



FOOD *for* THE CITIES

Ensuring quality and safety of street foods



FAO / O. Argenti

Drinks and beverages are an important part of street foods. Tea vending in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Challenges...

Street foods have an important socio-economic role... Street foods are ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors or hawkers especially in the streets and other similar places. They represent a significant part of urban food consumption for millions of low-and-middle-income consumers, in urban areas on a daily basis. Street foods may be the least expensive and most accessible means of obtaining a nutritionally balanced meal outside the home for many low income people, provided that the consumer is informed and able to

choose the proper combination of foods.

In developing countries, street food preparation and selling provides a regular source of income for millions of men and women with limited education or skills, especially because the activity requires low initial investment. This activity also supports local agricultural producers and food processors and contributes to local and national economic growth.

...but they raise some serious concerns... Today, local authorities, international organisations and consumer associations are increasingly aware of the socioeconomic

importance of street foods but also of their associated risks. The major concern is related to food safety, but other concerns are also reported, such as sanitation problems (waste accumulation in the streets and the congestion of waste water drains), traffic congestion in the city also for pedestrians (occupation of sidewalks by street vendors and traffic accidents), illegal occupation of public or private space, and social problems (child labour, unfair competition to formal trade, etc.).



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Vendors can impede traffic and pedestrian access to sidewalks, such as this food cart in Bangkok, Thailand

...among which food safety. The risk of serious food poisoning outbreaks linked to street foods remains a threat in many parts of the world, with microbiological contamination being one of the most significant problems. Food-borne pathogens are recognized as a major health hazard associated with street foods, the risk being dependent primarily on the type of food, and the method of preparation and conservation. A lack of knowledge among street food vendors about the causes of food-borne disease is a major risk factor. Poor hygiene, inadequate access to potable water supply and garbage disposal, and unsanitary environmental conditions (such as proximity to sewers and garbage dumps) further exacerbate the public health risks associated with street foods. Improper use of additives (often unauthorised colouring agents), mycotoxins, heavy metals and other contaminants (such as pesticide residues) are additional hazards in street foods. Although many consumers attach importance to hygiene in selecting a street food vendor, consumers are often unaware of the health hazards associated with street vended foods.



FAO / K. Arif

An un-hygienic environment for food production raises an additional challenge to the vendors. Small restaurants in a market lane in Cotonou, Benin

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Trained vendors display their selling authorization and wear clean working clothes, including a hair scarf, in the food fair in Lima, Peru



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FAO's response...

FAO has a comprehensive programme to assist national and municipal authorities in ensuring the quality and safety of street food. As with all food preparation activities, the basic food hygiene rules must be applied. As most street food vendors are untrained in food hygiene or sanitation, and have to work under very poor and unsanitary conditions, FAO has been dedicating great attention to sensitization and training of the different actors of this complex system.



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Ready-to-eat street foods are commonly sold in African markets, such as in Conakry, Guinea

Attention is being given to realistically adapting the guidelines of Codex Alimentarius regarding the General Principles of Food Hygiene and the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system to the street food context. The Codex Regional Coordinating Committees have elaborated respective codes of hygienic practices for street vended foods which take into account the local conditions and the special nature of street foods.

FAO has developed guidelines for nutrition education and, most recently, a detailed curriculum for nutrition education in schools. Effective nutrition education programmes for school children and other key community groups are essential means of equipping street food customers with the knowledge necessary for making healthy food choices.

FAO's action...

Several projects have been implemented by FAO in collaboration with national and municipal authorities with a view to:

- improve conditions under which street foods are prepared and sold;
- strengthen food quality control capabilities of the local authorities to improve overall quality of both the raw material and processed foods;
- undertake further research on the street food sector: socio-economic impact, legislative framework, hygienic and nutritional improvement;
- improve vendors' knowledge about sanitation and food hygiene and nutritional value of foods through education and training;
- share experiences and promote networking among local and national authorities at the regional level to spread good practices and promote a common strategy;
- raise awareness among consumers about nutrition and hygiene aspects of street foods.

Specific training material is available, as well as a variety of recommended designs for selling and transport equipment, to minimize the risk of contamination of street foods. This has been built over 20 years of experience in Latin America (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru), Asia (India, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand), and most recently in Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda) and the Near East (Egypt, Morocco, Sudan).



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Ready to eat food can be properly stored above ground level and protected against flies and dust. Small restaurant in the Sunday Market in Islamabad, Pakistan



Food for the Cities - Multidisciplinary Area
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