



Enhancing Multisectoral Coordination to Respond to Food Safety Events: The Sierra Leone experience

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02 October 2026

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- Food Safety Situation & Governance
- Progress in strengthening Multisectoral Coordination
- Enabling Policies /Legal Frameworks
- Key challenges
- Lessons Learned
- Future perspectives in strengthening multisectoral coordination

BRIEF OVERVIEW: FOOD SAFETY SITUATION & GOVERNANCE

- Sierra Leone has made significant strides in strengthening multi-sectoral coordination to effectively prevent, detect and respond to food safety event
- This progress has been anchored in the country commitment to a **‘one health approach’**, recognising and interconnecting human, animal and environment
- The country has experienced incidences of contaminated food and drink in some communities though not fully documented. This has been a public health concern in affected populations

PROGRESS IN STRENGTHENING MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION

The National Food Safety Technical Working Group (NFSTWG) was established in May 2021 with clearly defined ToR

A coordinating body providing technical guidance and innovative solutions to support food safety by analyzing challenges in the food supply chain for public health benefits

A team with multiple disciplines and expertise:

➤ **Includes 6 key Ministries:**

- ✓ The Ministry of Health (Food Safety, Disease surveillance and Nutrition),
- ✓ Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (Crop Protection and Animal);
- ✓ Ministry of Trade and Industry;
- ✓ Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources;
- ✓ Ministry of Water and Sanitation
- ✓ Ministry of Environment

PROGRESS IN STRENGTHENING MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION

➤ **Key Government Departments:**

- ✓ Sierra Leone Standards Bureau;
 - ✓ Office of National Security,
 - ✓ Early Warning and Response Mechanism Coordinating Centre (Under the office of the President);
 - ✓ Customs Service Department– National Revenue Authority and the Sierra Leone Policy
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➤ **Agencies:** Consumer Protection and Environmental Protection Agencies

➤ **Research Institutions/ Universities**

➤ **Civil Society**

➤ **UN Agencies:** WHO, FAO, UNIDO, UNICEF and WFP

Two Sub committees: National INFOSAN and National Codex Committee

SUB COMMITTEES OF THE NFSTWG

1) International Food Safety Authority network (INFOSAN)

- ❖ The Director of Environmental Health as the Emergency Contact Point
- ❖ INFOSAN Focal Points from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Fisheries, Environment, and Sierra Leone Standards Bureau (Trade)
- ❖ WHO and FAO

2) National Codex Alimentarius Committee

- ❖ National Codex Contact Point – Sierra Leone Standards Bureau (Deputy Executive Director).
- ❖ Technical Committees based on emerging issues.

BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

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- **Improved information sharing:** We prioritize regular and efficient communication to ease the flow of information among stakeholders such as TWG group email, Whatsapp platform for the TWG and subgroups, Phone calls or messages and through Technical and adhoc meetings.

The voice and opinion of every stakeholder is considered very valuable even in conflict resolution among institutions

- **Policy coherence:** when different sectors work together, it ensures food safety policies and regulations are consistent and aligned across the entire food system. This reduces confusion and duplication of effort

BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

- **Resource optimization:** collaboration allows for the pooling of resources (financial, human, and technological) to address food safety challenges more efficiently
- **Enhanced capacity building:** multisectoral initiatives has helped build capacity and expertise in food safety across different sectors. This includes training programs, technical assistance, and knowledge sharing
- **Increased public trust:** when the public see different sectors working together to ensure food safety, it increases their confidence in the food system

PROGRESS THROUGH MULTISECTOR COLLABORATION

- Strong coordination and collaboration through the National One Health Platform. Met the minimum requirement (Level 3) in the JEE score benchmark for IHR core capacities through effective One Health implementation Met.
- National Food Safety and Quality Control Guidelines (2021) developed and implemented, standardizing food safety practices nationwide in line with Codex Principles and procedures
- Developed and validated SOPs on food safety (food establishments, slaughterhouses, aflatoxins, and chemical residues in food) and a training manual for food business operators and monitoring tools for food establishments

PROGRESS THROUGH MULTISECTOR COLLABORATION

- Public Health Act, 2022, reviewed and gazetted, strengthening the national public health legal framework.
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- Food and Feed Safety Act, 2017 operationalized, enhancing food safety regulation and enforcement.
 - National Training Manual for Food Establishments developed, strengthening food business compliance with food safety standards.
 - Four national Food Safety SOPs (Aflatoxin, Slaughterhouses, Food Establishments, and Chemical Residues) were developed, contributing to improved regulatory compliance and inspection consistency.

