

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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ALINORM 03/28

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

*Twenty-sixth Session
30 June – 5 July 2003*

REPORT OF THE FIFTEENTH SESSION OF THE FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

*Kampala, Uganda
26 – 29 November 2002*

Note: This document includes Codex Circular Letter CL 2002/55-AFRICA

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CX 3/5.2

CL 2002/55-AFRICA
December 2002

TO: - Codex Contact Points
- Interested International Organizations

FROM: Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, FAO, Viale, delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy.

SUBJECT: DISTRIBUTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 15TH SESSION OF THE FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA (ALINORM 03/28)

The report of the 15th Session of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Africa is attached and will be considered by the Twenty-sixth Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (30 June - 5 July 2003).

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS AND INFORMATION

1. Proposed Draft African Regional Guidelines for National Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees at Step 8 (by omitting Steps 6 and 7) of the Codex Procedure

Governments and interested international organizations are invited to provide their comment on the above subject matter and should do so in writing to the Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy (fax: +39 (06) 570.54593 or E-mail: codex@fao.org) **not later than 15 March 2003.**

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Fifteenth Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa reached the following conclusions:

- Reconfirmed its support for the Recommendations arising from the FAO Conference on International Trade Beyond 2000 particularly of the Recommendation 21 regarding the effectiveness of the use of written comments that allowed taking into account the national positions in the physical absence of a delegation at the meeting but noted that holding of major Codex sessions in developing countries had the nature to sensitize the hosting countries to the work off Codex but did not facilitate the participation of countries outside the Region (paras 6 and 37);
- Generally supported the idea and concept on the Trust Fund for Participation of Developing Countries in Codex Standard Setting Procedures and concluded that the concept should cover not only simple interest in participation in the Codex meetings but also should be oriented to enhance capability and effectiveness of delegations to effectively participate in the discussions (para. 12);
- Supported the decisions of the Executive Committee and views expressed by the Delegation of Uganda regarding the Guidelines for the Preservation of Raw Milk by the Lactoperoxidase System that until uncertainties related to the process were resolved the restrictions on the use of this system should be maintained (paras 16 and 17);
- Forwarded the Proposed Draft African Regional Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees for final adoption by the 26th Session of the Commission (para. 25);
- Expressed its opinion on several activities included in the Draft Medium - Term Plan 2003 – 2007 on Objectives related to Promoting Sound Regulatory Frameworks (para. 29), Promoting the Widest and Consistent Application of Scientific Principles and Risk Analysis (para. 30-32), Promoting Linkages Between Codex and Other Multilateral Regulatory Instruments and Conventions (para. 33), Enhancing the Capacity to Respond Effectively and Efficiently to New Issues (paras 34-35), Promoting Maximum Membership and Participation (paras 36 – 37) and Promoting Maximum Application of Codex Standards (para. 38);
- Commended the different initiatives taken by the two organizations in FAO and WHO activities on capacity building to further enhance these activities to cover the need of the developing countries in the Region (para. 53);
- Well received the presentation on the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and Other FAO and WHO Work on Food Standards and expressed concerns on the necessity to ensure adequate representation of Codex members at the Special Session in February, given the importance of the evaluation for the future of Codex (para. 60);
- Expressed its appreciation to FAO and WHO for the efforts made to date to improve the procedures for the selection of experts for the Joint FAO/WHO scientific activities and called upon African Member countries to ensure that names and curricula vitae of suitable experts for consideration as members be submitted to FAO and WHO (para. 65);
- Exchanged updated information on Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees, and stated that there was considerable experience in the Region and those that were still in the early stage of development their systems could learn a great deal from those countries that have moved further ahead (para. 96);
- Exchanged information on consumers participation in Codex work and reiterated its request that consumers should be actively involved in the Codex decision making process (para. 109);
- commented on various aspects of traceability/product tracing (paras 110 - 119) and;
- Unanimously nominated the Kingdom of Morocco for appointment as the next Coordinator for the Region of Africa, subject to approval by the 26th Session of the Commission (para. 120).

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INTRODUCTION

1. The FAO/WHO (Codex) Regional Coordinating Committee for Africa held its Fifteenth Session in Kampala, Uganda, from 26 to 29 November 2002, by courtesy of the Government of the Republic of Uganda. The Session was chaired by the Coordinator of the Committee, Dr Ben Manyindo, Deputy Director, Uganda National Bureau of Standards. The Session was attended by 75 delegates, advisors and observers representing 18 Member Countries, two Observer countries from outside the Region, and 2 international organizations. A complete list of participants, including the Secretariat and representatives of FAO and WHO, is provided in Appendix I to this report.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

2. Dr. Ben Manyindo, welcomed the delegates to Uganda and stressed the need for Uganda and Africa region to actively participate in Codex work in order to ensure that national and regional interests are taken into account in the formulation and implementation of the international standards for food trade and food security. Welcoming statements were also made by:

- Mr A. Qureshi, the FAO Representative in Uganda; and
- Hon. Dr Richard Nduhura, the Minister of State for Tourism, Trade and Industry of the Republic of Uganda.

