



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

E

Agenda Item 4.3 a)

GF/CRD Mongolia-2

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

FAO/WHO GLOBAL FORUM OF FOOD SAFETY REGULATORS

Marrakech, Morocco, 28 – 30 January 2002

CAPACITY BUILDING ON FOOD SAFETY IN MONGOLIA

COUNTRY PAPER PROPOSED BY MONGOLIA

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Capacity building is a key strategy to improve food safety in developing countries. Considering and supporting the notion of the international community to change its traditional approach of technical assistance this paper aims to illustrate ineffectiveness of the old approach as in example of the HACCP development attempts in Mongolia. Although the attempts lasted nearly for 10 years no industry has introduced HACCP. It may have other influencing factors preventing its application but can be a clear example of the ineffectiveness. Therefore the paper suggests different approaches to support national or local educational authorities based on different training needs.

During the last 10 years about 6-7 consultants of the FAO and WHO worked in Mongolia to advise and provide technical assistance to develop HACCP. Usually the work continues for the period of 2 weeks and up to one month. Consultants organized workshop and seminar on HACCP as usually. For the last, WHO consultant worked in Mongolia on HACCP in 2000. However at present no food industry has introduced HACCP in Mongolia to assure food safety except some start in meat industry.

The consultants provided valuable recommendation and for instance since the last consultancy very little has been implemented. The reason for it may be:

Participants of the most training were inspectors including the last training in which only 4 teachers have participated while greater expertise in HACCP needs to be developed in Mongolia. At the same time most of the recommended items did not have or clarified definite financial support. The Government role to implement these recommendations was a weak due to dilution food safety issue with many other “priority” issue.

Training needs of food handlers and workers of food industry WHO Western Pacific Regional Strategy on Food Safety states a strategy that training institutes on food industry must have HACCP training program. Only 4 hours in class teaching lesson on HACCP is in the curriculum of the Food Technology School of the Polytechnical University of Mongolia as a result of the last consultancy. However, the school does not have a teacher who has been specifically trained on HACCP, which makes more difficult to teach on broad base including practice.

Training needs of policy makers and decision makers To build favorable legal environment for food safety is important. Mongolia does not have a flexible Food Law although it has been recently approved by the Parliament in 1999. A FAO consultant has provided advice during development of this Law; however, many recommended items appear to have been deleted during parliamentary review. Therefore, training programs on public administration for the policy makers need to have a subject on food and nutrition policy subject including recent approach of risk assessment. We may need to use effective mechanism of advocacy.

Above examples gives a traditional approach of technical assistance from the International Agencies should be changed.

In this regard, collaboration with national education authorities to promote food safety education in schools and universities should be one of important strategies to improve food safety in developing countries. Although it takes time this kind of action will end up with more long-term results, sustainability and capacity building in food safety area. It is hard to ensure a scientifically sound planning and implementation of Food safety Program without well-qualified staff, as they will serve as gatekeepers of the Programme. This kind of collaboration also will result in improved public food safety and nutrition education. Moreover, it is essential to strengthen coordination and collaboration between different food control agencies in our country and facilitation of multisectoral approach for food safety through establishment of a National Intersectoral Coordinating Committee

is important. Therefore, mass of trained and dedicated people in the society can move things such as Intersectoral Cooperation and many others for food safety.

To add more on different approach is that recently Food Technology School of Polytechnical University of Mongolia has implemented a Textbook Development Project with the support of Tempus TACIS of European Union. The project included activities aiming to improve teachers ability such as English language course (for Mongolia English Language is not widely used at professional level), 1-3 months oversea training on how to teach and apply those knowledge written in the textbook during the training and in country application in their daily teaching. The project seems to have positive effect to improve curriculum of the school. Moreover, we can use distance learning approach to train teachers of the national University and Institutes dealing with food.

Conclusion

Both Government and International agencies must seek and support effective mechanism of cooperation to improve the effectiveness of the technical assistance on food safety. As key to improve food safety and capacity building in developing countries support of national institutes and universities and revise curriculum and training of teachers are important actions. But practicality is important while introducing this approach to meet different stakeholders' needs.