

REPORT OF THE FOOD SAFETY CAMPAIGN

MOHALE'S HOEK

31ST AUGUST – 5TH SEPTEMBER 2006



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VOTE OF GRATITUDE

The campaign was a success and The Environmental Health Division's utmost gratitude is extended to the following organizations and institutions:

World Health Organization: The organization has been very supportive in providing technical advice as well as funding.

Lesotho Mounted Police Service (Mohale's Hoek): The security and other services rendered throughout the campaign were vital to the execution of campaign.

District Health Management Team: Their active participation in all the activities is appreciated as well as the patience required while working beyond working hours.

Mafeteng Health Management Team: Their efforts on the last day of the campaign were vital since they participated in the scheduled educational session.

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PART 1: GENERAL BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND TO THE CAMPAIGN

In October 2005, the Food Safety and Vector Control Programme of the Environmental Health Division (EHD) commissioned a study entitled “**Food Safety Study at Retail Food Establishments in Lesotho**”. The findings of the study revealed that people are exposed to risks due to consuming food unfit for human consumption from some of the establishments. The study recommended that food safety campaigns be held in all districts, starting with those involved in the study (Qacha’s Nek, Quthing, Mohale’s Hoek, Mafeteng and Butha-Buthe).

Initially the district of Quthing was identified for the campaign due to its generally low conformance to food establishments’ requirements. However, at the planned period the district was hosting the King’s Birthday National Ceremony. The neighbouring Mohale’s Hoek district was then selected to launch the campaign.

Due To logistical hurdles, the campaign was held in August to September instead of July, as planned.

The biggest portion of the campaign’s budget was support from the WHO while partial funding came from the Government of Lesotho.

CAMPAIGN THEME

The theme of the campaign was:

“Food Safety in All Food Establishment: A Key to Good Health”.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CAMPAIGN

As outlined below, the objectives are divided into “Overall” and “Specific”.

Overall Objective

To communicate the importance of food safety to owners of food establishments, food handlers as well as street food vendors concentrating on the theme.

Specific Objectives (Campaign Strategies)

1. To disseminate information on food safety to target groups
2. To initiate the process of incorporating informal street vendors into the formal sector.
3. To inspect all food establishments in the town of Mohale's Hoek.
4. To inspect and condemn foodstuffs that are unfit for human consumption in supermarkets.
5. To enforce food safety as a critical issue in the newly decentralized Health Services and thus capture the commitment of stakeholders.

TARGET GROUPS

The targeted groups were:

Food establishment owners

All food handlers

Street food vendors

The general community.

PART 2: CAMPAIGN EXECUTION

Prior to the joint campaign (including district and central level officials), the District office conducted social mobilization on the 29th – 30th August 2006. The campaign was executed as planned and the activities are elaborated on a day basis.

DAY 1: 31st August 2006

A team of 12 EHD officers from the district and central level carried out an inspection of supermarkets (owned by Chinese entrepreneurs due to their notorious history). The team was also reinforced by the presence of police

officers for security in order to counteract past incidences of violence by the shop owners to Health Inspectors/Environmental Health Officers.

Six supermarkets were inspected and numerous items were condemned and confiscated (The volume of the condemned items was a total of two twin cab van loads). The table below illustrates a summary of items condemned.

Table 1: Quantities of Condemned foodstuffs

	Mass (Kg)	Volume (L)	Total no. of Items
Solids	218.0	-	1255
Liquids	-	127.1	224
Unmeasured items	-	-	12604
TOTAL	218	127.1	14083

The table is enforced by the image below

Image 1: Condemned consignment of food consumable commodities



Combustible items were incinerated while liquids (which were mainly drink concentrates) were poured down the drain. The remaining items were destroyed and disposed of at the town's dumpsite.

The following are the findings and observations from the shop inspections:

- ◆ The consumable commodities condemned were expired, dented, contaminated or unlabelled.
- ◆ There is a tendency in supermarkets to place the price (permanent marker) on the expiry date, thus obscuring it.
- ◆ There is a tendency to erase the expiry date with methylated spirit.
- ◆ Contaminated and or expired food commodities are sold in smaller packets, out of the original packaging e.g. sugar, tea bags and confectionaries.
- ◆ The cardboard outer packaging of some commodities e.g. soya mince soups and baby cereals are removed such that new labels are placed with a marker on the inner foil/plastic. This way the expiry date cannot be known.
- ◆ Frozen foods are tampered with (e.g. chicken portions) and then resealed with heat. A burnt candle found in the cold room of one store gave evidence.
- ◆ The "First in, First out" principle of stock control is not used. Expired foodstuffs were mixed with the new stock and some old stock placed behind new stock on the shelves.
- ◆ There is also a tendency of concealing expired commodities in the storerooms, once these are found, they claim they were destined for destruction or return to suppliers. In accordance with the Public Health Order No.12 (section 68), expired commodities are not to be found on the premises.
- ◆ Generally, most of the Chinese-owned supermarkets' hygiene standards are not conducive to food safety. This remains a huge challenge for the less resourced Environmental Health Division (Human resources,

transport and non-office equipment like tools to ease operations) in the district regarding the wide spread of the Chinese

Recommendations

- ◆ No markings should be made on top of the expiry dates.
- ◆ Commodities should never be removed from their original packaging.
- ◆ Mass shop Inspections should be carried out with the support of the regions (especially during regional meetings) and central level. Districts should assist each other where regional committees do not exist.
- ◆ Legal action is to be taken against those who erase expiry dates from packages.
- ◆ Many of the consumers in the supermarkets were ill informed on safe food. The MOHSW, therefore should work jointly with the Consumer Department of the Ministry of Trade to disseminate information on food safety.

