



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

Agenda Item 5

Conference Room Document 3
English only

FAO/WHO Regional Conference on Food Safety for Africa

Harare, Zimbabwe, 3-6 October 2005

Food Safety Situation in Sierra Leone

(Prepared by the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau)

Introduction

The level of food safety generally accepted by any society reflects the history of the safe consumption of this food by humans. It is a fact that the technology that brings about this safety has been acquired in the course of the long history of the use of this food. Foods are considered safe only when they are carefully produced, processed, stored, handled and prepared.

Food Safety Situation

To put safety in context in the case of Sierra Leone, a background to the enforcement of related laws is deemed necessary.

Foods were safer during the colonial era because of the rigid enforcement of environmental laws monitored by the Public Health Department and the Ministry of Agriculture officials right down to the chieftom guards. The relation between the conditions of living and the salary paid to officials was favourable for the motivation of these officers and its impact on the enforcement of these laws and regulations.

After Independence, the laws, infrastructure and logistics were unfortunately neglected resulting in different allegiances, loyalties and vested interest that impacted negatively on the functioning and performances of these older agencies.

The eleven-year rebel war virtually destroyed the infrastructure and equipment that was left.

This situation, coupled with the eroding of the buying power of the consumer made him eat without discrimination solely to keep body and soul together. It is in this environment that the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau was created by the Standard Act No. 2 of 1996 to standardize commodities and practices and to provide for other related matters.

The Sierra Leone Standards Bureau, since 1965 in its first incarnation as the Weights and Measures Department of the Ministry of Trade then designated as the Bureau of Standards by a Cabinet conclusion, has been the National Codex Contact Point.

It was not difficult for the National Standards Council and its executive organ the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau to revive the National Codex Committee with the assistance of WHO (Sierra Leone Chapter).

The National Codex Committee has four technical committees (see Annex 1), comprising of all the relevant institutions and stakeholders interested in or affected by its work in food standards.

In its third national quarterly meeting the National Codex Committee decided that all food standards in Sierra Leone (for the time being) shall be based on Codex Standards except where there is a supreme national interest and in keeping with our obligations as a member of the Codex family.

Since the Bureau is now the Enquiry Point for the World Trade Organization and the Focal Point for Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS).

Experience in Sierra Leone has proven that the close collaboration and linkages created by the National Codex Committee, and because of the coordinating role legally given to the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau, the work of the stakeholder agencies (the Environmental Health Division formerly Public Health Department, Phytosanitary Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the Nutrition Department of the Ministry of Trade and Sanitation) on Food Safety has been significantly enhanced country wide.

An Ad-Hoc task force on expired foods was created comprising these agencies, the Sierra Leone Police and the Consumer Protection Agency. With funds provided by WHO this task force did a nation wide sensitization campaign targeting all inhabitants of the thirteen (13) districts of the country.

Visits to warehouses, restaurants, stores, markets and shops were carried out and the consuming public was educated as to their right under the laws and their duties to inform the relevant enforcement agencies about unsafe foods, areas of preparation, storage and handling.

This is now further enhanced by assistance from WHO for the adoption of food standards by the National Codex Committee after various Technical Committees have adopted them for submission.

Sensitization workshops on these standards have been carried out.

A repeat of this sensitization programme throughout the thirteen (13) districts of the country is planned. Thanks to WHO support, a field vehicle has been donated to the Contact Point thereby enhancing its mobility and monitoring capacity.

Furthermore, the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau has opened its Landing/Acceptance Import/Export Inspection Office at the principal port of entry at the Queen Elizabeth II Quay.

We are aware that our land borders, like in most former colonial countries are very porous, but also hope that our gradual presence at all points of entry (sea, land and air) will eliminate substandard and unsafe foods from entering the country.

We expect that before the advent of this conference we would have had a database from WHO which will enhance and consolidate our capacity while providing useful data for eventual prosecution of eventual offenders.

We are a long way from achieving the absolute control of food safety but we hope that with the assistance so far provided and projected by our partners we will minimize unsafe food presence in our country for the health of the population and the economy of the country.

