

Trip Report – Samoa, March 15-17, 2011

**Country visit by Global Health Institute (Centre for Health Innovation & Partnership):
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Summary Conclusions:

Consultations were held with the Government, Agencies and the Private Industry on the need to implement fortification of foods and improve the supply of nutritious food in Samoa, in follow up of the Government's endorsement of the Pacific Framework for Action to improve food and nutrition security in the region. The Government is keen to establish food fortification standards; however it would like to gather evidence of vitamin and mineral deficiency and it needs some technical assistance in moving forward with implementation. Regulations for food control and food safety, and mandatory labeling of foods are being drafted in line with Codex requirements, to make food trade a level playing field in Samoa. The Agencies (WHO & FAO) are willing to assist and support the implementation of government policy around food fortification. The need for criteria and frameworks on fortification from other countries in the Pacific can be adapted and used for implementation in Samoa. Advocacy efforts for nutrition and food quality need to be enhanced to educate consumers in order to bring food security issues to the forefront.

Objective: (i) To follow up on the adoption of the Framework for Action on Food Security by the Samoan Government at the Pacific Food Summit in April 2010 and at the Pacific Leaders' Forum in August 2010; in particular to follow up on the adoption of national scale fortification of rice, flour and oils that form a central part of the Framework for Action on Food Security. (ii) Seek opportunities to advocate with all stakeholders for mandatory rice, flour, salt and oil fortification.

9:30 am Tuesday 15th March 2011

Meeting with Mr. Andrew Peteru, ACEO, Ministry of Health and Ms. Christine Qusted, Principal Nutritionist, Ministry of Health (MoH)

- The National food and drug act is outdated and needs to be replaced by two separate pieces of legislation: food and drugs. Currently a Food Bill is being drafted to replace the food portion of the food and drugs act.
- There is currently no food labeling regulation and new regulations are needed to move forward. MoH would like the services of a Consultant to prepare the legislation.
- There is a current interest to fortify flour and salt in Samoa. An awareness meeting with large importers retailers to aid this process was held. A baseline assessment of urinary iodine in school children is planned in the second half of 2011. The MoH would make use of the draft regulations that were put forward at the Manila fortification meeting for developing local flour and salt fortification standards. It will first have to be passed by the Codex Committee before submission to the Cabinet. The Government has yet to consider rice or oil fortification.
- The MoH coordinated a national food summit that was held in Apia in August 2009. Participants were representatives from different government ministries and corporations as well as NGOs and private business came together to discuss ways to address the nutrition problems facing the population.

- Approximately 75% of the wheat flour is imported from Fiji and therefore, fortified. Not very much salt is iodized. Imported flour and salt is packed in small, unlabelled packets. There is no indication of vitamin A fortified oil supplied into the country. Samoa is a price sensitive market and every effort must be made to control food prices.
- The challenge is how to make fortified food a requirement and how to get other Ministries more informed and involved in the process.
- Further, advocacy and health promotion efforts are needed for better nutrition in the country. MoH has prepared a plan of action for nutrition. This will be updated along with the National Plan of Action for Nutrition in the second half of the year with SWAP funds.
- A salt reduction program is planned later in the year.
- In terms of food quality, there is a huge problem with an excess of expired food products in the market. The new food legislation will mandate MoH to do food control checks at the boarder that is right now under the control of the Quarantine Department.
- A small number of Infants and young children are suffering from acute malnutrition, and MoH reports a current resurgence of kwashiorkor and marasmus in these age groups. This is probably partly due to the current rise in food prices that makes purchased nutritious food almost unaffordable for the marginalized sections of the society. Children are given unhealthy, cheap food such as quick noodles that are poor protein sources.
- Pre-schools are run by various church groups and women's groups. Some of the women's groups have funding to establish facilities to supply meals to pre-children. Some schools have canteens. Draft school nutrition standards are now available and being pilot tested. They will be finalized soon and will go out to the schools shortly. A global school health survey measuring the BMIs of children between 13-15 years is underway.

11:00 am Tuesday 15th March 2011

Meeting with Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF)– Mr Fonoiva Sealiitu Sesega, Chief Executive Officer and Ms Emele Ainuu, Principal Crops Officer

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) considers the production of sufficient food for local consumption as key to achieving food security. The main mandate is to increase food production to meet local demand, decrease import of food by 50% and to increase export.
- The agricultural sector in Samoa is dominated by small-scale subsistence farming households. Almost all crops are therefore consumed locally and little is exported.
- The main crops grown are taro, coconut, bread fruit and banana. Currently, quality vegetables and fruit that are imported are mainly for the elite and the Hotel market. There is a move to grow more nutritious fruits and vegetables at home. The Chinese Government has set up a farm to demonstrate how to grow cabbage and tomatoes. The farmers may not have the patience to grow vegetables the Chinese way.
- There were discussions on the possibility of setting up an export authority to make sure local production that is of high quality can replace the imports.
- The concept of quality food through fortification of staple food and oils was discussed. Food consumed by the population does not meet their nutritional requirements and in the interim measures such as food fortification are essential for optimal health. Increasing vegetable and fruit consumption would take a long time.
- Cross-sectoral alliances between MoH and MAF would go a long way to improve not only food security but also nutrition security in Samoa.

