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FIFTH EDITION OF THE VALIDVIEWNETWORK MONTHLY GLOBAL DISCOURSE - "POISON ON THE PLATE: CONFRONTING NIGERIA'S EPIDEMIC OF FAKE AND ADULTERATED FOOD ITEMS,"

The Fifth Edition of the ValidViewNetwork Monthly Global Discourse was held virtually on Sunday, 25 October 2026, between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. WAT. The session brought together food scientists, environmentalists, policymakers, public health practitioners, researchers, journalists, agricultural professionals, development experts, diaspora stakeholders, students, and civic-minded citizens to examine one of Nigeria's most persistent yet insufficiently addressed challenges: the growing threat of food poisoning and food adulteration and its implications for public health, food security, economic productivity, consumer protection, and national development.

The theme of the Fifth Edition was **"Poison on the Plate: Confronting Nigeria's Epidemic of Fake and Adulterated Food Items,"**

The discourse was stimulated by growing public concern over repeated reports of contaminated food products, unsafe preservation practices, misuse of chemicals, counterfeit consumables, and increasing questions regarding the effectiveness of existing consumer protection mechanisms.

Professor Sanni, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute (NSPRI), brought extensive experience in food processing, preservation, quality assurance, post-harvest management, and agricultural value addition. His contributions highlighted the importance of appropriate processing, storage, preservation, testing, and quality control in protecting consumers, reducing food losses, and strengthening food supply chains.

Professor Opeolu, an environmental toxicologist, researcher, and environmental consultant, contributed expertise in chemical contaminants, environmental pollution, toxicological assessment, and the potential pathways through which pollutants could enter food chains. Her contributions underscored the relationship between environmental quality, food safety, and human health.

Together, the two discussants provided complementary scientific perspectives on the challenges of fake, adulterated, contaminated, and potentially harmful food products. Their submissions reinforced the importance of moving beyond public concern towards evidence based interventions, improved accountability, stronger regulatory enforcement, and sustained public awareness. The discourse emphasized that protecting consumers requires collective responsibility and coordinated action to prevent food contamination, promote responsible food handling, and strengthen confidence in Nigeria's food supply system.

FUNDAMENTAL TAKEAWAYS

1. Food Safety Is a National Development Issue

The discourse established that food safety extends far beyond individual health outcomes. Unsafe food affects national productivity, healthcare expenditure, labour efficiency, educational attainment, agricultural development, and public confidence in institutions. A nation cannot achieve sustainable development when citizens remain uncertain about the safety of what they consume daily. Food safety must therefore be recognised as an essential component of national development planning.

2. Food Adulteration Has Become Increasingly Sophisticated

Food adulteration is no longer limited to isolated incidents of poor hygiene or accidental contamination. Increasingly sophisticated forms of adulteration now involve deliberate chemical manipulation designed to extend shelf life, alter appearance, improve marketability, or maximise profit regardless of public health consequences.

The discourse highlighted concerns regarding the possible links between prolonged exposure to unsafe food and the rising burden of chronic illnesses. Distinguished Discussants observed that while many food-related illnesses are treated as isolated health incidents, insufficient surveillance and reporting mechanisms make it difficult to measure the true scale of the problem.

3. Accountability Must Extend Throughout the Food Value Chain

Responsibility for food safety cannot rest solely on regulatory agencies. Farmers, processors, transporters, traders, retailers, consumers, research institutions, policymakers, and elected leaders all have important roles to play. Food safety is a shared responsibility requiring collective vigilance and accountability.

4. Technology and Traceability Are No Longer Optional

Modern food systems increasingly rely on traceability mechanisms that enable products to be tracked from production to consumption. The discourse recognised the potential role of digital systems, artificial intelligence, and modern supply-chain monitoring tools in strengthening transparency, accountability, and public confidence. Nigeria must begin investing more intentionally in traceability infrastructure if it hopes to reduce food-related risks effectively.

5. Research and Scientific Innovation Must Be Prioritised

The discourse underscored the importance of adequately funding research institutions engaged in food preservation, food safety, agricultural technology, and post-harvest management. Sustainable solutions require continuous scientific investigation, innovation, technology adaptation, and stakeholder collaboration. Research should be viewed not as an expenditure but as a national investment.

