

ESSAY COMPETITION ON FOOD SAFETY AND FOOD WASTE MANAGEMENT

TOPIC: OUR FOOD OUR FUTURE ; THE FUTURE OF FOOD SYSTEM.

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Introduction

Food is more than what we eat, it is the thread that ties together our health, our environment, our economies, and our future. Today, the world is confronted by a paradox: while millions go to bed hungry every night, nearly one-third of all food produced is lost or wasted before it reaches the table. In Africa, where fertile land and youthful energy abound, hunger and malnutrition still haunt families, while at the same time urban markets overflow with discarded grains, fruits, and vegetables. The theme of this year's reflection "Every safe meal and every grain saved is a victory against hunger and waste" is not only a moral reminder but also a call to action.

As a young change maker from Tanzania, I see food not merely as a product of agriculture but as the heartbeat of sustainable development. The way we produce, process, distribute, and consume food will determine whether we can overcome the dual challenges of hunger and climate change. Our food systems are at a crossroads, either we continue with unsustainable practices that degrade land, waste resources, and deepen inequalities, or we re-imagine a future where every grain counts, every meal is safe, and every community is nourished. This essay proposes that the transformation of food systems requires a bold integration of food safety and food waste management within a framework that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Main Body

The Challenge of Today's Food Systems ; The global food system is under immense pressure, The rapid urbanisation, population growth, climate change, and environmental degradation have created an imbalance between food availability, access, and sustainability. Cities are expanding into peri-urban and rural areas, often swallowing fertile farmland and disrupting natural ecosystems. In Tanzania, for instance, urbanisation around Mwanza, Dar es Salaam, and Arusha is shrinking agricultural space while increasing food

demand. At the same time, large amounts of food are lost along the value chain due to poor storage, weak infrastructure, and inadequate market systems.

This situation directly undermines the SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), which calls for ending hunger and achieving food security. It also challenges the SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), since food waste contributes to unnecessary resource use and greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, unsafe food contaminated by poor handling, pesticides, or pollution poses risks to health, undermining the SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

Food Safety: Protecting Every Meal; Food safety is the foundation of public health. Without it, food becomes a source of disease instead of nourishment. According to the World Health Organization, foodborne illnesses affect one in ten people worldwide each year, with children under five bearing a disproportionate burden. In Africa, weak regulatory systems, inadequate infrastructure, and poor hygiene practices contribute to unsafe food in markets, schools, and households.

Ensuring food safety is therefore not a luxury but a necessity. For Tanzania and Africa at large, investing in better food safety systems is vital. This includes:

Firstly strengthening standards and regulations that guarantee safe production, processing, and distribution. Secondly Training farmers, traders, and food vendors in hygienic practices. Also to Supporting affordable technologies such as solar drying, cold storage, and improved packaging. And last but not least is through Enhancing consumer awareness so that citizens can demand safe food as a right, not a privilege.

Food safety is also a gateway to economic opportunity. When African countries meet international food safety standards, they unlock export markets and empower local farmers to compete globally. Thus, every safe meal is both a victory for health and a step toward economic resilience.

Food Waste Management: Saving Every Grain ; If food safety protects what we eat, food waste management ensures that what is produced is not squandered. Globally, about 1.3 billion tonnes of food is lost

or wasted annually. In Africa, post-harvest losses remain a serious problem: up to 40% of grains and 50% of fruits and vegetables never reach the consumer. In Tanzania, maize a staple food is often lost to poor storage facilities where pests and moulds destroy harvests.

Food waste is not only a moral issue but also an environmental one. Wasted food represents wasted water, energy, and land. Worse still, when dumped in landfills, it generates methane a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide worsening climate change. Addressing food waste directly supports SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

Practical solutions exist: This include Encouraging source segregation of waste, where households and markets separate organic waste for composting. Secondly is through Promoting community compost plants and biogas projects, turning food scraps into fertiliser and clean energy. Another is to Establishing food banks and redistribution programs to channel surplus food to vulnerable groups before it spoils. Lastly but not least is to Introducing incentives such as lower waste collection fees for sorted waste, as seen in successful city region food systems worldwide.

These solutions create jobs, protect the environment, and most importantly, ensure that food nourishes people instead of landfills.

City Region Food Systems: Building Bridges Between Urban and Rural ;One of the most promising approaches is the development of City Region Food Systems (CRFS), which strengthen linkages between urban consumers and rural producers. Urban markets depend on rural farmers for supply, while rural economies depend on urban markets for income. Yet, this connection is often weak or exploitative. CRFS offer a holistic model that integrates food safety, food waste management, land use planning, and environmental protection.

For example, by preserving peri-urban farmland, cities secure local food supplies and reduce transport costs. By investing in rural watersheds, cities protect drinking water while supporting agriculture. By linking food waste

recovery in urban areas to organic fertiliser needs in rural areas, both sides benefit. This integrated model resonates with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Lessons from Success Stories

Case studies around the world show that innovation in waste management and food safety can be replicated. Example In Sri Lanka, the Balangoda compost plant transformed waste into valuable fertilizer while creating jobs and protecting the environment. Its success was anchored in source segregation, demand-driven marketing, and quality certification. If adapted to Tanzania, such models could reduce urban waste, improve soil fertility for smallholder farmers, and generate green jobs for youth.

The key lesson is that food system transformation requires collaboration. governments providing policy and infrastructure support, private sector investing in innovations, academia offering research, and youth driving community action.

Call to Tanzania, Africa, and the World

Tanzania must recognize that its abundant youth population is its greatest asset. By empowering young people to lead food safety campaigns, innovate waste-to-energy technologies, and champion sustainable consumption, the country can leapfrog challenges that other regions face.

Africa, with its vast natural resources, cannot afford to import food insecurity. The continent must institutionalize food safety and waste management in its policies, embed city region food systems in development planning, and uphold the ‘Right to Food’ as a universal guarantee.

At the global level, solidarity is essential. Hunger and food waste are not African problems; they are human problems. Food loss in Africa can destabilize global supply chains, just as food waste in developed countries undermines global sustainability. A united global commitment to safe, sustainable, and waste-free food systems is the only path to securing our common future.

By Conclusion

The future of food is the future of humanity. If we fail to make every meal safe and every grain count, we risk a world of hunger, disease, inequality, and environmental collapse. But if we act boldly in strengthening food safety, managing food waste responsibly, and embracing city region food systems we can build a future where no child sleeps hungry, where farmers thrive, and where food nourishes both people and planet.

As a young changemaker, my message to Tanzania, Africa, and the world is clear: our food is our future. Let us choose a path where food systems are sustainable, resilient, and just let us act on the truth that every safe meal and every grain saved is indeed a victory against hunger and waste. The time for speeches is over the time for action is now.