

EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe, Nutritious Food

Food safety intervention in traditional Nigerian markets



The Safe Food Brand (Abinci Fes-Fes)

Behavioral Themes:

Sociocultural norms
Risk perception
Self efficacy

Sector/field of work:

Food System Resilience

Location:

Kebbi and Sokoto States, Nigeria

Sample Size:

50 vendors, 202 consumers

Program Year:

2021 - 2022

SUMMARY

Feed the Future's EatSafe: Evidence and Action Toward Safe, Nutritious Food (EatSafe) seeks to enable safer food in traditional, or "open air" food markets. In Nigeria, the program operates in Kebbi and Sokoto States. One intervention, "The Safe Food Brand" (Abinci Fes-Fes in Hausa, the local language) was developed as a demand creation initiative to provide consumers with a simple visual 'cue' about vendors who prioritize food safety. The Brand:

- Provides vendors with rigorous training on key elements of food safety in the market (e.g., vendor hygiene, stall hygiene, and safe food handling) and a certificate of training after the session. Enrolled vendors then receive a package of branded items (apron, cap, bunting, and bin) that work as a visual cue to show consumers that the branded vendors can be trusted to handle food safely.
- Conducts an in-market campaign to create awareness amongst consumers, easing their shopping experience by signaling to shoppers which vendors practice safe food handling.

LEARNINGS

Over an initial 8-week observation period, the majority of participating vendors continued to practice the safe food handling practices they had learned as part of the vendor training. While many vendors were successful in maintaining practices, for some actions e.g., covering of food, less than half of the branded vendors were found to be compliant. Reason being, shopping in traditional markets is a visual activity where consumers want to see what they are purchasing even before engaging with the vendor.

Vendors reported they were motivated to implement what they learned to attract customers and, hence, increase their income. They also indicated their intention to remain in the Brand, which they found useful for their businesses and communities.

Consumers reported they purchased more food from Abinci Fes-Fes vendors once they understood the significance of what the Brand signaled. This in turn made their shopping experience easier, thereby helping them make healthier decisions for their family with their choice to purchase food from a safe food trained vendor.



CONTEXT

Food safety is critical to public health and individuals' well-being. Sociocultural norms and personal and environmental hygiene practices influence consumers and vendors' preferences, beliefs, and habits regarding food safety. Feed the Future's EatSafe seeks to improve knowledge, attitudes, and practices around food safety by leveraging a behavioral science lens. The focus of this case study, "The Safe Food Brand" is one of EatSafe's four interventions in Nigeria.

The objective of the Brand is to create demand for safer food by training vendors on best practices for food safety, and linking them to consumers through the development of a below-the-line campaign to create consumer awareness. By equipping traditional market vendors with the skills needed to uptake safe food handling practices, and by creating a signal through the Brand, the intention is that this creates a pipeline of consumers demanding safer food.

To achieve these objectives, EatSafe developed prototypes to capture the form and delivery of the intervention, followed by a pre-testing exercise to gather feedback from consumers and vendors to contextualize the intervention. The prototypes were then tested to understand whether the interventions have the potential to lead to behavior change. The testing phase allowed EatSafe to move from hypotheticals to objective outcomes on behavior change.



INTERVENTION DESIGN

EatSafe utilized a Theory of Change to understand the environment and interpersonal influences around food safety in traditional food markets in Kebbi and Sokoto States, subsequently creating a pathway to sustainably alter vendor practices and stimulate consumer demand.

The Safe Food Brand (Abinci Fes-Fes) Theory of Change

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
EatSafe vendor training	Trained vendors are recruited to join the brand and receive relevant materials	Consumers know (recognize) what the brand represents (values, attributes)	Consumers buy from branded vendors	Consumers are empowered to prioritise food safety
Brand compliance guidelines; opt in and maintenance checklist for vendors who have been trained	Promotion campaigns for the Brand are executed in market only (i.e., below-the-line campaigns)	Consumers perceive branded vendors differently than non-branded vendors	Consumers seek to protect brand standards	Vendors are responsive to customer demand for safe food
Brand strategy (brand promise, value proposition, personality, tone of voice)	Vendor brand compliance is monitored using simple checklist	Consumers prefer branded vendors	Brand creates customer loyalty	
Brand visual identity; logo, emotional benefit messages, functional benefit messages, brand visual usage guidelines		Consumers feel confident that foods purchased from branded vendors handle food in a way that promotes food safety	Vendors use better food handling/storage practices	
Campaign strategy and relevant materials developed		Vendors have increased knowledge and perceived self-efficacy about food handling practices	Increased communication/ signalling with consumers that food is safe	
		Vendors see positive impact of the brand on their business and see value in continuing to participate in the Brand and improve food safety	Sales are positively affected by brand	
			Vendors seek opportunities for further engagement to promote the brand or other stakeholder groups (e.g., Association)	
			Vendors invest in improved equipment and/or additional training to better ensure food safety	

