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Columnist: [--](#)

## Street food vending in urban Ghana: moving from an informal to a formal sector

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Street food vending in urban Ghana is an increasing popular informal business that allows people to eat affordable, local and varied foods, while representing an important source of income for many vulnerable families.

Despite its advantages, street food vending is considered to be a major cause of health hazards such as food borne diseases. The main contributing factors are the poor vending environments and the vendors' practices. It is therefore important to assist and support this informal sector to the benefit of the whole nation.

Results of a study on street vending in Accra, conducted between December 2011 and May 2012, by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Regional Office for Africa, sheds some light on the socioeconomic status of the different actors in the sector and the actions required to improve food safety and nutritional quality of street foods. The study showed that out of 99 vendors interviewed, 95% were females and 47.3% had a secondary level of education. Most of them were married (68%) and the number of people in their household on an average is four.

### The vendors

In urban Ghana, street food vendors are mainly from underprivileged and middle socio-economic groups. In most cases, their level of education is low and it is therefore difficult for them to have access to formal employment. The vendors usually start the business with low investment and do not have access to loans, and this prevents them from extending their business. The vending is usually on a family-basis, with the vendor operating most of the time with family members.

### The consumers

Mainly two types of street food consumers can be found in urban Ghana. The first consists of the poor population that relies completely on street food to cover their daily needs. The second one comprises of workers and students/pupils. Generally, the working place or the school is far from the house and it is difficult to return home for lunch. In addition to that, many institutions/schools, either private or public do not have a canteen on their premises. This easily explains the fact that many workers and students/pupils consume street foods particularly during lunch hours.

### Tailor made capacity development

Several initiatives have been conducted in order to develop capacities of street food vendors in terms of food safety and quality; less has been done with reference to the nutritional importance of the food sold on the streets and the entrepreneurial aspects of this activity. However, the high number of cases of food borne diseases calls for more action, especially in the Greater Accra Region, as the street food vending sector continue to expand. Public institutions, vendors and consumers all have a great role to play in ensuring safety of the street foods. National and local institutions, among others, with the support of international organisations and NGOs can work to strengthen and promote the available tools and guidelines and join forces to effectively train the different actors involved in the sector.

### Streamline registration

All Street food vendors should register to the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and must have authorisation prior to start their activity (development and building permit, business operating permit, health certificate, among others). The purpose is to ensure that every vendor is healthy and operates in a suitable environment.

In practice, most street food vendors do not comply with the complex set of authorisations needed for food vending. As an example, the study revealed that 16 vendors out of 98 did not have any vending permit. The rest of the interviewed vendors were able to show only the health certificate, which is just one of the many authorisations needed for vending. Though considerable efforts have been made by the Government in terms of promoting registration, many challenges remain: the long and costly procedure (mainly in terms of days spent out of work), the difficulty to access proper information (given the low literacy level of many vendors) and the low enforcement by local authorities due to limited resources.

For all the reasons above, streamlining the registration process alongside with promoting awareness raising campaigns could motivate the vendors to obtain the proper authorisation and see their ventures formally recognised by public authorities.

#### Institutionalizing street food vending

Many schools and institutions rely on street food vending for the provision of food to their students and/or pupils and it is common to see vendors stably installed around schools and institutions. This relationship needs to be strengthened and institutionalized. The benefits will be on both sides. The customers (workers, students/pupils) will have access to safe and affordable foods, while vendors will rely on a regular source of income and will benefit from the institution's infrastructures (source of drinking water, electricity, waste management). In addition, this approach could also compensate for the lack of canteens in schools and institutions. Appropriate mechanisms such as prepaid food coupons can be set up to facilitate the creation of these formal relationships. Public institutions in charge of controlling street food vending should also be involved to ensure quality of the food sold.

Despite the health hazards and its informality, street food vending is an important source of income for many Ghanaians and helps in fighting food insecurity and poverty in urban areas. It is therefore important to support this sector to be more formal. This will result in reducing the risks, ensuring consistent and regular earnings, both for the vendors and the Government. This approach needs strong participation of the Government, as well as the Civil Society and the Development Partners.

#### Comments:

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