



GROWING CITIES, INCREASING FOOD SAFETY CHALLENGES:

CASE OF FORT PORTAL TOURISM CITY

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Unhygienic food handling can be such a disturbing sight to any food consumer. The state of this abattoir that serves Fort Portal City should be a concern for everyone, more so, the Fort Portal City Authority.



A food stall close to a heap of refuse in downtown Fort Portal Tourism City. There is need for City Authorities to provide descent and inclusive spaces for sale of food by vendors who may not afford high costs of renting business premises in the growing city.

Consumption of contaminated food is a growing concern for urban food systems in Uganda. The capacity to manage urban waste for new and sprawling urban centres remains marginally low. The urgency to provide food to the growing urban population through informal food systems is faced with many challenges. Most often, street food vending, meat abattoirs, farmers' markets and small-scale food processors operate in unhygienic environments.

A number of markets have been constructed in Fort Portal City to provide inclusive and descent spaces enhance food safety. In 2013, Mpanga Market was reconstructed and expanded to accommodate more traders, but the growing urban population and influx of more traders in the city is escalating the demand for market space. The new markets, including Mpanga and Kabundaire are once again facing congestion. The impact of this is currently pushing low capital food vendors to the margins of unsafe spaces to establish food vending make-shift markets. Common sights of this are to be found near to garbage heaps and poorly drained areas in the city. There is an apparent poor-rich contract of inequality that needs to be addressed by the city authorities..

Such is Fort Portal City, one of the newly created cities in Uganda. The city is gazetted a regional tourist hub, and facing increasing influx of new populations in hope to tap into the vast economic and social opportunities. The City's hinterland and neighboring districts are known for the good and conducive climate and fertile soils that support agriculture and massive production and exportation of food to the neighboring cities, towns and countries.

As the city grows, it's also facing challenges of managing urban waste posing a risk to food contamination and other atrocious public health outcomes.

It's worth noting that access to diverse, nutritious and safe food is every person's human right. These rights are however being silently denied from the food consumers through a broken food system and unregulated food management practices.

Food safety is a key component in building a healthy and productive population. At all levels of the food system, there is need to administer optimal food safety handling procedures to enable maintenance of the food safety.

Minimum standards of food sanitation and hygienic practices at different stages of food handling can save a great deal of human life and protect people from food borne illnesses that result from consumption of contaminated food.

Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC) in partnership with Kabarole District and Fort Portal Tourism City with funding from HIVOS and Health Food Africa conducted an inspection of the food markets and preparation points including farmers' markets, abattoirs, food kiosks, restaurants and hotels in Fort Portal Tourism City to understand the food safety situation at the different food handling points.

From the study, it was observed that the urban and transit populations are at increased risk of contracting food borne diseases and victims of food poisoning.

- The findings revealed a high risk of food contamination as food was found to be prepared, served and sold in a state that makes it unsafe for human consumption. From the study, it was found out that:

- In the urban food markets, placing food on unclean surfaces or directly on the ground is very common
- There is widespread selling of food in dirty places and closer to landfills
- Food handlers do not cleanse their hands and equipment while handling food
- Food handlers operate in unhygienic conditions such as poorly maintained sanitary places, animal breeding or feeding areas
- Slaughtering animals is done in substandard abattoirs with poor drainage system and dirty surfaces

All the above practices increase the risk of food contamination that may result into food poisoning and food borne diseases. It's a call to all food handlers to adhere to appropriate food handling protocols to ensure maintenance of food safety for human consumption. There is also need for the city authorities to enforce adherence to food handling protocols. They should also ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to maintain sanitation and hygiene in the markets and any food handling points. To drive better and context specific advocacy outcomes, more research should be done on invisible food contaminants, including, metals, aflatoxins and indiscriminate use of dangerous food additives.

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