6. Food Safety Requires Cultural Change

Harmful food practices originate from a culture that often prioritises convenience, appearance, speed, and profit over safety and long-term wellbeing. Lasting improvements will therefore

require not only stronger regulations but also a gradual transformation of attitudes, values, and behavioural norms throughout society.

7. Strengthening NAFDAC's Multidisciplinary Capacity for Food Safety

The Discourse expressed concern about the adequacy of NAFDAC's current institutional capacity to effectively confront Nigeria's growing food safety challenges. It noted that effective food regulation requires multidisciplinary expertise spanning pharmacy, food science and technology, microbiology, environmental toxicology, analytical chemistry, nutrition, and public health while NAFDAC is currently saturated with Pharmacists. It emphasised that protecting Nigerians from food poisoning and adulterated food products requires an adequately resourced, multidisciplinary regulatory system capable of preventing, detecting, and responding effectively to food safety threats.

8. Local Government Autonomy as a Foundation for Effective Food Safety

Food safety regulation cannot be achieved through the efforts of NAFDAC alone without strong grassroots institutions and functional local governments. The Discourse therefore called on state governors to respect and facilitate constitutionally guaranteed local government autonomy, enabling councils to access their funds, exercise their responsibilities, employ relevant personnel, and respond to the needs of their communities. It stressed that empowered local governments would strengthen grassroots surveillance, improve coordination with NAFDAC and environmental health authorities, and facilitate early detection of food safety threats.

9. Addressing Institutional Overlaps and Reviewing NAFDAC's Regulatory Mandate

Overlapping responsibilities among regulatory agencies and government institutions is a serious obstacle to effective food safety governance in Nigeria. It observed that unclear boundaries of responsibility, duplicated functions, weak coordination, and gaps in accountability could undermine enforcement and allow unsafe food products to circulate in the market. The Discourse further noted that some of the complex challenges NAFDAC currently faces may extend beyond the scope of its original institutional design, mandate, or operational capacity, particularly where they involve environmental contamination, unhygienic food production, public health surveillance, market sanitation, and grassroots monitoring. It therefore called for a comprehensive review of the mandates and working relationships of relevant agencies to clarify responsibilities, eliminate unnecessary duplication, close regulatory gaps, and strengthen interagency collaboration. It affirmed that NAFDAC should be unbundled.

10. Curbing Political Interference and Safeguarding Regulatory Independence

Undue political interference could undermine the effectiveness of regulatory agencies such as NAFDAC in discharging their statutory responsibilities. It noted that political pressure, improper influence over enforcement decisions, selective application of regulations, and interference in investigations or sanctions could weaken institutional credibility, compromise accountability, and allow individuals or businesses to evade appropriate consequences. Such interference could also discourage professional officers from acting impartially, particularly where powerful interests are involved. The Discourse therefore called for stronger institutional independence, transparent appointment and decision-making processes, adequate funding, and protection for regulatory officials who act lawfully and professionally.

11. Strengthening the Roles of Agricultural Extension Officers in Grassroots Food Safety
The importance of agricultural extension officers in promoting food safety, public awareness, and responsible practices at the community level was emphasised. The Discourse called for stronger collaboration among extension officers, local government authorities, environmental health personnel, market associations, and NAFDAC to identify unsafe practices, educate food handlers and traders, and promptly report suspected food contamination.

12. Promoting Indigenous Languages for Effective Food Safety Communication
The Discourse emphasised the importance of indigenous languages in the fight against food poisoning, food adulteration, and unsafe food handling practices in Nigeria. It noted that public awareness campaigns, safety guidelines, product alerts, and health advisories may have limited impact when communicated only in English or other languages that many consumers do not readily understand. The Discourse therefore urged the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) to intensify efforts to translate and interpret its public education materials, product warnings, food safety regulations, and consumer advisories into major Nigerian languages. The Discourse stressed that food safety information must not merely be published; it must be communicated in languages people understand, enabling them to recognise dangerous products, make informed choices, report suspected violations, and protect their families from preventable foodborne illnesses.