3. Mr Tom Billy, the Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), in welcoming the delegates drew their attention to the fact that the work on the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of the Codex had been finished and would be available to the Member Governments shortly. Mr Billy invited the delegations to study the report and be prepared to consider it at the forthcoming session of the CAC, especially that some recommendations such as establishment of the FAO/WHO Trust Fund for Enhanced Participation in the Work of Codex were very important for developing countries.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (Agenda Item 1)¹

4. The Coordinating Committee agreed to the proposal by the Delegations of Morocco and Tanzania to discuss, as an information item, the preparations for the forthcoming Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants to be held in Arusha, Tanzania in 2003 under Other Business. On this basis the Coordinating Committee adopted the Provisional Agenda as the agenda for the Session.

MATTERS REFERRED BY THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION AND OTHER CODEX COMMITTEES (Agenda Item 2)²

5. The Committee noted matters arising from the 24th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the matters arising from the 49th and 50th Session of the Executive Committee. It also noted that some issues would be discussed on the relevant agenda items of the current session of the Committee. In addition the Committee noted matters referred as follows:

RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE FAO CONFERENCE ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE BEYOND 2000

6. The Committee reconfirmed its support for the recommendations of the above Conference and particularly of the Recommendation 21 regarding the effectiveness of the use of written comments that allowed taking into account the national positions in the physical absence of a delegation at the meeting (see also paragraph 36, below).

¹ CX/AFRICA 02/1

² CX/AFRICA 02/2.

FAO/WHO TRUST FUND FOR ENHANCED PARTICIPATION OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE WORK OF CODEX

7. The Committee recalled that the 50th Session of the Executive Committee had extensively discussed this issue and that it had decided to seek comments for the further revision of this document by FAO and WHO.
8. The Representative of WHO noted that the concept of Trust Fund was raised by the Chairperson of the Commission Mr Tom Billy at the 24th Session of the CAC in order to assist the developing countries more active participation in the Codex meetings. The Representative indicated that despite the fact that the Trust Fund would be managed by the WHO according to its accounting rules the FAO would play an important role in this process and that before completion of this document, the Meeting of the Joint FAO/WHO Consultative Group which will take place in Rome, in December 2002, would further discuss and elaborate detailed criteria for this process. The Representative also indicated that a progress report reflecting further discussions between FAO and WHO would be presented to the Executive Committee and the Codex Alimentarius Commission in February 2003 and that there would be a report prepared by a consultant to provide a basis for further discussion on fundraising.
9. Many delegations supported the further development of this document and establishment of the Codex Trust fund.
10. Some delegations drew attention to the proposals in the Concept Paper concerning the generation of data from developing countries for use in the development of Codex Standards, and expressed the opinion that under such circumstances there would be a need to take into account the international accreditation of laboratories.
11. The Observer of the Consumers International pointed out the necessity of involving all stakeholders in the process of development of Codex standards and related texts and that effective participation of consumers should be ensured in this process. He also pointed out that the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries of the Trust Fund should be developed in order to evaluate its effectiveness.
12. The Committee generally supported the idea and concept of the Trust Fund and concluded that the concept should cover not only simple interest in participation in the Codex meetings but also should be oriented to enhance capability and effectiveness of delegations to effectively participate in the discussions.

LACTOPEROXIDASE SYSTEM FOR THE PRESERVATION OF RAW MILK

13. The Committee recalled the Codex Committee for Milk and Milk Products, had asked the advice of the Executive Committee how to proceed with consideration of milk products prepared in conformity with the Codex Guidelines for the Preservation of Raw Milk by Use of the Lactoperoxidase System (CAC/GL 13-1991). It had been noted that the Guidelines contained a specific provision excluding such products from international trade. The Coordinating Committee also recalled that this matter had been considered by the 50th Session of the Executive Committee and which had asked the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene to consider whether the provisions restricting the use of lactoperoxidase system in milk used for processing into products which would enter into international trade be retained and whether the Guidelines should be revised.
14. The Secretariat clarified that the issue raised very basic questions concerning the maintenance of measures restricting international trade in the absence of an appropriate risk assessment. It was noted the initial JECFA evaluation covered the process as originally developed in the 1980's, but that in the meantime some chemicals used in this system had been changed or were used in different proportions. Therefore there was a need for a re-evaluation of the system by JECFA. Moreover, it did not appear that there existed an adequate microbiological risk assessment of the process, although there was considerable evidence that the system delays the spoilage of raw milk under ambient conditions in tropical countries.
15. The Delegation of Tanzania informed the Committee that a pilot program using the lactoperoxidase system had been carried out some time ago and it showed that the milk processed with this system could be transported and sold fresh to markets that were 40-50km away.

16. The Delegation of Uganda supported by other delegations and the Observer from Consumers International indicated that there were some uncertainties with this process and that until they were resolved the restrictions on the use of this system should be maintained.

17. The Committee supported the decisions of the Executive Committee and views expressed by the delegation of Uganda.

PROPOSED DRAFT AFRICAN REGIONAL GUIDELINES FOR THE CODEX CONTACT POINTS AND NATIONAL CODEX COMMITTEES (Agenda Item 3)³

18. The Coordinating Committee recalled that the last (14th) Session of the Committee welcomed the Proposed Draft document prepared by Consumers International on this issue and had supported the development of Guidelines as new work. It also recalled that the document had been attached to the report of the last Session of the Committee and circulated for comments at Step 3 of the Procedure.

