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**REDUCTION OF FOODBORNE HAZARDS, INCLUDING MICROBIOLOGICAL AND
OTHERS, WITH EMPHASIS ON EMERGING HAZARDS**

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tanzania has had two cases of foodborne hazards which had great consequences of the economy of the country and which we will wish to share with the other countries participating in this important world food safety forum. All the cases involved European Union (EU) ban on imports of fish, the *Nileperch*, harvested from Lake Victoria, which is jointly shared between Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In this presentation, we shall point out how the precautionary approach applied by EU was resolved through the assistance of WHO and implementation of the food safety and quality interventions at all levels of the food chain in a very sustainable and ethical way.

2. CHOLERA OUTBREAK AROUND LAKE VICTORIA IN 1997

There was an outbreak of cholera around Lake Victoria in 1997 and the EU imposed a ban on all the fish exports from the Lake to the EU market. The hazard addressed in this case was microbiological involving *Vibrio cholera* bacterium. Tanzania and the other East African partner states, Kenya and Uganda protested to the EU on the ban being unjustified, but EU applied the precautionary principle to defend their case. Tanzania requested WHO to carry out risk analysis, which concluded that fish from the Lake did not pose the risk of cholera outbreak in Europe.

Tanzania and indeed, Kenya and Uganda embarked on massive hygiene programme on the fish handling and processing establishments around the Lake. Such programme was based mostly on the Recommended Codex Codes of hygiene for fishery establishments and on the various EU Directives on fish hygiene. As a result of this programme and under the assistance of both UNIDO and EU the fish handling and processing establishments around Lake Victoria managed to install HACCP (Hazards Analysis and Critical Control Point) systems.

The EU ban was finally lifted and Tanzania and the other countries sharing the Lake started to export fish from the Lake to EU again. But the economies of these countries had suffered unrecoverable losses.

This case was a classical demonstration of the devastating consequences of the precautionary principles if their application is not applied diligently.

Again this case did demonstrate the Cooperation which can be called for between neighbouring countries, regional economic organizations and international organizations like WHO, FAO and UNIDO in resolving an eminent economic confrontation between two trading partners.

This case also pointed to the weaknesses existing at international level, be it at the bilateral agreements level or through the WTO Dispute Settlement Committee, in addressing the issue of compensation for retrospect economic losses.

3. EU BAN ON LAKE VICTORIA FISH IMPORTS IN 1999

The hazards addressed in this case was chemical arising from suspected misuse of pesticides in Lake Victoria as was reported by Uganda, The EU again imposed a ban on all imports of fish harvested from the Lake. The ban required the countries around the Lake to demonstrate beyond any doubt that fish from that Lake did not contain pesticides residues above tolerable levels. For Tanzania, HACCP systems installed in the fish establishments adequately ensured the safety and quality of fish products from such establishments.

Efforts were coordinated between the three countries sharing the Lake and massive awareness campaigns were carried out at all levels from the artisanal fishermen/community level to higher political authorities in the respective areas regarding fish products hygiene and safety. The campaign was even stretched to cover good pesticides application practices at farm levels to ensure no pesticide can reach our waters.

The sad part this case was the fact that no Lake Victoria fish samples collected in the EU markets, from the Lake itself or from the local Tanzania market, and tested in accredited laboratories in Africa (South Africa) or in EU countries, demonstrated the presence of pesticides residues. However, it took

more than a year for the ban to be lifted. This is besides the very high number of samples sampled and tested by different authorities worldwide.

Several lessons were learnt from this case. First we realized as a country that we did not have the ability and capacity to analyse for the presence of pesticide residues in food and foodstuffs. As such fish samples had to be analyzed out of the country at exorbitant costs. Efforts have been initiated to put up well equipped food chemical and microbiological analysis laboratories in the country and we shall appreciate further assistance to this effect be at bilateral or multilateral levels. The need for such laboratories is even necessitated by the fact that the country needs to be prepared for responding fast to any emerging chemical hazards. Furthermore, such laboratories will generate the requisite analytical data for both regional and international chemical hazards monitoring and control. Tanzania welcomes cooperation with well established organizations like FDA of US or similar organizations in the EU for the purpose of generating data for worldwide consumption especially in the development of international permissible levels of pesticide residues, residues of veterinary drugs in food of animal origin.

Secondly, timely response to emerging or suspected chemical hazard is very important if the extent of economic losses has to be minimized. In this case, availability of the right expertise and infrastructure in the country would have greatly minimized the human suffering and colossal economic losses incurred by the country as a result of the ban.

Another lesson learnt from this case was the fact that involvement of all parties at all points of the food chain, including consorted engagement of the private sector and mobilisation of the necessary political will and support, are the key to the amicable resolution of this kind of cases.

Again we saw very close collaboration between the three countries sharing the Lake and lately with EU in resolving the ban.

4. CONCLUSION

We hope these two cases have shed light to the other countries of the economic problems a country can incur as a result of application of the precautionary principles. Furthermore, country's unpreparedness can cause a lot of human sufferings do to inability to timely resolve an economical ban. We shall be very happy to hear experiences from the other countries.