12:00 noon Tuesday 15th March 2011

Meeting with Punjas – Mr Kalpesh Kumar, Branch Manager, Punjas Samoa.

- Punjas distributes not only its own products imported from Fiji, but also brings in lower priced food from other countries - noodles, tinned fish, cookies and rice from China, Vietnam & the Middle East. This is done to compete in the local market. None of these foods are fortified. Punjas makes every effort to bring in good quality, nutritious food.
- Punjas sells iodized salt imported from India in Samoa. They do not market non-iodized salt.
- Whole wheat is imported to Fiji from Australia and milled and fortified to Fiji standards before being brought into Samoa.
- Rice consumption in Samoa is dependent on the availability of taro and bread fruit. Wheat flour is more commonly eaten than rice. The Samoans buy rice when they have sufficient money.
- Punjas distributes its products in both the Upolu and Savaii Islands.

2:30 pm Tuesday 15th March 2011

Meeting with the World Health Organization– Dr Yang Baoping, Country Representative, Ms Tasha Shon, Nutrition Specialist

- WHO works closely with Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education to assist in the implementation of health programs and strategies to improve the health of the Samoan people. The WHO's role is to provide technical support where needed.
- WHO is working with MoH to carry out a survey on iodine deficiency in school children during the second half of 2011. Non-Communicable diseases are considered a high priority by the Government. WHO considers fortification to be a worthwhile intervention as part of a comprehensive approach to food security in the country
- Samoans are increasingly eating rice instead of traditional crops. Fortification of rice could benefit the population.
- Samoa needs an implementation plan to introduce fortification. They could easily adapt standards and legislations implemented by other countries such as Fiji. Allan & Clarke are often contracted to write Samoan legislation. There is a need for resources, e.g Consultants to assist in writing up laws, regulations and the implementation of interventions. Delphina Kerslake, a law advisor, may be of assistance for developing laws and regulations
- WHO feels that there is not enough collaboration between sectors in Samoa. Therefore, more linkages need to be made for outcomes to be achieved. The MoH is only one part of a network of agencies which have influence over food security

9:30 am Wednesday 16th March 2011

Meeting with the Food and Agricultural Organisation– Dr Dirk Schulz, Food and Nutrition Officer

- FAO views the situation in Samoa and the Pacific Islands in the context of economic and trade transitions. Over the past 30 years, the food supply has changed dramatically. In parallel, the public health situation has also changed. There is a need to look at issues in the broader context of why things are occurring.
- Significant trade imbalances are something that needs to be addressed in Samoa.
- FAO-SAPA houses the Codex office in the Pacific that develops the FAO-WHO Food standards. Nine Pacific Island countries are members of Codex. There are standards for additives (fortification), food hygiene and food labeling. They also have recommended guidelines for fortification. These are non-binding and are free for countries to use, whether or not they are

members. These standards are recognised by the WTO and it allows countries to defend challenges.

- Samoa is currently drafting a food act as there are no regulations in place. FAO is also pushing for food labeling and making provisions for fortification standards. A good evidence base and a good science base are essential for a good policy foundation. FAO suggested further studies on consumption patterns and needs assessments should be conducted to inform policy makers.
- FAO instituted food balance sheets for Samoa in 2004. The intake of traditional staple crops is on a steady decline while that of wheat and rice consumption is on the increase. However, this trend seems to be plateauing off.
- It would help Samoa to have an export certification so that there can be quality assurance of food products for export. The University of South Pacific and the Scientific Research Organisation of Samoa could be used for accreditation.

11:00 am Wednesday 16th March 2011

Meeting with the Ministry of Trade and Foreign Affairs– Ms Theresita Uitime, Senior Foreign Services Officer

- The Ministry of Trade negotiates free trade agreements and tariffs. It is the Ministry of commerce and Labour that is involved in the fair trading act that deals with the quality and safety of food.
- The turkey tail ban is not compliant with the WTO mandates. The plan now is to do some ground work during a 3 year period primarily focusing on controlling import of all fatty meats through a common food standard. The WTO is suggesting a high tax in place of a ban on imports.
- There is a National working committee on trade agreements. They also have a National export strategy for the years 2008-12. They are currently working on a Trade Sector Plan
- Samoa has a standard for import of eggs following problems with import of eggs that are past their expiration dates.
- The Ministry of Commerce is working on the standards for food labeling. The legislation covers food from the time of production till it reaches the consumer. However, the consumer information act does not explicitly cover food.
- There are also bilateral agreements for certain foods. Binding tariff rates are kept higher for imported mutton flaps to help protect public health and applied tariff rates are high on fish and vegetable imports to protect local farmers.
- The need for further collaboration amongst sectors was again raised as an issue

