

# The importance of improving food safety in Africa

Unsafe food causes widespread ill health and economic losses. A wide range of innovations are needed to improve safety standards and global public health.



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## ANALYSIS

### Food safety: overcoming the burden of foodborne disease

(</en/dossiers/article/overcoming-the-burden-of-foodborne-disease.html>)

## DELIA GRACE'S POINT OF VIEW

### "Training by itself will rarely improve food safety"

(</en/dossiers/article/delia-grace-training-by-itself-will-rarely-improve-food-safety.html>)

## FIELD REPORT: NIGERIA

### Tried and tested fast food service

(</en/dossiers/article/tried-and-tested-fast-food-service.html>)



Delia Grace leads research on zoonoses and FBD at ILRI in Kenya and has 30 years' experience working in developing countries © FAO/Giuseppe Carotenuto

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Delia Grace, programme manager for Animal and Human Health at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), speaks on the global burden of foodborne diseases (FBD) and the innovations underway to tackle them.

## **What are the primary risks linked to a failure to maintain high food safety and quality standards?**

In past decades, there has been a lot of interest in the impacts of unsafe food on trade. If unsafe food is exported, this can result, for example, in illness in the importing country and economic losses for the exporter. Inability to meet importing standards – and subsequent rejections – has been shown to cost low- and middle-income countries billions of dollars each year.

More recently, however, there has been increasing recognition of the significant burden that FBD places on global health. A landmark first assessment

([http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/199350/9789241565165\\_eng.pdf;jsessionid=51EFA75128F6939028AB065B2E48F515?sequence=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/199350/9789241565165_eng.pdf;jsessionid=51EFA75128F6939028AB065B2E48F515?sequence=1)), of the global burden of FBD, conducted by WHO in 2015, considered 31 food safety hazards. The report shows that FBD has a health burden comparable to malaria, HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis. Much of this burden (98%) falls on developing countries and 40% of this on children under 5-years-old.

## **How is ILRI helping to build the capacities of stakeholders in developing countries to meet food safety and quality standards?**

ILRI is a research for development organisation. We innovate approaches and technologies and then develop and test them. We have learned that training by itself, or providing new technologies, will rarely improve food safety. In order to implement change, people also need some additional incentive and a conducive or enabling environment. In Ethiopia, for example, an ILRI pilot intervention consisting of training on good hygienic practices significantly improved knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) in key food safety aspects. Bacteria counts on meat were also significantly reduced. Here, buy-in from abattoir management was key to behavioural change.

In Nigeria, significant improvements in KAP and meat hygiene were seen in butcher groups. This was attributable to a group-based intervention which used peer influence to encourage behaviour change. Evaluation showed not only improvements in KAP, but also decreases in incidence of FBD from meat sold by the butchers involved. And in Uganda, training improved the capacities of butchers in appropriate pig slaughter and pork handling. However, the use of disinfectants and other good practices such as protective wear have not been fully adopted by all, partly due to associated costs.

## **Is the private sector implementing any innovative initiatives to address food safety issues in the supply chain?**

Innovation occurs at all levels. Some private sector value chains have been at the forefront of taking up information technologies, such as Kenyan company greenspoon (<https://greenspoon.co.ke/philosophy/>), who have set up an online healthy food store. Informal markets are also transforming rapidly and innovating – for example, ILRI has worked with a Nigerian butcher who developed a simple frame to keep flies off his meat. Subsequently, ILRI carried out research into using insecticide-treated nets to reduce flies at markets.

The private food sector in developing countries is huge, but is largely informal and said to consist of ‘mice and elephants.’ The formal private sector, or elephants, tends to consist of a few large companies who are very concerned about food safety and who generally adopt approaches and methods used in high-income countries, such as cold chains and supermarkets. This sector also consists of smaller firms targeting niche, high-value markets and larger firms targeting bigger segments of the market. Making up the informal private sector are the mice, or the millions of small enterprises that are very difficult to regulate.

## **Why is it important to have a more evidence-based approach to food safety policymaking in Africa? What are the benefits of this for agricultural value chain actors?**

Evidence is very important because little is known about food safety and its management in Africa. One of the most important insights from FBD studies is that a low number of hazards are typically responsible for a large proportion of the health burden. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, non-typhoidal *salmonella*, pig tapeworm, and toxigenic *Escherichia coli* are responsible for nearly 50% of the FBD burden. A focus on tackling these hazards in particular would therefore be much more effective than trying to address all hazards at once.

In Kenya, dairy products constitute the largest item of household expenditure, and annual milk consumption per person is estimated at 145 l. Yet Kenya's informal, small-scale milk sector dominates the milk marketing chain. Prior to 2004, however, informal vendors, including mobile milk traders and small-scale producers, were not officially recognised under the colonial dairy policy and were unable to obtain a licence. Many of these small-scale operators were women, and attempts to close down the informal sector would have jeopardised an important livelihood opportunity.

Efforts to revise the dairy policy were spearheaded by the UK Department for International Development-supported Smallholder Dairy Project (<http://smallholderdairy.org/>) (SDP). The project generated research-based evidence to reveal the economic significance of the informal milk sector and highlight the potential for improved handling and hygiene practices to ensure milk quality. The Dairy Traders Association (DTA) of Kenya was launched in September 2009 with its aims and activities based around the same concept as the SDP. Through the DTA, around 4,000 milk traders have been trained and certified by the Kenya Dairy Board. Field regulators are now also ensuring that licensed outlets operated by milk traders meet conditions for milk hygiene, testing requirements and sanitation. Without the intervention, such a change would have been unlikely.