

The Tanzania Food, Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 2003

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Key Messages

- The Tanzania Food, Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 2003 governs food safety and aims to ensure that all food products in the country are safe for consumption and meet established quality standards.
- While the Act offers a strong foundation for regulation of food safety in Tanzania, it has several shortcomings.
- A multiplicity of Acts dealing with food safety results in a fragmented approach to food safety oversight.
- The continued sale of both adulterated and unfit foods, as well as milk from diseased animals, is evidence that enforcement of the Act is lacking.
- The Act would benefit from greater attention to gender inclusivity and climate change, which are growing themes of relevance to food safety.

Introduction

Globally, a significant share of foodborne diseases result from consuming fresh and perishable foods which are sold in informal markets in developing countries such as Tanzania, where inadequate storage and cooling facilities compromise food safety. Foodborne illnesses range from mild diarrhea to cancer (in the case of chemical contamination) and pose significant health risks. Low levels of food safety hinder progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3 (good health and well-being), and further impede international food trade. The lack of a robust surveillance system for foodborne diseases in Tanzania makes it challenging to assess the true scope of the problem.

The Tanzania Food, Drugs and Cosmetics Act (FDCA) governs food safety and aims to ensure that all food products in the country are safe for consumption and meet established quality standards. It covers a wide range of provisions, including the regulation of food handling, processing, distribution, and sale. The Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS), established in 2009, oversees the implementation of the Act. TBS is responsible

for preparing and promoting standardization, as well as quality control across various industries and commercial products.



While the Tanzania Food, Drugs and Cosmetics Act offers a strong foundation for regulation of food safety in Tanzania, it has several shortcomings. These are discussed below.

Multiplicity of Acts dealing with food safety

The Tanzania FDCA is the primary legislation that governs the safety, quality, and labeling of food, drugs, and cosmetics. However, there are several other Acts that also deal with the same issues, including the Finance Act of 2019 and the Standards Act. This results in a fragmented approach to food safety oversight

and makes control of food safety more complicated.

Sale of adulterated food

Adulteration involves adding, removing, or substituting substances in food to deceive consumers or reduce production costs, often with harmful effects. Contrary to section 30 (1) of the Tanzania FDCA, adulteration of food continues to be undertaken. For instance, adding water to milk to increase its volume in pursuit of higher profits is referred to as milk adulteration; this might not compromise the safety of food, but it does affect food quality. Similarly, mixing wheat flour into maize flour for the purpose of increasing its weight is another common form of food adulteration.

The Tanzania FDCA aims to prevent the sale of contaminated or misbranded food. Accordingly, it prohibits food adulteration and sets penalties for violations. In reality, however, adulterated food products are regularly sold by street food vendors to boost their profits. Enforcement is evidently lacking, and this undercuts food safety in Tanzania.

Sale of unfit food

The Tanzania FDCA seeks to protect public health by prohibiting the sale of food that is “unfit”, i.e., food that is spoiled, contaminated, or otherwise unsafe for consumption. As specified in section 32 (1), this includes food that contains harmful substances, is prepared in unsanitary conditions, or does not meet established safety standards. Along these lines, communities engaged in fishing sometimes report that fisher-folks sell fish that were caught using chemicals. Fish caught in this way are considered unfit for human consumption.

On paper, offenders face severe penalties, including fines and/or imprisonment. Nevertheless, cases of unfit food sales continue to occur, and according to the Tanzania Food and Drug Authority (TFDA) (now named the Tanzania Medicine and Medical Devices Authority (TMDA)), over 1,000 people die per year due to consumption of unsafe food. This indicates that there are loopholes allowing for misbehavior on the part

of food suppliers and vendors. Again, stronger enforcement is recommended for protection of consumers’ health.

Sale of milk from diseased animals

According to the Tanzania FDCA (section 40 (1)), milk from diseased dairy animals should not be used for human consumption. Diseases such as mastitis, tuberculosis, and brucellosis can lead to the presence of bacteria, viruses, and other harmful microorganisms in the animal’s milk. The resulting milk may then contain harmful pathogens, toxins, or other contaminants that pose serious health risks. In contravention of the Tanzania FDCA, reports of milk sales from diseased animals continue to surface. Firmer measures need to be taken to exclude milk from diseased animals from the human food supply.



Lack of attention to gender inclusivity

The Tanzania FDCA does not address gender inclusivity among its provisions. This omission may stem from traditional norms and cultural barriers that prevent women, elders, and youth from participating fully in certain activities. Nevertheless, it is important to incorporate gender-related issues into policies related to food safety, considering that women are very much engaged in various activities of relevance to food safety along the food value chain. For example, women are heavily involved in the marketing of many agricultural products and are especially predominant in fish processing activities such as frying, sun-drying, and smoking. Women, who are often at the forefront of food handling and processing, are therefore in a pivotal position to implement and uphold food safety standards.

Incorporating gender and youth inclusivity into food safety legislation would not only acknowledge the essential roles these groups play but would also enhance the effectiveness of food safety measures. It would convey that all stakeholders, regardless of gender or age, have an opportunity to contribute to and benefit from a safer food system.

Lack of attention to climate change

The Tanzania FDCA does not address the critical issue of climate change in relation to food safety. However, climate change poses numerous direct and indirect threats to food safety. For example, altered weather patterns can lead to increased occurrences of plant diseases and pests, reducing crop yields and quality and thereby compromising food safety. Warmer climates may lead to an increase in pest resistance to pesticides, further complicating efforts to maintain food safety. Climate change likewise affects fish stocks, with altered water temperatures and acidity levels impacting the availability and safety of seafood.

Given the significant impact of climate change on food safety, it is thus recommended that issues related to climate change be explicitly addressed in the FDCA. For example, the impact of climate change on the emergence of different types of crop pests needs to be known. Guidelines and strategies are needed to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on food production and safety. These may address climate-resilient agricultural practices, such as crop diversification and use of drought-resistant crop varieties, which can help ensure food security and safety in the face of changing environmental conditions. Furthermore, improving infrastructure for food storage and transportation is vital to prevent food spoilage and contamination.

By acknowledging the intersection of climate change and food safety, Tanzania can develop more robust strategies to safeguard its food supply against the growing challenges posed by a changing climate.

Photos

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