Module 2

Food policy

For the Informal Food Sector
OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, participants should be able to:

1. Identify the needs of the sector for improving nutrition, food safety and quality
2. Describe the present status of government policies towards this sector in the SADC region
3. Describe the benefits of clear policy guidelines regarding the sector
4. Discuss the responsibilities of governments, ministries and non governmental organisations regarding policy issues.
5. Discuss the contribution and assistance that could be provided by regional and international organisations.
2.0 DEFINITION OF FOOD POLICY

A Food Policy is an official and approved commitment by government, which makes provision for the availability of safe and nutritious food at all times to the population. Since the informal food sector is recognised for its contribution in providing ‘easy to eat food’ to the public, provision must be made in the Food Policy to include the informal food sector so as to give to this sector an official recognition.

2.1 STATUS OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES TOWARDS THIS SECTOR
IN THE SADC REGION

In many SADC countries, the informal food sector has been growing rapidly over the past years. This phenomenon is linked to a number of factors: rapid rural-urban migration, need to feed large populations, usually the urban workforce, which spends the day away from home, and prevailing unemployment in the formal sector.

It is therefore imperative that the informal food sector be given due recognition by the national and local authorities and be regulated so that it can become an integrated part of the economic life of the country.

The operators of the sector in most countries are marginalized and are excluded from consideration in urban planning policies. National and local authorities have therefore an obligation to review this stand and wherever possible, modify current planning to accommodate street based activities. Furthermore the requirements of this valuable sector need to be considered in future urban development. There is a need for a clear policy,
which must aim at upgrading the street food sector at local and national levels.

### 2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF A CLEAR POLICY FOR THE INFORMAL FOOD SECTOR

The policy has to include the following components:

- Development and introduction of improved practical technologies.
- Provision of adequate infrastructure
- Training of food processors and vendors
- Education of the public with special attention to school children
- Development of codes of practice

The policy should not only look at the above factors but special attention should be given to socio-economic factors, safety and the provision of nutritious food at affordable prices for the population. For the successful implementation of the policy all the stakeholders must be involved in all the stages right from the formulation to the implementation stage.

Provision should be made for the creation of a special unit, which will facilitate the implementation of these components and provide necessary facilities for the successful implementation.

Food processors and vendors should be encouraged to regroup themselves in co-operatives or association with a view to facilitating access to information, training and credit.
Authorities should promote interaction and co-operation among consumer groups, health enforcement officers, and street vendors. This participatory approach will facilitate the elaboration of regulations, guidelines on licensing and development of inspection procedures.

Children as consumers
The role of the children in the informal sector needs to be examined and appropriate measures/legislation introduced to safeguard their health and interest. Street food accounts for a part of the daily diet of children especially during school days. The main implications of such a situation concern both nutrition and food safety and these have to be examined in details.

Children as workers
Children are involved in the preparation and selling at fixed food stalls, peddling in the streets or even working for some entrepreneurs. This practice may need to be reviewed in the light of regulations governing child labour.

Access to credit facilities
The provision of credit at concessionary rate of interest may encourage street vendors to improve their stalls for the production of more hygienic and safe food while contributing to the improvement of the environment.

Importance of training
Training of the workers of the informal sector is essential for improving the safety of food prepared. Short training courses focusing on imparting relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes, will have to include modules on
✓ Policy and Regulations,
✓ Food Safety and Hygiene,
✓ Food Technology,
✓ Food Quality and Safety.

Provision of potable water and other facilities
Provision of a regular supply of potable water and the proper organisation of rubbish and waste water disposal and the upgrading of food stalls and its surroundings are to be considered as key elements of a street food policy.

Code of practice for street foods

Authorities need to recognise the socio-economic situation of operators in the informal food sector while elaborating and implementing remedial actions to ensure the safety and quality of these foods. Good hygienic manufacturing practices based on food safety systems like HACCP can contribute to the achievement of these objectives.
2.3 BENEFITS OF CLEAR POLICY GUIDELINES REGARDING THE SECTOR

Introducing policies for this sector means that the sector will be officially recognised as a partner in the food supply system. Official recognition may mean that some vendors may apply for and obtain loans for improving their businesses.

In some countries food vendors have to pay protection money. Instead of being poor, vulnerable and disorganised, informal businesses will be able to organise themselves and resist exploitation.

With a comprehensive policy, the informal food businesses will be considered in urban planning policies. Authorities, when designing new buildings or shopping centres, may in their plans make provision for specially designed locations for the informal food business. This will lead to an improvement of the conditions in which these businesses operate.

Policies will normally have a component of training and education that will benefit the workers and equip them with all necessary skills to perform their work better.

Policies will make provisions for regulation, registration and licensing.

Renewal of licenses may be used as opportunity to assess level of knowledge and commitment to provision of safe food, and to educate the workers.
Through clear policies and regulations, the state will ensure that the workers can carry out their businesses in better conditions, that food security is improved, and that customers are protected.

2.4 RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNMENTS AND MINISTRIES REGARDING POLICY ISSUES

Government and local authorities must be strongly committed to the promotion of nutritional well-being. This includes a commitment to helping the sector improve food safety and quality. This must be translated not only in terms of comprehensive policies but also in terms of adequate means to enable implementation of these policies. They must

(a) Provide information

Governments have to collect baseline information about the sector, its size and characteristics, and set up a data bank which will store and update information about this sector. Research regarding the various aspects of the informal sector will have to be an ongoing process.

This information generated will be of use to policy makers in decision making, to the scientific community to guide further research, and for the welfare of all the other stakeholders.

(b) Provide leadership

Governments and ministries will have to demonstrate adequate commitment to work towards the improvement of food security and safety. Governments will have the
responsibility of deciding the type of environment legal and technical in which this sector will operate.

(c) **Determine priorities for national action**

Governments and ministries have to determine priorities and develop policies and action plans to tackle the priority problems.

(d) **Grant official recognition to the sector**

The action plan for improvement of food safety in the sector has to acknowledge the sector as a source of employment and an important component in the food supply system.

(e) **Set up a mechanism to ensure co-operation among all partners**

Government is responsible for setting up an independent body, which will be constituted of representatives of central and local authorities, of consumers and vendors and of other stakeholders. This body will advise on changes that could be implemented to improve the sector.
2.5 ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

The collaboration of non-governmental organisations is essential to
• Educate consumers about food safety issues
• Promote healthy diets and lifestyles
• Promote safe practices among producers of raw materials and food vendors
• Support active consumer groups

2.6 INTER COLLABORATION BETWEEN REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

• Organising international and regional conferences on nutrition issues in order to raise awareness among member states about food safety and quality, and the need for well-defined policies for the informal sector.
• Providing assistance to member states to develop policies and action plans to help the informal food sector.
• Mobilising financial and technical support to enable the implementation of the action plans.
• Supporting action oriented pilot projects to improve the food safety in certain member states.
• Supporting training programs for food vendors and inspection officers and consumer education programmes.
• Providing technical support and funds for carrying out research in food safety.
REFERENCES

