The Regional Food Safety Strategy for WHO South-East Asia was formulated in 2014 to encourage Member States to initiate, develop and sustain multisectoral approaches and measures for the promotion of food safety among all population groups. Member States are at various stages of progress on the development of a national food safety policy and action plan, establishment of a functional National Codex Committee (NCC) and national FBD surveillance systems, and enactment of food safety standards and regulations. Much progress has been made in the past five years to strengthen Codex, FBD surveillance and emergency response activities through implementation of the Regional Strategy.

Based on the implementation of the Regional Food Safety Strategy and considering current challenges and emerging issues in the food control system, the Framework for Action on Food Safety in the WHO South-East Asia Region has been developed with the overall vision of safe and healthy food for all individuals through strengthening the food control system to safeguard consumer health.

The proposed Framework for Action is aligned with existing and prospective food safety-related strategies and policies. The Framework is tailored for food safety authorities across the food chain, as well as for authorities involved in food safety emergencies, preparedness and response in Member States, within a time frame of 2020–2025.

The Framework underlines the strategy to safeguard consumer health by strengthening food control and FBD surveillance systems to reduce the burden of FBDs. Strategic actions and measurable indicators have been formulated under seven components of food control:

1. policy and legal framework,
2. control management,
3. risk-based inspection,
4. data and information to support risk-based control measures,
5. national laboratory system,
6. preparedness and response to food safety emergencies, and
7. food safety communication and education.

Strategic approaches are designed to guide and facilitate incremental changes in the national food control system, addressing the major impediments, e.g. lack of strong political commitment to food safety, lack of human and financial resources, and weak coordination mechanisms among food safety stakeholders at the national and subnational levels.

National policy and strategic plans should be developed through an evidence-based information and decision-making process with active participation of national stakeholders for implementation. In addition, a national food control system needs regular performance monitoring and evaluation(M&E) to systematically review the appropriateness and effectiveness of policy decisions and priority actions. FAO and WHO supported Indonesia to carry out an assessment of its National Food Control System on a pilot basis in 2017–2018. This assessment used a standardized tool which may serve as a model for other countries to assess the status of food control systems and formulate policy and priority actions for improvement through a multisectoral approach.

The Framework for Action on Food Safety is aligned with other strategic plans and programmes related to food safety at the regional and global levels. Similarly, the Framework acknowledges the contribution of other relevant sectors in promoting food safety and safeguarding consumer health within and outside the health system using a holistic approach. Food safety is a shared responsibility and implementation of the Framework should be coordinated with various health-related programmes in WHO, such as nutrition, environmental health, climate change, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), and neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), taking into consideration the One Health approach. In addition, it should be coordinated with relevant national food safety stakeholders such as agriculture, animal health, livestock production, aquaculture, etc. at the country level.