12:30 pm Wednesday 16th March 2011

Meeting with Ah Liki Wholesale – Mr Alex Brunt, Manager

- Ah Liki is a major wholesaler in Samoa. They import salt from New Zealand (Pacific Salt Grade 27) that is non-iodized. It appears that the salt from China is also non-iodized.
- Flour distributed by Ah Liki is imported from FMF that is fortified according to Fiji standards. Ah Liki holds over 50% market share for flour.
- It imports Calrose medium grain rice (Island Sun) from Australia that is usually enriched. The rice is either grown in Australia or sourced by SunRice from the United States and sent to Ah Liki for distribution. The rice was not enriched for a period of time because of increased costs.
- There is hardly any price difference between fortified vs unfortified flour/rice.

- Sania cooking vegetable oil imported from Indonesia contains vitamin E, omega-3 and omega-9 from Indonesia.
- Ah Liki is keen to comply with import of fortified rice, iodised salt and vitamin A fortified oil.

2:30 pm Wednesday 16th March 2011

Meeting with Chan Mow Co. Ltd Wholesale – Mr Patrick Chan Mow

- Chan Mow is a major wholesaler in Samoa
- Salt distributed in Chan Mow is both iodized and non-iodized. Iodized salt is considerably more expensive.
- Flour is imported from Australia and Indonesia
- Rice imported from Vietnam (med- short grain) is not fortified.
- Taro is currently cheaper than rice but it is usually the reverse and consumption patterns reflect this.
- Vegetable oil is imported from Indonesia, not fortified with Vitamin A.
- There were discussions on the need for food safety laws on street food/market food. There is also a need for level playing field if fortification is to be introduced (regulations)

2:00 pm Thursday 17th March 2011

Meeting with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour– Ms Unasa Iulia Tauaiupolu Petelo, Assistant Chief Executive Officer and Mr Roger Toleafoa, Senior Fair Trading Officer

- The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL) is the Codex secretariat for Samoa and is involved in developing standards. The egg standards were done to prevent import of and distribution of eggs beyond the expired date.
- The Ministry of Health is currently preparing standards for food hygiene and bottled water and MCIL is in the process of developing the first draft of standards for food labeling.
- For flour fortification, the standards that were made available at the Manila meeting could be adapted for local flour fortification standards.
- The Ministry is very keen to address food security in the context of improving the health of the population. Achieving ample supply of food (Taro, banana, other staples) alone is not enough. It must be in conjunction with the food being safe and nutritious. The availability of food standards will help in the promotion of food and nutrition security.
- There were discussions on removing price control on sugar products to discourage consumption of sugar. Since the Samoan diet is already high in fat, keeping the price of oil high may be considered. The importance of advocating on the harmful effects of high amounts of salt, sugar and fats and oils in the diet was also discussed.
- Food entering the country is managed by the Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Revenue at the wharf.

2:00 pm Thursday 17th March 2011

Meeting with Mr. Andrew Peteru, ACEO, Ministry of Health, Ms. Christine Quested, Principal Nutritionist and Ms Suafai Seuseu Salima, Ministry of Health (MoH)

- Food legislation: The MoH currently has a WHO funded Consultant to prepare a food legislation document. Following that, regulations for iodized salt, fortified flour, rice and oil need to be written. Some WHO or SWAP funds may be available for writing food regulations.
- Draft Food hygiene standards are currently on hold until the Food Legislation is finalised.
- Stephen Hazelman, a Consultant, based at the Ministry of Agriculture has been appointed to work solely on addressing Food Security in Samoa.
- There is a huge problem of expired food products in the market. The wholesalers pass on the goods to retailers just before the expiry date. Environmental health officers have been given the task of monitoring the quality of food in wholesale and retail shops.
- The Chinese have started a vegetable garden and pig farm in the country. The local farmers growing cocoa and coconuts benefit from big bonus schemes for growing these and are reluctant to grow vegetables.
- Need for Consumer rights groups for quality food to be formed and maintained
- There is little advocacy for improved nutrition to drive change in the country.

Recommendations

- The Ministry of Health would like assistance from a Consultant in preparing legislation for food regulations/standards. WHO assistance is preferred. MoH & WHO would like criteria and frameworks on fortification from other countries in the Pacific to be adopted and used for implementation in Samoa.
- MoH & FAO would like more evidence to be collected around nutritional status and food consumption patterns to inform policy makers and would like technical assistance to do so.
- MFAT & FAO would like trade imbalances to be addressed through increased local production, increased exports and food quality legislation.
- Wholesalers stressed the need for a level playing through legislation in the implementation of fortification strategies.
- There needs to be regular consultation amongst sectors to drive change and implement food security strategies.
- Advocacy efforts for nutrition and food quality need to be enhanced to educate consumers in order to bring food security issues to the forefront.