19. The Coordinating Committee considered the Proposed Draft Guidelines Section by Section and in addition to editorial changes made the following amendments:

INTRODUCTION

20. The Coordinating Committee amended the first sentence of Introduction to clarify the content and nature of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

21. The Coordinating Committee amended the third paragraph in order to ensure that not only standards but also other texts elaborated by the Codex were reference points under the WTO SPS and TBT Agreements.

SECTION ON FUNCTIONS OF THE CODEX CONTACT POINTS

22. The Coordinating Committee inserted an additional bullet (f) recommending the establishing of a website or web pages for the promotion of Codex activities as suggested by the Delegation of South Africa and renumbered the rest of the text accordingly.

SECTION ON THE COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE OF THE CODEX NATIONAL COMMITTEE

23. The Coordinating Committee had a debate regarding the wording used to express the nature of the rotation of the Chairmanship. The Coordinating Committee supported the proposal of the Delegation of South Africa that the wording “should” was too prescriptive and not always practical and that the nature of rotation depended on the national situation. It therefore agreed to rephrase the wording to read: “The position of the Chairperson may be rotational, maybe on a two-year term”. The Observer from Consumers International was of the opinion that rotation of the Chairmanship among the members of national Codex Committees should be followed.

24. The Coordinating Committee noted that there was no arrow between the National Government and the Codex Secretariat and corrected it in the flow diagram attached to the document, and agreed to correct this.

STATUS OF THE PROPOSED DRAFT AFRICAN REGIONAL GUIDELINES FOR CODEX CONTACT POINTS AND NATIONAL CODEX COMMITTEES

25. The Coordinating Committee unanimously agreed to forward the Proposed Draft African Regional Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees to the 26th Session of the Commission for final adoption at Step 8 by omitting Steps 6 and 7 of the Codex Procedure (see Appendix II).

³ ALINORM 01/28, Appendix II, CX/AFRICA 02/3 (comments from South Africa and Ghana).

CONSIDERATION OF THE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN 2003-2007 (Agenda Item 4)⁴

26. The Coordinating Committee noted that the Commission at its 23rd Session (1999) had initiated the process of developing the Medium-Term Plan for the subsequent five-year period, namely 2003-2007. Between 2000 and 2001, the Executive Committee had developed a structured model consisting of a strategic vision statement, a strategic framework described by objectives, and a detailed medium-term plan described by specific activities. The Strategic Vision Statement and the Strategic Framework were adopted by the 24th Session of the Commission (2001)⁵. The draft medium-term plan was revised to incorporate elements of the Chairperson's Action Plan and circulated to governments for comment. These were considered at the 50th Session of the Executive Committee in June 2002 and the draft plan was further revised and then forwarded to the Regional Coordinating Committees for further input prior to its final consideration by the Commission in June/July 2003.

27. The Executive Committee indicated that as a result of the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of Codex, additional changes to the Medium-Term Plan might need to be made prior to its final approval.

28. The Coordinating Committee agreed to discuss the Medium-Term Plan activity by activity within the Strategic objectives. Unless otherwise noted, the Coordinating Committee endorsed all of the activities presented in the Medium-Term Plan. The Delegation of the Republic of the Congo drew attention to inconsistencies in the editorial presentation of the activities in the French version of the document.

OBJECTIVE 1: PROMOTING SOUND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

29. In regard to Activity 25 (Foods derived from biotechnology), the Observer from the ISDC proposed that the activity should be confined to issues of safety evaluation and labeling and not to issues such as marketing. Several delegations recommended retaining the reference to marketing because this would capture all of the aspects that needed to be addressed in this important and relatively new activity. The Coordinating Committee concurred with this view. The Coordinating Committee also noted the view of the Delegation of the Republic of the Congo that explicit reference should also be made to "preservation" as an issue in the food chain that was distinct from food processing, and should be considered in relation to foods derived from biotechnology. The Secretariat noted that to date, foods derived from biotechnology did not demonstrate any differences from other foods in relation to characteristics of preservation.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROMOTING WIDEST AND CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES AND RISK ANALYSIS

30. In regard to Activity 6 (Systematic principles and guidelines for pre-harvest and post-harvest measures), the Delegation of Nigeria stressed that attention should also be given to "storage". The Delegation of Tanzania expressed its concern that reliance on the work of other inter-national organizations as described in the activity, represented a shift of responsibilities away from the Codex Alimentarius Commission and hence accountability and stated that such a shift made Tanzania uncomfortable.

31. On Activity 7 (Antimicrobial substances/resistance), the Coordinating Committee did not accept a proposal to limit consideration of this issue to the use of antimicrobial substances in food production. It was noted that the French text needed to be aligned with the English.

32. In regard to Activity 1 (Risk Communication), it was noted that the proposed activity would provide more detailed guidance on how to apply the statements of principle contained in the Draft Principles for Food Safety Risk Analysis currently nearing completion in the Committee on General Principles. The Coordinating Committee endorsed this approach.

⁴ CX/AFRICA 02/4

⁵ ALINORM 01/41, para. 68.

