



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA
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**FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SITUATION IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION:
CURRENT AND EMERGING ISSUES IN THE REGION**

(Prepared by FAO and WHO)

Introduction and background

1. Member countries need to address food safety issues in a timely and effective manner. These issues can include known, sustained critical issues, as well as unexpected emerging food safety issues. The 70th session of CCEXEC noted the importance to identify emerging issues and to define priorities among them (REP 15/EXEC). Regional coordinating Committees (RCCs) can play a role in catalyzing this process.
2. The CCEXEC, and CAC at its 38th session, requested FAO and WHO, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat and the regional coordinators to develop a set of questions on needs and priorities in the region and to analyze the information collected for presentation at the next round of RCCs sessions.
3. This was done for the 22nd session of CCAFRICA, and the results of the first questionnaire were reviewed by the Committee. The latter agreed that the results were useful for the region and that the relatively low response rate of 34% would improve in future with countries taking ownership of the process and being more proactive in organizing consultations at national level to fill in the questionnaire. In an attempt to stimulate this ownership and proactivity by countries, FAO and WHO in preparation of the second issue of the questionnaire:
 - refocused the questionnaire on emerging issues (as the difference between emerging and critical issues were not always well perceived)
 - simplified the survey
 - changed the modality (using survey monkey, instead of email exchanges)
 - involved regional coordinators as the prime initiators and analysts of the information
4. This document presents an analysis of the responses to this second questionnaire on emerging food safety and quality issues.
5. The objective is to help countries and regions to proactively identify prospective issues that could be of significance and lead to concrete actions where necessary.

Questionnaire on emerging food safety/quality issues.

6. An identical questionnaire prepared by FAO/WHO was sent to the Codex Contact Points of all members of the region with the request to indicate what most important issues in food safety and quality they consider as emerging.
7. Member countries were asked to provide the 3 most important emerging issues in food safety and quality, supported by a rationale (why the issue was selected; expected and /or actual impact of the issue). Members were also asked to indicate the process by which they had come to the identification of these issues, in particular who had been involved in these discussions.
8. Definitions of the key terms used in the questionnaire were provided: issues and emerging issues (see Table 1).

Table 1: Key terms in the questionnaire on emerging food safety and quality issues.

Key terms	Definition
Issues	With the word <i>issues</i> is meant hazards/challenges, but also opportunities or trends that might have an impact on food safety and quality.
Emerging issues	Those that are new or unexpected. Although their effect is currently not necessarily being experienced, these issues may cause a change in the status quo. Identification of these issues will help to provide proactive guidance and support to counties in addressing prospective issues that could be of regulatory significance.

Analysis of results.

9. Out of the 49 member countries, 23 member countries completed the survey and one incomplete response was received. This corresponds to an increased rate to 47 % from 34% obtained during de last survey. This is the result of several follow-up and / or direct support provided to member states. Continuous effort should be made to increase the understanding of emerging issues and the rationale supporting the identification of these.

Table 2: Participating Countries

Angola	Côte d’Ivoire	Lesotho*	South Africa
Benin	Gabon	Madagascar	Tanzania
Botswana	Ghana	Mali	The Gambia
Burkina Faso	Guinea-Bissau	Morocco	Togo
Cameroon	Kenya	Nigeria	Uganda
Congo, Democratic republic of	Liberia	Senegal	

10. Figure 1 below presents the major emerging issues reported by the survey. Eight (8) issues have been mentioned twice or more during the survey, with antimicrobial resistance (11), pesticides residues (9), and weakness of national food control systems (9) ranking first and second positions.