1. Created a brand

Name:

- Abinci Fes-Fes (clean/impressive looking food)
- Sai wanda yafi kyau (buy only the best). The name is drawn and based on the Hausa Language.

Brand Promise:

- Your food handled better
- Value proposition: Abinci Fes-Fes Brand helps shoppers quickly identify branded vendors to make healthier decisions for their family.

Tone/Voice:

- Relatable, knowledgeable, trustworthy and informative

Personality:

- Honest, confident, friendly, reliable and approachable



ABINCI FES-FES

Sai wanda yafi kyau

2. Developed an opt-in program via vendor training

Only vendors who had participated in EatSafe's food safety training program and agreed to meet the compliance measures outlined in the training were able to opt-in to the Brand. Vendors were then given a package of branded material to wear that served as the visual cue for consumers when shopping.



3. Below the line campaign

EatSafe deployed a series of activities over the course of a month to raise awareness of the Brand and educate consumers on the importance of food safety. This was done through tactics such as dramas, games and use of influencers.



4. Conducted compliance activities

Compliance was based on three main food safety practices:

Vendor hygiene:

clean appearance, trimmed nails, regular washing of hands, money handled away from food

Stall hygiene:

covered waste bin, clean table and shelves, no food placed on ground

Safe food handling:

separate dry and fresh foods, cover ready-to-eat food, proper display



About 75% of the trained vendors opted into the Abinci Fes-Fes program. Following pilot implementation and the awareness campaign, EatSafe monitored the intervention via observational studies of participating vendors and consumer surveys.

Vendor Hygiene: The majority were observed to have clean hands and clean trimmed fingernails to protect their food from germs. Grain vendors indicated they did not see the need to wash their hands regularly as they used them quite frequently for scooping dry grain.

Handling of Money: Almost all vendors handled cash themselves, and most did not wash their hands after handling money. Vendors felt that consumers would still buy from them regardless of how they handled their cash.

Stall Hygiene: The majority of vendors had clean stalls and surroundings. Over half of the vendors had their commodities placed above the ground and on clean tables. Only a few vendors' stalls had a smell coming from run off from fish/meat or from their surroundings.

Safe Food Handling: Most vendors, who sold a variety of commodities, separated their vegetables from animal-source-foods (meat/fish) and dry foods from fresh products to avoid spoilage. Majority of vendors had their food uncovered instead of covered (less than half) as per safe food practices, this was so as

to to keep their commodities dry and/or allow consumers to see what they were purchasing.

Consumer Surveys: Across both markets, a majority of consumers said it did not take them long to locate an Abinci Fes-Fes vendor (Figure 1), indicating the value proposition of creating a quick shopping experience was successful.

Over 90% of consumers indicated a preference to shop from an Abinci Fes-Fes vendor and agreed that they were happy with how their food was handled by such vendors (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 1: Time spent looking for an Abinci Fes-Fes vendor in the market

