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COURSE TITLE: Communication in English.

COURSE CODE: GST

MATRIC NUMBER: 19/Law01/112.

QUESTION

You were taught that in writing an academic essay, you should start with the perception of a problem. Perceive a problem in your present environment, formulate a researchable topic for it, and await further instructions in our class on Thursday by 10am.

 STREET VENDORS AND THEIR POOR HYGIENE.

A vendor is a person or company offering something for sale, especially a trade in the street. A street vendor is a person who offers goods or services for sale to the public without having a permanently built structure but with a temporary static structure or mobile stall (or head-load).

 I strongly believe it is safe to say that at least once or twice, we all have purchased something from a street vendor; either we were driving, being driven or just randomly walking on the road.

The street foods play an important socioeconomic role in meeting food and nutritional requirements of city consumers at affordable prices to the lower and middle income groups and are appreciated for their unique flavors and convenience. Street foods also assure food security for low income urban population as well as livelihood for a significant proportion of the population in many developing countries like Nigeria. These are described as wide range of ready-to-eat foods and beverages or prepared at home and consumed on the streets without further preparation. Some examples of street foods are; meat pie, cooked maggot, buns, bole and akara. These food items are usually sold by vendors and hawkers in the streets or other similar public places.

In contrast to these potential benefits, it is also recognized that street food vendors are often poor, uneducated and lack knowledge in safe food handling, environment, sanitation and hygiene, mode of food display, food service and hand washing, sources of raw materials and use of portable water. Consequently, street foods are perceived to be a major source of public health risks.

Food borne illnesses of microbial origin are a major health problem associated with street food. Diarrheal diseases however, are the most common food poisoning cases in Nigeria and in some cases, these can cause death. The diseases are caused by either toxin from the microbe or by the human body’s reactions to the microbe. The traditional processing methods that are used in the preparation, inappropriate holding temperature and poor personal hygiene of food handlers are some of the main causes of contamination of food. Most street vendors don’t care about the health of those eating what they sell, as far as they are making profit. The foods are not always effectively protected from flies and dust.

Street vendors face unique kinds of livelihood risks because of the legal, physical and sociocultural environment in which they work. The most pressing and ongoing risk for many street vendors is the possibility that local government authorities will forcefully remove them from the streets or confiscate their merchandise. The fear of this puts them at the edge as they do all they can to gain enough money to use to cater for themselves when that happens, even if it involves jeopardizing the lives of their customers. The physical environments in which they work typically lack proper infrastructure, such as clean running water, toilets, and solid waste removal. Street vendors are exposed to physical harm from the improper provision of fire safety equipment and the improper regulation of traffic in commercial areas. The latter affects the food being sold as the smoke from cars may have contact with the food since it is exposed.

In as much as some of the street vendors’ poor hygiene isn’t their fault, they also play a role in it. Although not all street vendors are unhygienic, majority is and as we all know, majority carries the vote. Most of them are poor, as earlier stated so they don’t have the money to maintain themselves and proper food hygiene. But all is not about money, they can start by washing their hands regularly, cleaning their environment and staying far away from drainages and stagnant water. For the sake of public health, it is important for street vendors to understand the epidemiology of food borne illnesses because it will help in prevention and control efforts. They should evaluate food safety measures and development of new food safety standards.

If this is done, I can assure that there will be less cases of food contaminaion from patronizing the street vendors.