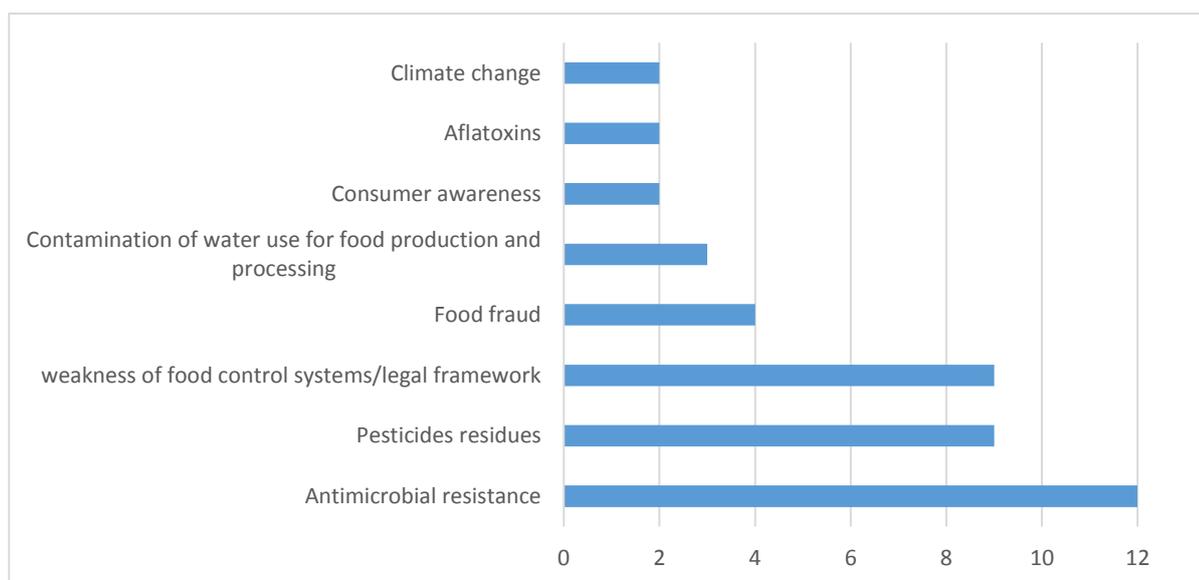


Figure 1. Frequency of major emerging issues in Food Safety and Quality

11. Other categories mentioned only once in the questionnaire, and therefore not reported in figure 1 were:
- Risk Analysis;
 - Biotechnology food / Bio fortification;
 - Heavy metal contamination of food;
 - Use of growth hormones;
 - Food waste;
 - Illegal animal slaughtering;
 - Food safety tool kits;
 - Budget allocation for food safety control;
 - Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)
 - Marine bio-toxins
 - Street foods

Conclusions.

12. The simplified process and other measures seem to have had a positive impact on the response rate by countries. However, there is still margin for progress, in particular with regard to ownership. Suggestions are welcome to continue improving the process, and make the results always more useful, so that they can be used to feed into the Codex Strategic Plan in a more specific manner and sharpen focus and approach of FAO and WHO capacity development programmes.

13. Antimicrobial resistance continues to be mentioned most frequently as an emerging issue. As programmes are in place through FAO and WHO, supported by Tripartite arrangements and significant work is undertaken, more details by countries about what else should be done would be welcome by FAO and WHO to improve targeting of these activities as well as integration into other programmes.

14. This topic is closely followed by the issue of weak national food control systems. FAO and WHO would like to remind countries of the publication of the FAO/WHO food control system tool (FAO Food safety and quality series, issue n. 7) that could help them to better identify the specific capacity development needs to be addressed. The interconnection of this issue with the AMR issue is also noted, underlying the requirement for an improved integration by countries of approaches such as One Health in the development of their National food control systems.

15. In order to obtain responses with enough specifics, useful to shape FAO and WHO's programmes, as well as to feed into Codex Strategic Plan, the importance of the national consultation process should not be underestimated. Feedback from participating countries on the interest raised by this topic of emerging issues with the different national stakeholders, as well the approaches followed to ensure these consultations are welcome to help non respondent countries stimulate these discussions in preparation for this agenda item at the 24th session of CCAFRICA.

Category (#of times it was mentioned)	Explanation of the emerging issue
AMR (11)	<p>While the use of antimicrobials on the farm helps reduce the prevalence of pathogenic microorganisms, it also creates antimicrobial resistance among some of these pathogens with negative consequence on public health including difficulties for patients to be treated for conditions that need antibiotics. Countries expressed the need for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robust regulatory systems to better control accessibility and inappropriate use of antimicrobials; - A One Health approach to address AMR; - National surveillance program for AMR and AMU.
Pesticide residues and heavy metals(9)	<p>Actors along food/crop value chain use chemicals to combat crop losses due to incidence of pests. This practice is becoming very important now, due to the increased availability of and accessibility to agrochemicals. This can also lead to the contamination of water including water used for food production and processing such as irrigation water. Countries reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase of the presence of pesticides certain food commodities such as fresh fruits and vegetables, fish and aquaculture products; - Intentional use of pesticide to extend shelf life or fight flies; - Lack of resources to adequately monitor pesticide contamination.
Weakness of food control systems / legal framework (9)	<p>Most national laws are fragmented and food safety issues are handled by multiagency without coordination. This give rise to overlaps and confusion in implementation of regulations, resulting in weakening enforcement.</p> <p>Countries highlighted absence of coordination and the need to allocated adequate resources to secure food safety infrastructure, research and enforcement activities;</p>
Food fraud (4)	<p>Foods and food ingredients commonly associated with food fraud include olive oil, fish and seafood, honey, milk and dairy products, meat products, grain-based foods, fruit juices, wine and alcoholic beverages, organic foods, spices, coffee, and tea, and some highly processed foods. Although the vast majority of food fraud incidents do not pose a public health risk, a few fraud cases have resulted in actual or potential public health risks Unintentional adulteration is a result of ignorance or the lack of facilities to maintain food safety and quality;</p> <p>The substitution of olive oil with other types of seed, legume, or nut oils could have unintended consequences if consumed by those with certain food allergies;</p> <p>Food fraud misleads the consumer causing the sale of poor quality goods and ultimately posing risks to human health.</p>
Contamination of water used in food production and processing (3)	<p>Water quality is often compromised by the presence of infectious agents, toxic chemicals, parasites, water run off from fields into open wells and radiological hazards” according to World Health Organization.</p>
Consumer awareness (2)	<p>There is limited consumer awareness at the national level on food safety related aspects. Limited information and knowledge among consumers.</p> <p>Consumer knowledge is critical in any functioning food control system;</p> <p>Consumer groups and other civil society groups often play a big role in ensuring that the consumers have a voice. Therefore, there is a need to create awareness on food safety issues.</p>
Aflatoxins (2)	<p>Aflatoxin contamination is a critical issue in the region. Two countries mentioned high levels of aflatoxin in commodities such as groundnuts and maize and the consequences on public health and trade.</p>
Climate change (2)	<p>Pathogens tend to mutate because of climate change. For example the appearance of phytopathogens fungal toxin producers and proliferation agents causing zoonosis;</p> <p>Climate change and variability lead to the rise in temperatures, the evolution of the rains, the stress caused by drought and extreme weather events. This could have direct and indirect effects on food safety.</p>