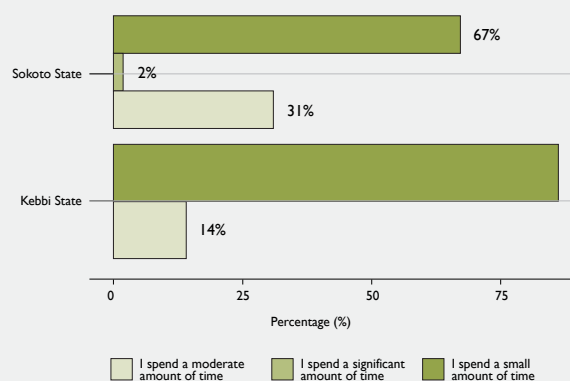


Figure 2: I prefer to purchase from Abinci Fes-Fes vendors

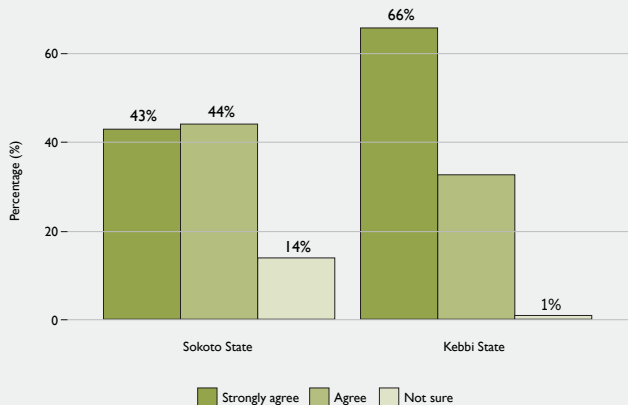
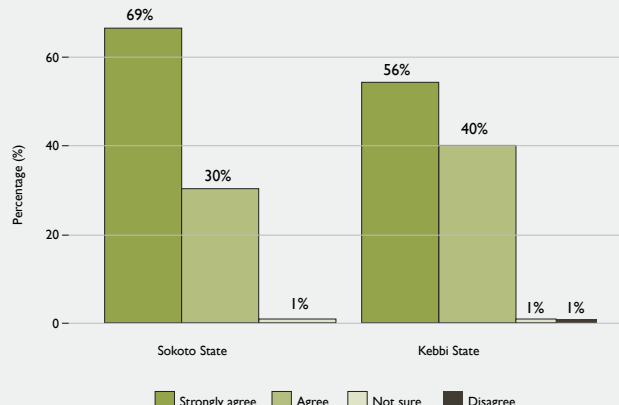


Figure 3: I'm happy with how the Abinci Fes-Fes vendor handle my food



■ Brand Assets and Campaign Tactics

The brand kit shared with vendors worked well, with the apron in particular serving as a practical item to keep vendor clothes clean and help them stand out from non-branded vendors in the market. On the other hand, the cap did not work particularly well due to sizing issues.

From a consumer perspective, the games and dramas which were part of the in-market activation were a key feature. They drew in crowds and worked as an entertainment platform to educate consumers on the practical impact of foodborne disease and create awareness about the Brand.



■ Behavior change: Knowledge, attitude and practices

The results indicate a change in behavior among vendors in maintaining safe food practices when selling their commodities. Findings also show that consumers understand their risks from foodborne disease, and they exercise judgment in seeking vendors who are trained on safe food practices. The on-ground awareness campaign sensitized them on why their choice is crucial and its impact on their and their family's health.



■ Inhibiting and facilitating factors for compliance

Although most vendors did not have issue complying with most of the food safety practices, some cited the following challenges as reasons for difficulties with compliance:

- Long distance to dump sites results in vendors dumping refuse in other vendors' stalls or on the ground
- Sweeping at close of business, which is when vendors do a clean of the stall, results in the presence of litter from produce during the course of the day
- Water is costly and unavailable
- Certain items could make compliance easier (e.g., provision of nets, water, waste disposal sites, more training and financial assistance)

The main facilitator for compliance among vendors was the consumers' acceptance of higher prices due to their satisfaction with the quality of commodities. **As such, showing or providing a direct economic value link to vendors' livelihoods can be pivotal to the success of an intervention.**

Though this intervention was focused on vendor behavior change, it relied on the creation of an enabling environment through the below-the-line campaign targeted at consumers. This campaign incentivized vendors to implement safe food practices and created awareness amongst consumers on the importance of food safety.

■ Viability of sustaining the intervention

“The branded items I wear and use to decorate my stall have attracted more customers to me. Many of the customers return because they like the neatness of my stall and my food items, so my profit has increased. I used to make about N13,000 monthly but I have made N20,000 this month.”

Aniebet Adebisi

Grains vendors, Dan Kure Market, Sokoto



Overall, vendors noticed positive changes in sales and customer patronage as a result of Abinci Fes-Fes. Additionally, vendors have shown a high level of interest in remaining in the Brand program. The transition of how best to maintain the intervention requires some modification from its current framework in order to keep functioning cost effectively and sustainably. For example, to encourage vendors to continue and maintain proper food

handling and safety practices; a few high performing vendors may be selected to voluntarily act as ambassadors of the program. Ambassadors could be guided by the market association to partake in training new vendors and re-training non-compliant vendors when necessary. Local government could support adoption of the program through implementation by market management or vendor/commodity associations.



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For more details on EatSafe program activities, visit www.gainhealth.org/EatSafe.