OBJECTIVE 3: PROMOTING LINKAGES BETWEEN CODEX AND OTHER MULTILATERAL INSTRUMENTS AND CONVENTIONS

33. The Coordinating Committee noted the view of the Delegation of Congo Republic that Activity 13 (Alignment with other aspects of *Biosecurity*) could equally as well have been placed under the activities described under Objective 2. The Delegation of Tanzania reiterated its concern about the shift of responsibilities away from the Codex Alimentarius Commission implied by this activity, but expressed its support for the activity in general.

OBJECTIVE 4: ENHANCE CAPACITY TO RESPOND EFFECTIVELY TO NEW ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE FOOD SECTOR

34. The Coordinating Committee expressed its support for Activity 3 (Revision of the Elaboration Procedure) but expressed its serious concern about the reference to Internet conferencing. It noted that only about one-quarter of Codex Contact points in the Region had access to email, much less to Internet conferencing facilities and that reliance in Information Technologies for the elaboration of standards would only serve to increase the divide between countries that had unlimited access to the Internet and those that did not.

35. In relation to Activity 19, the Coordinating Committee questioned whether or not this activity was not covered elsewhere and whether or not it was properly placed under this Objective. In any case, the Coordinating Committee was of the opinion that the removal of obsolete or overly prescriptive provisions would need to be considered in the light of their justification as appropriate measures within the Codex mandate.

OBJECTIVE 5: PROMOTING MAXIMUM MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

36. The Coordinating Committee expressed its strong support for Activity 37 (Guidelines for consideration of written comments).

37. In relation to Activity 14 (Holding of Codex Sessions in developing countries), the Coordinating Committee noted the opinion of the Delegation of Morocco that the holding of major Codex sessions in developing countries had the nature to sensitize countries to the work of Codex however did not facilitate the participation of countries in the meetings outside the region. The Coordinating Committee endorsed the Activity however, but noted that the Activity should also refer to training of the developing host country organizers in managing such complex meetings. It was suggested that the FAO/WHO Participation Trust Fund might be used for this purpose.

OBJECTIVE 6: PROMOTING THE APPLICATION OF CODEX STANDARDS

38. In reference to the collection of information by FAO and WHO to facilitate risk communication (Activity 23), the Coordinating Committee stated that it would be beneficial if FAO and WHO would involve the member countries in the collection and analysis of the data.

**CAPACITY BUILDING FOR FOOD STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS
(Agenda Item 5)⁶**

39. The Representative of FAO presented the discussion paper on capacity building activities in the region undertaken by FAO and WHO during the period since the last Regional Codex Coordinating Committee meeting, including a brief on regional or national capacity building activities that are in the process of being approved.

40. The Committee was informed of the need for capacity building in food standards and regulations to enable Codex Members that are also members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to carry out required harmonization of their domestic technical regulations and standards with standards developed by international standards-setting bodies, in the Joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission for food

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safety; the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) for animal health; and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) for plant health.

41. The representative informed the meeting of the global activities undertaken by FAO and WHO in different international meetings and projects in which the countries of the region were direct participants and beneficiaries. These included the *Enhancement of Coffee Quality through Prevention of Mould Formation*, which involves African producer countries as Ivory Coast, Kenya and Uganda and the FAO *Umbrella Programme for training on Uruguay Round and Future Negotiations on Agriculture* the first phase of which was completed in 2001. This project sponsored 14 sub-regional workshops of which 4 were held in the region; the second phase of the project has been formulated and is under consideration for funding.

42. The Committee was also informed of the different capacity building initiatives undertaken by the Organizations and in particular the FAO *Trust Fund for the Food Security and Food Safety*, the FAO *Integrated Programme for Building Capacity in Biotechnology, Food Quality and Safety, and Phyto- and Zoonosanitary Standards*; and the *Joint FAO/WHO/OIE/WTO/WB Facility for Capacity Building in Standards and Trade Development* which will cover mainly SPS-related subjects, i.e. food safety, animal and plant health.

43. At the regional level projects and workshops were organized to support national food safety authorities. These include a project to train private small/medium size industries in HACCP/Good Hygiene Practices (GHP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP); the Special Regional Program on Food Security for the ECOWAS countries, to improve harmonization of regulation and upgrade the institutional capacity of food control institutions; the regional workshop on Quality and Safety Based on Good Manufacturing Practices and HACCP organized in September 2000 in Tanzania. The meeting was further informed of the WHO regional strategy for addressing food safety issues through the Healthy Market Places and the attention given to the training of street food vendors in safe handling practices. The WHO Regional Office for Africa will also aim to develop an approach for food-borne disease surveillance system, as an integral part of national epidemiological surveillance system.

44. At the national level, the representative of FAO informed on the ongoing field projects on capacity building in food safety supported by FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme which covered the following countries: Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea (Conakry), Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

45. All delegations welcomed the capacity building report of FAO and WHO and expressed their appreciation for the capacity building activities undertaken by FAO and WHO in this region. In particular many delegations emphasized the importance in improving the quality and safety of street food in different African countries to protect the consumer and facilitate the development of the sector, because of its important socio economic aspects and its contribution to household income.

46. The Observer of Consumers International (CI) also expressed its appreciation to the FAO/WHO capacity building programme and expressed the interest to involve more consumer organizations in street food programmes and other initiatives as partnership programmes with other stakeholders in individual countries.