National laboratories

- ❖ Veterinary labs – at Tecko, Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute and Njala University
- ❖ Plant Health and biocontrol lab – at Njala University
- ❖ Standard lab- at Sierra Leone Standard Bureau
- ❖ Food labs- at Njala University, Fourah Bay College-USL and Milton Margai Technical University
- ❖ Mycotoxin lab- at Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute - ongoing

PROGRESS THROUGH MULTISECTOR COLLABORATION

- A National Case Definition Manual for Priority Foodborne Diseases was developed, improving foodborne disease surveillance and reporting.
- The National Codex Committee was revitalized, with a Procedural Manual developed and members trained with technical support from WHO, enhancing coordination and engagement in Codex activities.
- 50 Codex food standards were adapted to the national context, strengthening alignment with international food safety standards and supporting effective implementation within the country.
- Food Safety Roadmap developed, laying the foundation for the development of a National Food Safety Strategic plan

PROGRESS THROUGH MULTISECTOR COLLABORATION

- National INFOSAN contact points in 5 lines ministries supporting food safety interventions which resulted to the development of a costed work plan for 2022- 2023
- Successfully secured grant from round 6 of the Codex Trust Fund which led to the development of procedural manual, Codex committee meetings and capacity building of NCC members for managing Codex activities

Investigation of foodborne events:

- ✓ food poison at Sherbro town mosque – Funkia, Western Rural district: 3rd April 2023
- ✓ A recall of apple Ceeres juice due to contamination of mycotoxin –patulin: 25th November 2021
- ✓ Alert notification on frozen chicken meat product with report submitted to the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed

PROGRESS THROUGH MULTISECTOR COLLABORATION

Celebration of the International Plant Health day using the One Health Platform



Celebration of the World Food Safety day using the One Health Platform



THE ONE HEALTH SYSTEM

CROSS SECTION OF INSPECTORS IN MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND AGRICULTURE ON SENSITIZATION AT THE LUMLEY MARKET AND SLAUGHTERHOUSE

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS INVOLVED IN FOOD SAFETY RESEARCH ARE PANEL DISCUSSION DURING THE FOOD SAFETY DAY



ENABLING POLICIES /LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The following documents guides the implementation of food safety activities the country:

- The Public Health Ordinance Act (2022)
- The Consumer Protection Act, 2020
- Code of Breast Milk Substitute, 2021
- The food and Feed Safety Act (2017)
- Weight & Measure Act #5 of 2010
- The Fisheries (Management and Development) Act, 2007
- Food and Drugs Act (1989)
- Sierra Leone Standards Bureau Act (1996)
- National One Health Strategic Plan (2022–2026)
- Sierra Leone National Action Plan for Health Security 2018 – 2022
- The Sierra Leone Water Company Act, 2017
- National Pesticide management Policy and the National plant protection policy (draft)

KEY CHALLENGES

- No Food Safety Authority to ensure implementation and enforcement of the Food Safety Act
- Limited foodborne disease surveillance system that will capture data on foodborne events
- Limited laboratory capacity to test and analyse food samples across the country - The SLBS lab has limited reagents for food analysis and testing and is not accredited
- No food safety policy and strategic plan in place
- Inadequate resources to support implementation of planned activities – limited donors and partners supporting food safety initiatives
- INFOSAN Focal Point has limited or no access to the food alert notification portal for contact details of importer (s) for food alert notification from INFOSAN and RASFF

LESSONS LEARNED

Our success was due to the following:

- Clearly defined mandates and roles of each sector in the food safety chain and working together using the “One health lens” contributed to strengthening coordination and collaboration among sectors
- Teamwork, transparency in planning and advocacy for food safety support –joint radio and TV discussion programmes, awareness raising interventions
- Joint implementation and involvement of relevant stakeholders in all interventions reduces duplication of efforts and contributed to achieving desired results
- Strong communication and networking platform – Whatsapp group for TWG members to discuss urgent issues and receive prompt feedback
- Determination and strong commitment of TWG members to addressing food safety issues –

WE NEVER GAVE UP! BUT KEEP PUSHING. ‘IT A SUCCESS FOR ALL NOT ONE’

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES IN STRENGTHENING MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION

- Advocacy for the establishment of a centralized Food Safety Governance Body (the Authority)
- Continue working together in the development and implementation of national strategic document on food safety such as:
 - National food safety policy and strategic plan
 - National food safety emergency preparedness, response and contingency plan

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES IN STRENGTHENING MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION

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- Fostering Regional and International Collaboration - Engaging with regional bodies to facilitate knowledge exchange, open pathways for safer trade and shared learning
 - Continue empowerment of smallholder farmers and food business operators through training to improve food handling and storage practices thus reducing contamination risks
 - Continue to promote public awareness and community engagement on food safety and hygiene practices with emphasis on local food markets



Cross section of Food Safety TWG Members



National Codex Committee Meetings and Trainings

Thank You All for Listening

Merci à tous de votre écoute

Obrigado a todos por ouvirem

شكرا لكم جميعا على الاستماع

**shukran lakum jamiean ealaa
alaistimae**