



Policy Brief: Enhancing food safety in Abuja (Federal Capital Territory)

Executive Summary:

Food safety is a critical public health issue in Nigeria. Recent incidents of foodborne illnesses e.g. Cholera highlight this challenge with implications for economic stability across communities, states and the nation more broadly. This brief presents some key research



findings and policy recommendations to enhance food safety through improved regulation, inspection, education, and technological innovation. It draws on two related studies on food safety conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates-funded project RSM2SNF (Research supporting African MSMEs to deliver affordable, safe, and nutritious foods). Between July 2023 and February 2024, key information about the size, infrastructure, and

governance of fish, tomatoes, and green leafy vegetables (GLV) wholesale markets were collected in 7 Nigerian states and the FCT where ten (10) wholesale markets were identified for fish. Table 1 describes the findings related to infrastructure and food safety in the markets in the study states.

State	Has a functional toilet (%)	No. of Traders per toilet	Access to pipe-borne water (%)	Treat water (%)	Main water source is a bore hole	Main water source is a well	Main water source (streams, jerricans, etc.)
Cross River	32	911	0	0	36	2	62
Kaduna	39	510	5	9	29	46	19
Ebonyi	26	722	13	0	57	8	30
Oyo	52	470	4	17	72	20	9
FCT	100	216	40	20	60	0	20
Plateau	17	1129	8	0	19	21	55
Borno	95	183	0	0	24	0	76
Kebbi	77	211	0	0	32	41	28

Source: RSM2SNF wholesale market study

Key findings:

- **Inadequate toilets and clean water:**
 - While 100 % of wholesale markets for fish in the FCT had a functional toilet (which is commendable) the trader/toilet ratio was found to be over 200 traders to a toilet, on average. An insufficient number of functional toilets can lead to people resorting to open defecation or using buckets and containers, sometimes kept around their stalls in the market. These practices can lead to the contamination of food (sold in the market) as well as soil and water sources with fecal matter, which can harbor the *Vibrio cholerae* bacteria.
 - About 40% of wholesale markets in the FCT have pipe-borne water. The main source of water is boreholes (about 60%) with another important source of water being water delivered in jerricans which is about 20%.
 - Only 20% of the markets treat their water in some way to avoid contaminants.
 - Trader hygiene practices (washing hands after toilet use) and handling practices (washing vegetables with clean water that is changed frequently) are important for reducing consumer exposure to microbial contaminants such as *E.coli* ((Martins et al., 2024).
 - Without enough functional toilets and handwashing stations, many people will not wash their hands properly after defecation, increasing the spread of cholera bacteria e.g. through direct contact and food handling.
 - Untreated water and poor hygiene can also allow for cross contamination of products during washing and handling.
- **Lack of Public Awareness and Education:**
 - No markets in the FCT have (1) any posters promoting food safety practices, (2) any rules about food safety communicated to traders or (3) quality control checks for these perishable foods respectively. This shows that food safety and food safety regulations are not yet prioritized in these food markets.
 - In the study on vegetable traders in southwest Nigeria, less than 1% of traders had ever received training on food safety and only about half of them changed their wash water (for vegetable washing) correctly (Martins et al., 2024). This means there is significant scope to improve trader hygiene and food safety handling practices via training.