47. The Observer of International Soft Drinks Council (ISDC) pointed out the importance of the involvement of the consumer and private sector in programmes oriented to improve the capacity of control and testing of products during the different phases from processing to the marketing.

48. Some delegations referred that the Coffee project was quite helpful to coffee producing countries, with the aim of formulating codes of practice for the coffee industry. Analytical capability was an important component of this project because of the need to carry out continued control on the programmes enforced to prevent OTA contamination. Many other countries referred to the need to keep under control other mycotoxins and more assistance in this area was called for.

49. Other delegations expressed the need for specific assistance in the area of infrastructures and laboratories to develop more efficient food control systems in the countries in order to control their exported product and have more chances to compete in international trade.

50. Many countries focused the need for specific assistance in data generation which should be used in the risk assessment approach for a better protection of the population from specific risks and facilitate a more efficient participation of African countries in setting international standards.

51. The observer of the United States informed the Committee of three initiatives undertaken by the US Codex Contact Point in America, India and in the Southern Africa Region to increase collaboration between different organizations operating at region and country level. The Observer also emphasized that importance for an increased collaboration and cooperation between FAO and WHO regarding capacity building activities on food safety in the Africa region.

52. The Coordinating Committee unanimously called for regional follow-up to the *FAO/WHO Global Forum for Food Safety Regulators*. Because of the importance of the subject matter and the particular problems facing Africa as a Region need for exchanges of experience and information in the Region along the lines of the Global Forum was highly important.

53. The Committee commended the different initiatives taken by the two organizations to further enhance these activities to cover the need of the developing countries of the Region.

EVALUATION OF THE JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 6)⁷

54. At its 50th Session in June 2002, the Executive Committee of Codex discussed progress on the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of the Codex Alimentarius and other FAO and WHO Work on Food Standards and agreed that the evaluation should be included in the provisional agendas of all Regional Coordinating Committees. Mrs Rachel Sauvinet-Bedouin (FAO) introduced the item to the Coordinating Committee on behalf of the evaluation units in both FAO and WHO, responsible for the management of the evaluation.

55. She informed the Coordinating Committee that the evaluation work was now completed. The Evaluation Team and the Expert Panel had agreed upon the content of the final report. The report would be available by early December in six languages. Management responses to the findings and recommendations from both FAO and WHO would be included in the document. The report will be made available to the WHO Executive Board in January 2003, and following discussion at special sessions of the Codex Executive Committee and the Codex Alimentarius Commission in February 2003, will be discussed further by the FAO and WHO Governing Bodies (FAO Programme Committee and World Health Assembly in May 2003, FAO Council in June 2003 and FAO conference in November 2003), together with the advice of the Special Session of the Commission.

56. The Coordinating Committee was informed about the highly consultative approach followed by the evaluation, including comprehensive questionnaire to Codex stakeholders for which a high rate of replies indicated interest and commitments from Members to Codex. Discussions were held in 24 countries and the European commission not only with all concerned departments of government, but also with representatives of the civil society as well as the private sector. Discussions were also held with the main international organizations, including WTO and other related standard setting organizations.

57. The Coordinating Committee was also briefed on the main findings and key recommendations of the evaluation covering Codex, its subsidiary bodies, the expert advice to Codex as well as the capacity building of Codex and its two parent organizations. The report includes 42 recommendations addressing strategic and policy aspects as well as organizational and managerial issues of Codex, expert advice and capacity building activities.

58. The Chairperson of the CAC, Mr Thomas Billy, informed the Committee about an informal meeting held in Paris on 21-22 November between the Chair, and Vice-chairs, the Secretariat and representatives of WHO and FAO involved in the management of the evaluation and its follow-up. The objective of the meeting was to conduct a preliminary review of the recommendations contained in the report in view of their presentation to the special session of the CAC in February 2003 and to examine modalities proposed in the report for a follow-up to the evaluation. It was agreed that the Secretary would produce a complementary paper for the Commission to lead the commission members through the forty-two recommendations.

59. The Codex Secretary stressed the value of such an independent evaluation for Codex and elaborated further on the meeting of last week, committing the Secretariat to support the follow-up process.

60. The presentation of the evaluation report was well received by the Members of the Region represented in the Coordinating Committee. Clarifications were asked about the linkages between the Medium-Term Plan and the evaluation as well as on several points made during the presentation, including, the proposed mandate, the priorities and the functions and composition of the new bodies recommended in the report. Concerns were expressed on the necessity to ensure adequate representation of Codex Members at the Special Session in February, given the importance of the evaluation for the future of Codex.

OTHER MATTERS OF INTEREST FROM FAO AND WHO (Agenda Item 7)⁸

61. The Coordinating Committee was briefed on the outputs of the Joint FAO/WHO bodies that provide scientific advice to member countries and relevant Codex Committees. This included the scientific advice on risk assessment of chemicals provided by the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and the Joint Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR). In addition, the work on microbiological risk assessment performed by the Joint WHO/FAO Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA) was described.

62. Specific reference was made to the ongoing efforts in the selection of experts to ensure transparency, geographical distribution and reliable scientific opinion. Currently, a project was planned to update and consolidate principles and methods for the risk assessment of chemicals in food. To facilitate the international risk assessment work on chemicals and microbiological hazards, the Committee was advised of the importance of national data from as many countries as possible as a basis for the work.