Challenges

The Sierra Leone Standards Bureau is faced with the following challenges:

- At present, the Chemistry and Biological Science laboratories of the University of Sierra Leone and other private laboratories carry out all analyses of food and food products at the request of the Bureau. Unfortunately, all these laboratories are not accredited nor are the testing personnel. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the provision of an official testing laboratory and field diagnostic kits for the Bureau.

- Training in HACCP is needed for staff.
- Long and short term staff training.
- Upgrading current facilities and strengthening capability.
- Providing logistics to enable the National Codex Committee to function at optimal efficiency and providing logistics to facilitate the efficient and effective running of the technical committees.
- Active participation in Codex workshops, seminars and conferences is essential.
- Support for funding technical committee work.

We are always gratified to be able to rub shoulders with the eminent experts at this conference so as to use the knowledge thus acquired to be a better partner to the trading community and a better servant to our nation.

We wish here to recognize the invaluable support of WHO towards the achievement of a safer food situation that would have otherwise been had they not come in with their assistance.

The National Codex Committee

No.	Name	Institution
1.	Ms Sylvetta Scott	Chairlady, National Codex Committee (M.H.S.)
2.	Mrs Rosaline Tijani	Directorate of Home Economics, NUC/SL
3.	Dr Mohamed M. Sisay	Livestock Dept., Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
4.	Mr Pascal Genet	Intertek Sierra Leone Limited
5.	Rev. S.M. Momojah	Ministry of Trade & Industry
6.	Mr Salie M. Sanusi	Sierra Leone Ports Authority
7.	Harrison N. Sanfa	Sierra Leone Police
8.	Mr M.J. Tucker	Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR)
9.	Mr Ibrahim Koroma	Consumer Protection Agency
10.	Mr C.V. Mustapha	Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography , FBC
11.	Mr Sheik S. Deen	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
12.	FAO Rep.	FAO
13.	WHO Rep.	WHO

The Animal and Animal Products Committee

No.	Name	Institution
1.	Ms Sylvetta Scott	Chairlady, National Codex Committee (M.H.S.)
2.	Dr Jalloh C. Adu-Kapuwa	Home Economics Department NUC/SL
3.	Ms Onita Farma	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
4.	Mr C.V. Mustapha	Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography FBC
5.	Mr M.K. Koroma	Chemistry Department FBC
6.	Mr Henry AS. Allieue	Home Economics Department NUC/USL
7.	Mr Ibrahim I.M. Sesay	Science and Technology Council M.E.S.T.
8.	Mrs Elizabeth F. Kpolie	Home Economics Department NUC/USL
9.	Ms Veronica L. Wilson	The Pharmacy Board of Sierra Leone
10.	Dr Alpha Barrie	Veterinary Dept. Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
11.	Mr Sheik S. Deen	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
12.	Mr Ibrahim Kabia	Consumer Protection Agency
13.	WHO Rep.	WHO

No.	Name	Institution
1.	Ms Sylvetta Scott	Chairlady, National Codex Committee (M.H.S.)
2.	Dr S.D. Johnson	Rice Research Station
3.	Mr Ronnie Frazer Williams	Chemistry Department FBC/USL
4.	Dr D.A.W. Neville	Chemistry Department NUC/USL
5.	Dr G.A.W. Roberts	Chemistry Department NUC/USL
6.	Mr M.P. Sedu	Department of Biological Sciences
7.	Mr M.S. Ibrahim	Department of Environmental Health
8.	Mr Mosses J. Tucker	Institute of Agricultural Research
9.	Prof. H.G. Morgan	Department of Microbiology, COMAHS/USL
10.	Mr F.M. Massaquoi	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
11.	Dr John C. Adu-Kapuwa	Home Economics Department NUC/USL
12.	Mr Festus Massaquoi	Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR)
13.	Mr Koroma	Consumer Protection Agency (SL)
14.	FAO Representative	FAO
15.	WHO Representative	WHO