

Food for Health: Understanding the Importance of Food Safety in the Context of Food Security

Authors : Carmen J. Savelli, Romy Conzade

Abstract : Background: Access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food is a basic human necessity, required to sustain life and promote good health. Food safety and food security are therefore inextricably linked, yet the importance of food safety in this relationship is often overlooked. Methodologies: A literature review and desk study were conducted to examine existing frameworks for discussing food security, especially from an international perspective, to determine the entry points for enhancing considerations for food safety in national and international policies. Major Findings: Food security is commonly understood as the state when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Conceptually, food security is built upon four pillars including food availability, access, utilization and stability. Within this framework, the safety of food is often wrongly assumed as a given. However, in places where food supplies are insufficient, coping mechanisms for food insecurity are primarily focused on access to food without considerations for ensuring safety. Under such conditions, hygiene and nutrition are often ignored as people shift to less nutritious diets and consume more potentially unsafe foods, in which chemical, microbiological, zoonotic and other hazards can pose serious, acute and chronic health risks. While food supplies might be safe and nutritious, if consumed in quantities insufficient to support normal growth, health and activity, the result is hunger and famine. Recent estimates indicate that at least 842 million people, or roughly one in eight, still suffer from chronic hunger. Even if people eat enough food that is safe, they will become malnourished if the food does not provide the proper amounts of micronutrients and/or macronutrients to meet daily nutritional requirements, resulting in under- or over-nutrition. Two billion people suffer from one or more micronutrient deficiencies and over half a billion adults are obese. Access to sufficient amounts of nutritious food is not enough. If food is unsafe, whether arising from poor quality supplies or inadequate treatment and preparation, it increases the risk of foodborne infections such as diarrhoea. 70% of diarrhoea episodes occurring annually in children under five are due to biologically contaminated food. Conclusions: An integrated approach is needed where food safety and nutrition are systematically introduced into mainstream food system policies and interventions worldwide in order to achieve health and development goals. A new framework, "Food for Health" is proposed to guide policy development and requires all three aspects of food security to be addressed in balance: sufficiency, nutrition and safety.

Keywords : food safety, food security, nutrition, policy

Conference Title : ICFSN 2015 : International Conference on Food Security and Nutrition

Conference Location : Athens, Greece

Conference Dates : July 20-21, 2015