Key Messages



FCT State needs more functional toilets in food markets



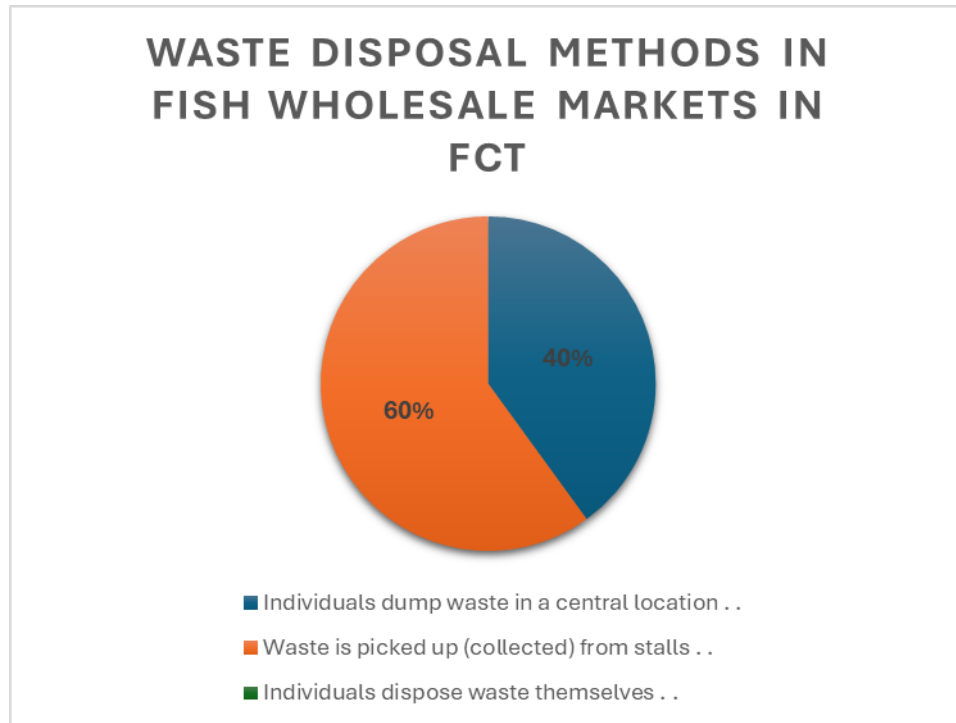
Food markets in FCT State need access to potable water



Food traders and consumers need adequate food safety training

Improper Waste Disposal:

- The 2 main ways waste is disposed of in the FCT is either by individual traders dropping their waste in a central location from which that waste is picked up daily, weekly, or less frequently or having their waste picked up from their stalls. Having solid waste around markets that is not properly disposed of frequently is a potential source of pathogens such as *Salmonella spp.*, *Escherichia coli*, and *Vibrio cholerae* that cause diseases.



Source: *RSM2SNF wholesale market study*

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Invest in the construction of more toilets** to reduce the trader-to-toilet ratios in the state.
2. Launch statewide **education and training for traders and consumers** to educate the public on safe food handling, storage, and preparation practices. This has been found to encourage adoption of good practices, particularly when the cost of adoption is low (Seaman and Eves 2010; WHO, 2015)
3. There is a need for **borehole water** within the food markets to be treated (e.g. by chlorination) to prevent potential health hazards



4. Integrate food safety education into school curricula to raise awareness among children and their families to improve food **safety demand and supply**
5. Employ more workers as Environmental Health Officers and train them on the Principles of Food Safety, Food Hygiene, and Personal Hygiene.



6. **Monitoring and control of hygiene in the markets:** The Environmental Health Officers should be empowered to regularly monitor the hygiene practices of the people in the markets and sanction them, if there is a need.
7. **Enhance collaboration via** Public Private Partnerships and improve interagency coordination between state and local government to streamline food safety efforts and ensure a unified response to incidents.
8. **Support research and innovation:** Increase funding for research on new methods and technologies to improve food safety and bring researchers, industry experts, and policymakers together to develop and implement cutting-edge food safety solutions.

Conclusion:

Ensuring the safety of our food supply is a shared responsibility that requires concerted effort from all stakeholders. By implementing these policy recommendations, the FCT can significantly reduce the incidence of foodborne illnesses, protect public health, and enhance the economic vitality of the food sectors.

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This policy brief is intended to guide strategic actions and foster discussions on enhancing food safety in FCT State. For further information or to discuss these recommendations in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact the RSM2SNF project via Mrs. Amadi Grace (the Project Management Assistant) using 09162066036 or grcraji@gmail.com.

References:

- Seaman, P., and Eves, A. (2010). Perceptions of food safety training and knowledge among food handlers. *Journal of Food Protection*, 73(7), 1238-1246.
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