63. With reference to facilitating work on pesticide residue evaluations, a pilot project had been proposed to improve the efficiency of pesticide residue evaluations through a system of work sharing among different national/international bodies.

64. In addition to the work of the Joint FAO/WHO bodies on risk assessment of chemicals and microbiological hazards, the Committee was informed of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultations on foods derived from biotechnology, probiotics, and acrylamide. Also of importance to the countries in the Regions was the convening of the first Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators to discuss food safety issues of international importance held in Marrakech in January 2002.

65. There was broad appreciation for the efforts made to date to improve the procedures for the selection of experts for the Joint FAO/WHO scientific activities. The Coordinating Committee stressed the importance of these new procedures for experts in the African Region and called upon African Member countries to ensure that the names and curricula vitae of suitable experts for consideration as members of the expert panels be submitted to FAO and WHO in accordance with the new procedures.

REPORTS ON FOOD SAFETY AND FOOD CONTROL ACTIVITIES INCLUDING THE ACTIVITIES RELATED TO CODEX CONTACT POINTS AND NATIONAL CODEX COMMITTEES IN THE REGION (Agenda Item 8)

66. The Committee recalled that this agenda item was longstanding on the Provisional Agendas of all Regional Coordinating Committees and was designed to allow the Coordinating Committees to achieve the objective stated in their Terms of Reference on the mutual exchange of information.

TANZANIA

67. Tanzania has put food safety concern in the top national priorities and this has been communicated to WHO. Provision of safe and adequate food was considered to be a constitutional right and a requisite for prevention of diseases as well as minimizing ill health effects. Strategies included provision of safe water to urban and rural communities and training of different players in the food chain on good hygienic practices including HACCP; 100 small/medium scale food processors, 100 health officers, 800 fishermen/fishmongers and 20 food supermarket operators have been trained.

68. Codex contact point is to be strengthened through a recently approved FAO-TCP project. Through this project, the Codex contact point will have a computer, photocopier, fax machines, Internet connection and transport. The national Codex Coordinating Committee will be able to meet more frequently than before (quarterly). The linkage role of the point between Codex Secretariat and relevant parties in Tanzania will be enhanced.

BENIN

69. The Delegation informed that the activities of the Codex Contact Point, which was located in the Ministry of Rural Development in the Department of Food and Applied Nutrition (DANA), were at very early stage and that the current equipment did not allow to determine vitamin A and provitamin A (carotenes), fibre, pesticide residues as well as carry out biochemical analysis of traces of hydrocarbons. There was also not possible to fully quantify and type aflatoxins, species of microorganisms such as *staphylococcus*, *Escherichia* and *Salmonella* therefore it was very desirable to receive the FAO and WHO support in strengthening their capacity for food safety and National Codex Committee.

KENYA

70. The National Codex Committee was reconstituted recently and incorporated all institutions as per Codex guidelines. The National Codex Contact Point is the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS). Currently, the Food safety regulatory aspects are enforced by various Government Agencies. However, the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) concept is being implemented by some industries in the fish and meat industries through the guidance given by the Kenya Bureau of Standards. Further technical assistance and exposure of stakeholders to the application of HACCP is desirable in the following specific industries: Fish; Coffee; Tea; Horticultural fresh produce.

71. In Kenya, accreditation of some laboratories at the KEBS has been done by United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), covering chemical and microbiological laboratories.

72. Kenya expressed interest in receiving technical Assistance in the following aspects:

- Strengthening of the National Codex Committee and the national Codex Contact Point to enhance the implementation of food safety measures.
- Capacity building in the food safety measures required in controlling pesticide residues, veterinary residues in foods and, aspects involving the assessment, testing and approval of Genetically modified food products.
- Capacity building should include the training through workshops, seminars and provision of necessary laboratory equipments.
- Harmonization of the existing food regulations being enforced by different government regulatory bodies.
- Enhancement of private/public sector partnership in handling food safety issues including control of fortification of some foods with nutritional ingredients such as addition of vitamins and minerals in composite flours.

SOUTH AFRICA

73. The Delegation of South Africa informed the Committee that it has a National Codex Committee comprising stakeholders from government through to consumers. The Committee meets twice yearly. Most of the work in preparation for South Africa's inputs into the various Codex Committee happens in national sub-committees. The Department of Health is the Codex National Contact Point and has established a

dedicated Codex office from where all Codex activities are co-ordinated. A website for food control activities, including codex activities has been established to improve communication.

74. South Africa has made a concerted effort to harmonize its standards where applicable with that of Codex.

BURUNDI

75. The Delegation stated that there were several services occupied with food safety namely Burundi Standards Bureau in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the food inspection service of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, the Directorate of Hygiene in the Ministry of Public Health. Burundi had laboratories with modest means that needed strengthening; also it did not have National Codex Committee. It was necessary to strengthen Burundi's ability in Codex Matters therefore it requested the assistance of FAO.

GHANA

76. National Codex Committee has been established effective February 2002 and the Codex contact point is established and resides in the Ghana Standards Board. It was reported that National Standards are being harmonized with Codex standards and that a National Integrated Food Safety Programme has been initiated with Technical and Financial assistance from FAO and World Bank. Implementation phase is to begin in 2003.

