



Eastern and Southern Africa
Small Scale Farmers' Forum

ESAFF - UGANDA

PRESS STATEMENT BY SMALL-SCALE FARMERS ON FOOD SAFETY ON THE COMMEMORATION OF THE WORLD FOOD SAFETY DAY 2023.

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By 2050, it is anticipated that there will be 9.7 billion people on the planet. We have more difficulties ensuring that people have access to safe, nourishing, and healthful food as the human population continues to expand. With an estimated 600 million cases of foodborne infections each year, unsafe food presents a risk to both human health and the economy, suffering vulnerable and marginalised people disproportionately, particularly women and children, populations affected by conflict, and migrants. An estimated 420 000 people every year globally die as a result of eating tainted food, and 125,000 of those deaths, or 40%, include children under the age of five. According to the FAO, around 600 million people, or nearly 1 in 10 people worldwide, get sick after eating contaminated food, and 420 000 people pass away each year. As the human population expands, there are several threats to the safety and security of the world's food supply. The issues of the twenty-first century will continue to revolve on improving global food security with wholesome, nutritious food.

For the health and wellbeing of communities, food safety is crucial. Food safety issues can hinder trade and jeopardise the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Comparable to severe diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, foodborne diseases have a similar global burden. The load is heaviest in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. About 110 billion US dollars (USD) are spent on foodborne illnesses each year in low- and middle-income nations, with sub-Saharan Africa bearing the brunt of this expenditure at USD 16.7 billion.

Small-scale farmers understand that anywhere in the value chain, from production to manufacture to consumption, food can get contaminated. Preventive procedures are necessary at all stages of food-related operations, including receiving, storing, processing, handling, and distribution. We acknowledge that the Ugandan government has been working harder throughout the years to raise the bar for food safety and food safety practices, but with limited success, particularly in terms of implementation. The Ugandan food supply chain has faced a number of difficulties, including the discovery of potentially harmful chemicals in food and food products on the market. We small-scale farmers think that in order to preserve life and promote good health, one needs access to enough nutritious food. Foodborne infections are frequently difficult to identify with the naked eye and are frequently contagious or lethal in nature. They are brought on by bacteria, viruses, parasites, or chemical substances that are ingested through tainted food or beverages. Food safety is essential for each stage of the food supply chain, including production, distribution, storage, preparation, and consumption.

Today, June 7, 2023, we observe the sixth World Food Safety Day (WFSD) alongside the rest of the world under the heading "Food standards save lives". Its goal is to increase awareness of and motivation for action in the areas of preventing, detecting, and managing foodborne risks, which will benefit economic growth, agricultural productivity, market access, tourism, and sustainable development.

Unsafe food intake is a growing public health concern in Uganda, having an adverse effect on infants, expectant mothers, the elderly, young children, and those with underlying medical conditions. Although the country has made strides in ensuring a safer environment for food safety and lowering the burden of foodborne illness, much work still needs to be done. Poor food management throughout manufacturing, processing, storage, transportation, and retailing is a major contributor to the load. Agriculture has changed as a result of the increased push for economic viability, with significant negative effects on human health and the environment. Farmers have opted for single-crop agriculture, which puts human and environmental health at risk while requiring production resources and techniques to optimise yields. Pesticides and synthetic fertiliser components that directly affect human and environmental health as a result of agricultural toxins pose a number of health dangers to farm producers and consumers.

Small-scale farmers have worked extremely hard to boost productivity while implementing simple safety precautions; never the less, lack of infrastructure still makes it difficult to guarantee food safety along the whole supply chain. Small-scale farmers still struggle to access proper roads for product transportation and storage facilities that guarantee food safety, ranging from roads to storage and electricity supply. Due to inadequate infrastructure, over one-third of the food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted. In order to ensure the security and safety of food, it is essential that there are adequate road network, storage facilities, and power supplies. Improved infrastructure will lessen post-harvest carelessness that results in tainted food.

"Through improving the relationship between plants, animals, soil, people, and the environment, agroecology emerges as the most sustainable approach to production, encouraging the use of less harmful inputs. In turn, this enhances and restores the ecosystem's functionality, ensuring food and nutrition security." – Masudio Margaret, Publicity Secretary, ESAFF Uganda.

"The entire cycle of food production, distribution, and consumption is often contaminated. Food safety is a responsibility that extends beyond producers and extends to consumers as well. We must all cooperate to uphold established food safety standards if we are to ensure food safety. Everyone has a responsibility since everyone has a right to a healthy diet." – Peter Enyetu, Vice Chairperson, ESAFF Uganda.

By decreasing external inputs and integrating renewable or natural alternatives, agroecology combines biodiversity and ecological processes in food production, guaranteeing the delivery of healthy, nourishing, and inexpensive food. Agroecology helps to create a solid system for food safety, which is crucial for promoting public health.

Governments are in charge of making sure that the foods that are readily available are safe for consumption by people because food safety is a public utility. By adopting agroecology, small-scale farmers are able to produce food that is safe while utilising little synthetic inputs. The protection of food products' nutritional value and commercial viability depends on safe food production and distribution. ***Therefore, small-scale farmers demand:***

1. The government should ensure that the food supply is fit for consumption by people by passing the appropriate food laws and setting up the required systems (including inspections, lab testing, and training) to support their implementation.
2. In order to realise the full potential of agroecology and reform the food system, the government needs to involve a variety of stakeholders. Adopt agroecological practices in extension services to spread awareness of potential threats to the health of people and the environment. This will safeguard both consumers and farmers from consuming harmful food.
3. Government should strengthen the implementation of agricultural policies and practices, food control systems and strengthen the food supply chain by giving proper treatment, which includes transportation and storage, industrial practices, and other things.
4. Government should establish specialized institutions such as farmers' cooperative banks to offer funding to small-scale farmers as well as strengthen other institutions in charge of infrastructure development such as roads, water coverage, power supply, and storage facilities.
5. Government and different stakeholders should promote better personal hygiene, including the washing of hands before and after handling food.

In conclusion, a robust food control system is necessary to ensure that the gaps that now exist are filled; nevertheless, its successful implementation depends on collaboration from all formal and informal actors in the value chain. Every citizen of Uganda should remember that the mere fact that something looks safe to consume is not a guarantee that it is.

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