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Food safety and the fight against malnutrition in developing countries: The Sierra Leone context

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Malnutrition, especially undernutrition is a well-known childhood disease killing millions of children in developing countries. It is caused by poor nutrient uptake aggravated by poor hygiene, illness and poor child care-feeding practices. Despite the multifaceted approach to combatting malnutrition, its multi-sectorial implementation approach is not properly coordinated in most countries. Anecdotal evidence suggests that safety of children's food in emerging baby food markets is becoming a growing concern amongst the possible causes of prolonged undernutrition condition and even death. While studies have not focused on this concern, it is however, worth noting that numerous locally prepared and commercially marketed baby foods purporting to be safe and nutritionally good for under-fives are all not ISO food safe products on the market. In Sierra Leone, home-made/ready-made products sold in supermarkets, on the streets, or in local stores pose strong safety concerns ranging from processing and composition, storage, packaging and overall safety. Products are not robustly tested for their nutritional composition or sensorial properties, let alone their safety for consumption. More worrisome is the fact that food safety policies on baby foods are not established or enforced in countries like Sierra Leone, nor is there any established national standard for baby foods. These concerns strongly border on the fight against malnutrition. Health and developmental implications for unsafe baby food products are far reaching in exacerbating malnutrition conditions. Countries like Sierra Leone need to establish achievable Food Regulations and Food Safety Policies to protect and ensure nutrition safe food products for children.

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