77. The Delegation also reported that the Food and Drugs Board and Natural Resource Institute (NRI) of Greenwich University in the UK have embarked on training and to eventually license HACCP Inspectors for Ghana. HACCP Training for officers of Standards Body, Regulatory bodies, small, medium and large scale industries, local government and consumers is on-going, and Local government environmental health officers have been trained on regulation of street vended foods. GMP/HACCP training for production and QA managers in small, medium and large-scale industries has also been undertaken.

NIGERIA

78. One of the options adopted to assure food safety/quality in Nigeria is the registration of food. Regulatory Agencies monitor GMP, the labelling declarations and conduct laboratory analysis on products before pronouncing them satisfactory for sale and consumption. Registered food products could also be awarded the quality mark if applied for.

79. The CCP and the NCC Secretariat are located in the Standards Organization of Nigeria. The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration chairs the NCC. The NCC has adequate representation and has been very active. The most recent achievement of the NCC is the Development of its Procedural Manual, a copy of which was submitted to the Codex Secretariat at this meeting. The NCC would appreciate assistance of FAO in a sensitization programme for policy makers and capacity building in laboratory analysis and in training in Risk Analysis to include risk analysis for storage of food crops.

BOTSWANA

80. Several standards have been finalized and approved as Botswana Standards such as animal feeds – cattle feeds, chicken feeds, ostrich feeds, sorghum grains for human consumption, fruits and vegetables, etc. A number of regulations are under preparation including those relating to control of abattoirs and butcheries, food labelling, marketing of breast milk substitutes, etc. A number of training sessions on food hygiene (workshops and seminars) have been organized targeting the street food vendors, personnel in restaurants and consumers in general.

81. The University of Botswana (UB) has conducted research on safety of street food in Botswana and has also published a booklet on safe handling of meat in 3 languages (English, Setswana (national language) and Ikalanga (one of the local languages))

RWANDA

82. The Delegation stated that food safety was a Number One priority and that consultants for food processing plants had helped in bringing awareness to this fact. The Delegation pointed out that analytical laboratories had serious problems due to the lack of reference standards, especially for aflatoxins.

LIBERIA

83. The Delegation of Liberia reported that food safety was a major concern of the government and that the government was doing everything possible to ensure that the people have access to safe food. As regard, food control activities, the Ministries of Agriculture, Commerce, and Health are handling food control activities. We put in place, a technical inter-ministerial committee to ensure that food available is fit for consumption. The Codex Contact Point has been located with the ministry of Commerce – Standards Division, but it is weak and there is a strong desire amongst its members to make it more active.

ETHIOPIA

84. Standards are the technical basis for Food Safety and Inspection Activities and the responsible organization for approving National Standards is the Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia (QSAE), which is operating for nearly 30 years. Currently about 60% of the approved standards fall under the Agriculture and Food Technology. For those standards that are technically regulated and QSAE has technical competence, food products are inspected and controlled through third party certification scheme. Various ministries like the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health are engaged in regulatory activities.

85. Various workshops and training on Food Safety and HACCP have been conducted by QSAE in collaboration with the UNIDO for experts working in food processing and regulatory activities and some food manufacturers implemented the HACCP system in their processes. The National Codex Contact Point is QSAE and it is now trying to formally establish the National Codex Coordinating Committee. The technical assistances that Ethiopia requires are:

- Establishment of Conformity Assessment system;
- Establishment of Food Safety Agency and
- Establishment and strengthening of the National Codex Committee.

SWAZILAND

86. In Swaziland, ministries of Health and Agriculture handled food safety issues. The Delegation informed the Committee that the drafting of the National Food Law has been completed and launched by the Prime Minister. The National Food Law was currently with the Attorney General's office for finalization. In Swaziland a total of twenty-five food inspectors from the ministry of Health and local government have been trained in the area of food safety and food inspection and that the National Codex Committee did meet when there was a need.

MOROCCO

87. In the past few years, Morocco has been giving particular importance to food safety. A draft law has been elaborated on Food Quality and Safety. Similarly, a programme on quality management of fish products has been completed and another project on canned vegetables is underway. In addition, two other projects have been undertaken relating to the reorganization of the national system for risk management. The first of these includes the setting up of a single entity for risk management and the second relates to the establishment of an independent risk assessment agency.

UGANDA

88. Food safety control in Uganda fell under the Ministries responsible for Agriculture, Health, and Trade and Industry. Food control is hampered by obsolete legislation and poor infrastructure. Mitigating

initiatives in place include putting in place the health policy, food and nutrition policy all of which recognize food safety as a national priority, harmonizing national food standards with Codex Standards, having an operational National Codex Committee, Bio-Safety Committee, strengthening fish export certification through the implementation of GMP, and HACCP and training of fisheries inspectors, enhancement of coffee quality and completion of study on street food vending. The foregoing initiatives have been undertaken on the collection of data on some pathogen-commodity combinations with the assistance of FAO, UNIDO among others. The way forward includes enactment and implementation of a modern food safety law and consumers protection law, capacity building to address data on MRLs, and dealing with GM foods and improvement of street foods.

