

Voice for Change Partnership

**Transforming the National Food Safety Control System for
Kenya: Lessons and Best Practices from the Vietnam Experience**

Policy Note prepared for the Voice for Change Partnership (V4CP) Programme by:

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Introduction

Food safety is defined as the handling, storing and preparation of food to prevent infection and to help ensure it keeps enough nutrients to provide a healthy diet (FAO, 2010). This is best achieved by effecting controls of the risky nodes of the value chain. Food borne illnesses are caused by biological, chemical and physical hazards as a result of the failures in control systems.

Evidence from the World Health Organization (WHO) Foodborne disease burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG, 2015) shows that food borne diseases contribute 243 million DALY (Disability Adjusted Life Years) while the combined burden of disease from HIV, Malaria and tuberculosis globally was estimated at 163 million DALY [Murray et al 2016] yet investment in food safety control is comparatively meagre. Further, Pires *et al* [2015] reported that the nine food borne pathogens causing diarrhea globally were responsible for over 1.8 billion cases and over 600,000 deaths, with 80% of these occurring in vulnerable populations (under 5s, the aged and poor) in Africa. Thus, food safety is an underfunded serious public health concern globally, with great significance among vulnerable groups in Africa.

Vietnam and Kenya are characterized by being middle income developing countries, have rapidly urbanizing populations, agriculture is dominated by smallholder farmers, have rapidly growing middle-income classes with different food culinary preferences from those of their older generations, and largely lengthy and unregulated value chains supplying the growing large cities. Under these circumstances, food borne illnesses are common, expensive to control and are a great strain to the economy. Both countries have adopted a devolved system of governance to speed up development. Vietnam has more tiers of governance compared to Kenya's two-tier system. Vietnam National Government decided to reform and transform its food safety control system to reduce the burden of foodborne illnesses as a result of inadequate food safety control in the domestic market, trade losses in export markets and reduce a large health budget.

Approach

Leadership

Vietnam Government prioritized food safety as an important contributor to achieving food security and health. Food safety was placed in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister for better resourcing and supervision. Kenya Jubilee Government has named food security and health among the big four agenda to transform Kenya's economy and improve livelihoods. It is important for Kenya to realize that food security is not merely having adequate amounts of food, but the safety of that food is of greater importance and therefore needs to be prioritized for realization of the big four agenda. The Vietnam Government realized that the problem was much bigger and requested assistance from international bodies (World Bank, United Nations agencies, private sector, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, non-state agencies, farmers among

others) to form a multi-stakeholder forum to get broad-based buy-in and inclusivity and advice the government on best practices.

The National Government of Vietnam from the onset knew the importance of an inclusive policy process and organized multi-sector stakeholder workshops that deliberated on the food safety issue, developed a road map and provided information needed to develop the control system. The Kenya constitution calls for stakeholder participation in making policies and laws. The proposed Kenya Food and Drug Authority bill under drafting stage needs inclusivity to give it the broad-based buy-in from the onset.

National Food Safety Control System

Policy and law

Like Kenya's system, Vietnam had its food safety control system being managed by different laws and institutions with often overlapping mandates. To address this challenge, Vietnam first developed a National Food Safety Policy that delineated roles of the various actors and formed an overarching agency, the Vietnam Food Authority (VFA) to coordinate the activities of food safety. The Deputy Prime Minister chaired the Food Safety Working Group (FSWG) and the inter-sector steering committee for food hygiene and safety that coordinated fast tracking of the food safety policy implementation. Secondly, the government promulgated a food law to anchor all the news bodies and processes to implement the food safety in law. Kenya does not have an overarching agency nor a single food law or food policy to coordinate matters food safety. Different schools of thought argue that Cap 254 and the National Food Security and Nutrition policy are the main food law and policy, respectively. While the two legislations deal with aspects of food safety, other legislations and policies also address food safety matters. Kenya needs to draft or consolidate its policies to have a single food policy and law. The inter-sectoral committee (National Food Safety Coordinating Committee) formed has not managed to bring food safety under one roof. The proposed Kenya Food and Drug Authority is envisaged to evolve into the overarching agency to supervise, report and respond to matters food safety.

Institutions

The developed policy in Vietnam, apart from giving clear roles for each actor, created new institutions that allowed smooth implementation of the policy and law. The institutions had clear reporting guidelines. Kenya will need to relook at the mandates of the various Ministries/ agencies involved with food safety to realign these for ease of coordination and efficiency.

Laboratories and inspection services

Food production, supply and marketing chains in Vietnam were reorganized and regulated using standard operating procedures that were uniform for management and third-party certifications. Inspections are done at the production by people's committees at the community level. Laboratories are well equipped and manned by qualified personnel and are fit for purpose. Kenya will need to reorganize and streamline good practices in the agriculture value chains and strengthen the laboratory services to be accessible and effective. With two levels of governance, Kenya has a much simpler structure to implement food safety laws than the Vietnam situation.

Coordination

Vietnam food safety policy saw the formation of the Vietnam food authority and the Inter-sector steering committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for coordination. The Vietnam Food Authority reports to the inter-sector steering committee. The Vietnam food authority is housed by the Ministry of health and is the overarching agency, charged with coordinating food safety matters. Kenya is working on forming a food and drug authority to coordinate various agencies charged with food safety mandates. Kenya can learn from Vietnam how to create a model that espouses multi-sectoral collaboration, shared responsibility and mutual accountability, across well-coordinated state departments devoid of sectarian interests.

Food safety standards and operating procedures

The Vietnam standards body developed standards that were science based and where evidence was lacking, regulations were set waiting for commissioned work to bring forth evidence. The operating procedures were harmonized to help uniformity and increase credibility of the results. These are world-wide best practices and Kenya could do well to adopt similar measures.

Development of food safety strategy

Kenya has since 1963 developed a number of strategies that have guided the focus on the goal and mission to the implementation of the policies. Recently, the Economic Recovery Strategy, Strategy for Revitalization of Agriculture, and Vision 2030 have elaborated the roadmap for implementation of various policies to push Kenya towards self-actualization. Implementation of food safety policy and food laws warrants development of a food safety strategy prior to enactment. Vietnam had to develop such a strategy to achieve national food safety and reduce food borne illnesses.

Development of a surveillance system

The government of Vietnam developed a surveillance system that was backed up by fit for purpose laboratories that sampled, analysed, collated and reported results to enable a national response. To optimize the meagre resources, food chains and nodes were categorized based on risk. Sampling was then directed to the most risky food value chains and nodes. Kenya has a surveillance system, but this is not adequately resourced to enable it carry out routine surveillance and value chains require to be categorized based on risk. This would help redirect resources and research to assist in averting the risks.

Establishment of food safety capacity building programs

To implement its food safety program, Vietnam's government embarked on building capacity at all levels to ensure adequate human resources were available. Kenya will need to develop curricula at universities and middle level colleges and establish in-service training to train food safety experts who will assist farmers and other value chain actors to produce and supply safe food to all.

Conclusions

The Vietnam case study offers useful lessons and model examples on how to develop and operationalize a national food safety system. The biggest asset of the Vietnam framework, was the strong political will and commitment of the highest office in the land to food safety. Kenyans must grab the opportunity to align the country's efforts on food safety around the big four agenda which

have high level political commitment and must involve stakeholders through an inclusive and transparent process to establish a sustainable modern food safety management system.

Further reading

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