13. Demanding Severe Penalties for Deliberate Food Poisoning and Food Adulteration
The Discourse condemned the deliberate production, distribution, and sale of poisonous, adulterated, or dangerously contaminated food products as a grave threat to public health and national security. The Discourse therefore called on the Federal Government and relevant law enforcement and regulatory agencies to treat deliberate, large scale food poisoning as a serious threat to public safety, deserving of investigation and prosecution with the same urgency applied to other acts that endanger innocent lives, including terrorism where the circumstances and applicable law warrant such classification.

14. Promoting Industry Sponsorship of Food Safety Research
The Discourse expressed concern about the apparent inadequacy of industry sponsorship for research aimed at addressing food adulteration, food poisoning, contamination, and other food safety challenges in Nigeria. It observed that stronger partnerships between industries, universities, research institutes, and regulatory agencies could generate scientific evidence, innovative technologies, and practical solutions needed to protect consumers. The Discourse therefore urged Nigerian food and beverage manufacturers, processors, distributors, and other relevant businesses to invest more deliberately in independent, evidence-based food safety research, working alongside institutions such as the Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute and universities with relevant expertise.

15. Promote Transparency and Public Accountability
Relevant food safety and regulatory agencies should regularly publish verifiable reports detailing complaints received, suspected cases of food adulteration, investigations conducted, enforcement actions taken, prosecutions initiated and outcomes achieved. Such disclosures should protect confidential information where necessary while enabling the public to assess institutional performance, identify regulatory gaps and hold responsible authorities accountable. Transparency must go beyond announcing raids and product seizures; it must

demonstrate what was investigated, what action was taken, and whether offenders were held accountable.

16. Enjoying Nigerian Delicacies Abroad: Let Food Safety Come First
Diasporans who choose to order food from Nigeria were urged to patronise only highly trusted suppliers who can demonstrate proper hygiene, effective temperature control, safe packaging, appropriate storage and compliance with applicable food import requirements. They were also encouraged to sponsor relevant research.

CONCLUSION

The Fifth Edition of the ValidViewNetwork Monthly Global Discourse established that food contamination is a global public health challenge and is by no means unique to Nigeria. However, Nigeria needs to strengthen its food safety infrastructure, particularly the systems for tracking contaminated products across the supply chain, promptly issuing public alerts, and implementing effective product recalls.

The Distinguished Discussants agreed that Nigeria's food safety challenges can be addressed through stronger regulation, scientific research, responsible food production, effective enforcement, public awareness, and collective accountability.

Nigeria now stands at a critical point where protecting consumers must become a shared national responsibility. Government agencies, food producers, processors, distributors, market operators, researchers, healthcare professionals, the media, and consumers must work together to strengthen food safety systems, improve monitoring, promote responsible practices, and ensure that violations are investigated and addressed.

Nigeria's food safety crisis is serious, but it is not beyond resolution. The challenge is to translate scientific knowledge, public concern, and regulatory responsibility into sustained action that protects lives, restores consumer confidence, and builds a safer and more trustworthy food system for present and future generations.

APPRECIATION

ValidViewNetwork expresses profound appreciation to Professor Lateef Oladimeji Sanni, Professor Beatrice Olutoyin Opeolu, all participants, contributors, media practitioners, stakeholders, and members of the public whose contributions enriched the Fifth Edition of the Monthly Global Discourse.

ValidViewNetwork remains committed to promoting evidence-based conversations that advance public awareness, encourage policy engagement, strengthen responsible leadership, and contribute to sustainable national development. The platform calls on government agencies, food producers, processors, market operators, researchers, consumer advocates, the media, and the general public to translate the discourse's insights into practical actions that protect consumers and promote a safer food system for all Nigerians.

ABOUT VALIDVIEWNETWORK LIMITED

ValidViewNetwork Limited, founded by **Kayode Ogunjobi, FHEA, FFAN**, is a multidisciplinary professional services organisation operating principally in consultancy,

media, advocacy, environmental and educational consultancy, research, knowledge development, professional services, communication, publishing, public enlightenment, policy engagement, and sustainable development.

Through this integrated structure, the organisation advances evidence-based communication, sustainable development solutions, institutional strengthening, and community-focused interventions that promote environmental protection, academic excellence, and societal wellbeing.

Mr Lanre Ogundipe, former President of the Nigeria Union of Journalists and former President of the African Union of Journalists, serves as Chairman of the Advisory Council.

E-Signed

Kayode Ogunjobi PhD, FHEA, FFAN
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
October 28, 2026.