DAY 2: 1st September 2006

On this day the team embarked on inspections of formal food establishments categorized as Hotels, Restaurants, Fast Food Outlets, Butcheries and Institutional cafeterias. On that day 16 establishments were inspected. The findings thereof would be compared to those of the study, (conducted almost a year ago) to establish whether there is an improvement or not. The number of establishments inspected is contained in table 2.

The general findings of the inspections are listed below, but statistical analysis to check for improvement since the Food Safety Study (October 2005) is still in process.

- ◆ Many of the food handlers do not have valid Food handlers' certificates, while the greater majority do not have them at all or keep them at home and not on the business premises.

- ◆ Some food handlers resist using head covers.
- ◆ Most of the aprons at restaurants were found to be very dirty due to oil splashes.
- ◆ In restaurants: most of the walls above the cooking areas were found to have accumulated oil and dirt for long periods. This is both unsightly and unhygienic.
- ◆ At Kan Kon Restaurant the extractor fan was non-functional and this caused back draught mixed with cigarette smoke and fumes from the restaurant. This is because the partitioning wall between the cooking and customer-sitting area does not extend to the ceiling. The condition is a serious health hazard.
- ◆ At Nthatuoa Restaurant the only food handler of the establishment was found to have fresh oil-burn wounds on her hands. At the time of the inspection she was found kneading dough and doing the general food handling. The immediate remedial action was to cut her out of work until she was certified fit to handle food again.
- ◆ MK Butchery was found to be functioning mostly as a catering business.

Recommendations

- ◆ The district staff is to follow-up on the recommendations made.
- ◆ Routine inspections should be carried out at least quarterly at all food establishments.

DAY 3: 4th September 2006

Subsequent to observations from the previous day, information dissemination (educational sessions) was given to all establishments visited. The sessions were centred on the “Five Keys to Safer Food” and great emphasis was made on problem areas identified from the previously conducted inspections. Posters and pamphlets of the “Five Keys to Safer Food” were also given to formal and informal establishments, respectively. A total of 39 posters and 250 pamphlets

were distributed on the day. Since not all establishments could be visited due to time and human resource constraints, the District Team committed itself to follow-ups as well as coverage of the unattended establishments. Table 2 provides details on educational sessions given by type of establishment inspected.

Table 2: Number of individuals given “Five Keys” educational sessions

Type of Establishment	No. of participants
Hotels	17
Butcheries	18
Institutional Cafeterias	47
Restaurants and Fast Food outlets	31
Catering kitchens	11
Bakeries	5
Individual vendors	210
TOTAL	339

For dissemination to street food vendors, a public address system was used at the bus stop area and the main streets to impart the “Five Keys to Safer Food” message.

The total figure in the table does not reflect the general community who attended the last day of the campaign where the “Five Keys” message was also disseminated.

Recommendations

- ◆ The district should conduct trainings for street food vendors not only to improve their food handling and hygiene but also as paving for the incorporation of their activities into the formal sector.
- ◆ The district should conduct trainings for business owners

- ◆ Butcheries should be separated from fast food outlets such that no two or more such operations or enterprises are in one space /room

Day 4: 5th September 2006

The aim was to collect all food handlers, food establishment owners and vendors to a single place and deliver the message of food safety. The proceedings of the day commenced with a fun walk from the District Administrator's office to the Racecourse. At the racecourse speeches were delivered to the crowd and the impact of the campaign was evaluated by giving fruits to all participants. The impact was positive because all remembered to wash their hands and their fruit before eating them.

Image 2: Campaigners on the fourth day



LIMITATIONS TO THE CAMPAIGN

Since the first launch of a campaign is a learning curve for future campaigns, the following constraints were identified and an attempt will be made to turn them into opportunities for future campaigns.

1. There was a shortage of human resources to form teams and thus not all establishments and supermarkets were covered during the campaign. This is crucial for supermarkets since some owners are notorious for hiding expired and damaged goods once their colleagues have alerted them of on-going inspections.
2. The last day of the campaign had fewer people than was expected and low representation (support) from business owners. This may have been attributed to the fact that educational sessions and IEC materials were distributed previously and also target groups cannot afford to close down their businesses to go to the gathering.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE CAMPAIGNS

1. Social mobilization should be given enough time and be more intense.
2. Neighbouring districts should join hands in all phases with the campaigning district to make a bigger and more impacting workforce.
3. Stakeholders such as Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office, Trade, Ministry of Tourism should collaborate more with the Environmental Health Division at all levels.
4. Gathering for the last day should not be taken to a secluded area but to the area around which most food handlers can participate without losing much business e.g. the bus stop area as opposed to the famous racecourse.
5. Grading of formal food establishments should be formalized such that incentives can be given to the highest graded establishment. This would be motivation to other establishments and a business advantage to the winning establishment.
6. Business owners should be informed in time such that they can also assist the campaign financially or otherwise.
7. The Food Safety programme management should devise a strategy to assess and evaluate the impact of food safety campaigns.

8. District Health Divisions should be empowered with essential resources such as more Health Assistants and transport to increase their coverage of the district: environmental health problems are also widespread in the rural areas.

ANNEX 1: CAMPAIGN PHOTOGRAPHS

Day 1 Activities: Condemnation and disposal of unfit food commodities



Day 4 Activities: Part of the campaign team prior to the walk



The community Participates in the fun walk



Community Health Workers pass the campaign message by song



St. Elizabeth School Students grace the campaign with songs



Some of the dignitaries delivering speeches

