

Strengthen the Ethiopian Food Control System



The brief highlights the significant challenges faced by the Ethiopian national food control system and the significant contributions of RAISE-FS in addressing the challenges.

Introduction

Health & economic significance of food safety: In the past, Ethiopia gave more consideration to food security, which is the unbeaten challenge of the country. The low priority given to food safety resulted in lack of significant investments on policy and regulatory frameworks; capacity building, foodborne disease surveillance, documentation, networking and information sharing, and improving public awareness on their health and economic impacts. Contamination of pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, and pepper with bacteria, parasites, pesticide residues, or mycotoxins has increasingly resulted in border rejection of the products in EU countries. Failure in complying with the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) standards is slowly pushing out the country from its competitive positions in the international markets (National Food Safety Master Plan 2025-2029).

The Ethiopian government made a significant move by enacting the food and nutrition policy, developing the national food safety master plan & establishing decentralized food safety control system structures in the regions to improve food safety & quality throughout the food value chains. However, protecting consumers from unsanitary, unwholesome, mislabeled or adulterated food & enforcing the law could not be realized until today because of limitations in technical & infrastructural capacities; dispersal of roles & responsibilities among Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture & Ministry of Trade & Regional Integration which led to overlap of mandates & duplication of functions, created gaps, inadequate alignment, coordination, & resulted in poor law enforcement.

Assessing the food control system: an assessment was made on the national and regional food control systems to understand the organizational structure & capacities, system functionality, role & responsibilities of actors and stakeholders' collaboration. Findings from both the national and the regions indicated that roles and

responsibilities are scattered among institutions with weakly organized structures & capacities (human and financial) resulting in a multiplicity of controlling authorities, overlap of mandates, loose coordination, collaboration and stakeholder alignment.

Challenges: Limitations in governance & regulatory frameworks; infrastructure and resource (human and budget); low public awareness and weaknesses in managing the supply chain and evolving risks were key constraints.

Information sharing: Outputs of the analysis were shared with key stakeholders during the validation workshops & thereafter. An issue brief with key action points was shared with policy makers for avoiding duplication, ensuring food safety control activities, and maintain the country's competitive position in the international market. In the four regions a number of validation workshops were conducted which resulted in Amhara in the establishment of a multi-stakeholders' food safety platform which is chaired by Bureau of Health, co-chaired by Bureau of Agriculture and the Secretaries are the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority (EFDA), Amhara branch office and the Bureau of Trade and Market Development. The purpose of this platform is to improve collaboration, information sharing, collective action & enhanced system efficiency.

Evidence generation: Together with Bahir Dar University, we generated evidence on prevalence of mycotoxins in sesame, pepper & soya bean, followed by developing and piloting of moisture testing tools, pepper pod solar driers and mold development prevention strategies.

In addition, a pesticide-use survey and an assessment on the status of One Health policy adoption and integration are being completed (January 2026).

Capacity building: long and short-term in-class and online courses in food quality and safety from farm to fork were provided to experts drawn from national & regional competent authorities, bureaus and offices

to tackle capacity limitations. A national food safety technical working group was established which identified priority food safety themes. On the basis of this, guidelines on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Good Handling Practices (GHP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) were developed for sesame, red pepper and poultry (biosecurity manual and poultry product quality and safety manual) anticipated to improve product quality and safety. This was done in collaboration with Ethiopian Agricultural Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration, Ethiopian Institute for Agricultural Research, Addis Ababa University and the private sector.

Lessons



Empower consumers as regulatory drivers

Food safety requires a multi-stakeholder participation & action where consumers & their associations act as the primary drivers of change through increasing consumer awareness, demanding for quality, and forcing the industry for safety compliance.



Adopt a "Farm-to-Fork" structural framework

The current fragmented food safety control systems demand for implementing a comprehensive, end-to-end framework that cover the entire supply chain.



Bridge the awareness & action gap

There is an urgent need to increase public awareness regarding the severe health & economic consequences of food contamination, which claims thousands of lives annually.



Strengthen data & evidence management

A major bottleneck is the lack of access to complete & reliable data on adulteration, mislabelling, contamination & foodborne disease outbreaks, illnesses & deaths; economic & social impacts, calling for database-building to take informed decision & develop strategies.



Optimize governance & eliminate mandate overlaps

Build a more resilient & well-coordinated system through streamlining governance structures, avoiding overlapping mandates, building institutions' capacity, & fostering collaboration among stakeholders.



Key takeaways

There is an urgent need for building efficient food safety control system that transition from reactive & fragmented practices to a proactive "one health" approach that integrates public awareness, strict farm-to-fork standards, and collaborative multi-stakeholder engagement.

Key publications

The Ethiopian National Food Control System: Status, challenges and recommendations.



Stakeholders Collaboration for Enhanced Food Safety Control System in Ethiopia.



Pesticide Lifecycle in Ethiopia: challenges, opportunities and leverage points.



Food Safety of Spices in Ethiopia.



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