CONGO, REPUBLIC OF

89. Food safety in the Republic of the Congo is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Population in collaboration with ministries of Agriculture, and Trade and Industry. Thanks to good collaboration between agencies, food inspection is fairly adequate despite the insufficient means of enforcement.

90. Several activities relating to food surveillance and control have been implemented. However, the Delegation requested FAO and WHO to strengthen control capacities. The Republic of the Congo participated in some of Codex Committee meetings such as the Codex Committee on General Principles. Food safety is a major concern of the Government of the Republic of the Congo.

CAPE VERDE

91. Food safety is a current concern of the Republic of Cape Verde. The various aspects of food safety issues are being addressed. Under review and pending approval is a project for the establishment of an agency for the standardization of food products. In the past two years, the department responsible for the control and accreditation of fish products has been re-organized. This service has been upgraded with legal means, human, physical and analytical capacities to conduct its work.

92. The control of other agricultural food products is under the responsibility of the Director of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry. Codex has a liaison officer situated in the Ministry Agriculture and Fisheries. However, a National Committee has yet to be set up.

GUINEA

93. The activities related to food safety were in very early stages of development and needed to be strengthened especially in capacity building. The delegation of the Republic of Guinea noted that the support of FAO and WHO for its participation at 15th Session of the Coordinating Committee for Africa was very useful in this regard.

CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL (CI)

94. The Observer from the Consumers' International expressed wish to see how Member States were involved in the work of the different Codex Committees and expressed the view that an analysis of this situation would be an interesting subject for future discussion.

ANGOLA

95. The National Codex Committee in Angola is a multisectorial body composed of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development, the Ministry of Trade the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Fishery and Environment, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Energy and Water and the Agostigno Netto University. The Codex Secretariat is composed of the President, the Executive Secretary and six coordinators of subcommittees:

- Technical subcommittee of Fishery Products;
- Technical subcommittee of Food hygiene;

- Technical subcommittee of Vegetable Products;
- Technical subcommittee for food of animal origin;
- Technical subcommittee for General Issues and
- Technical subcommittee Processed Products.

CONCLUSION

96. In his summary of this Item, the Chairperson stated that there was considerable experience in the Region and those that were still in the early stages of developing their systems could learn a great deal from those countries that have moved further ahead.

REPORTS ON CONSUMERS' PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK OF STANDARD SETTING (Agenda Item 9)⁹

97. The Committee recalled that this agenda item had been placed on the Agenda at the instruction of the 23rd Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission¹⁰. In recognition of consumers' rights to express their interests in the Codex decision making process, the Commission had urged member governments to continue to take the opportunity to provide a forum for the exchange of experiences on the ways and means of developing consumer inputs into National Codex Committees and Codex Contact Points.

98. The following delegations exchanged their experience as regards consumers' participation in the work of standards setting at the national level.

UGANDA

99. In Uganda, consumer affairs were incorporated in the related work of Codex. The Uganda Consumers' Protection Association (UCPA) was established in 1993, and it was affiliated with Consumers International, which had been beneficial to its active participation in food control and related activities. UCPA was a member of the National Codex Committee and was represented on all the Technical Committees of the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) responsible for standards development. A memorandum of understanding streamlining the working arrangements between the UCPA and UNBS was currently under discussion and was likely to be signed by the end of 2002. Nevertheless UCPA was still constrained by inadequate financial and physical resources.

TANZANIA

100. The Delegation informed that Tanzania Consumer Association had been formed few years ago but regrettably it was not very active. The organization is represented in the National Codex Coordinating Committee but did not have representation in the National Codex Working Groups. The Delegation also informed the Committee that the Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS) wished to see revival of the organization and would liaise with Consumers International to see if assistance could be provided to this effect.

KENYA

101. The Delegation informed the Committee that consumer organisations were included in the technical Committee activities for specific groups of food products and that these consumer organisations were involved in the entire process of establishing standards. Their views were taken into account alongside with the views of other stakeholders.

GHANA

102. In Ghana the role of consumers was recognized and consumers were represented in the governing boards of Ghana Standards Board (GSB), Food and Drug Board (FDB) and National Codex Committee.

⁹ CX/AFRICA 02/9

¹⁰ ALINORM 99/37, para. 43, last bullet.

Both GSB and FDB have established consumer complaints desks to deal with matters of concern for consumers.

103. The Delegation indicated that Consumer Protection Bill was presently before the parliament of Ghana but pointed out that there were many fragmented consumer groups and that efforts were being made to bring them under the one umbrella.

NIGERIA

104. In recognition of the role consumers play in food control and related matters, the Federal Government established the “Consumer Protection Agency, located in the Federal Ministry of Commerce. The Agency was represented in the National Codex Committee (NCC), Councils of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON) and their Technical Committees. The Consumer Associations that are non-governmental organizations are similarly recognized by the regulatory agencies including the NCC.

BENIN

105. Consumer Protection Associations in Benin are operational and are playing their very important role in the development of standards in analysing situation etc. Combined with the liberalization of the press, they were instrumental in putting considerable pressure on the responsible government authorities to ensure improvements in the food control situation. They participate in the work related to food safety.

ETHIOPIA

106. The Delegation informed the Committee that Consumer Protection Association was created only two years ago and still was in early stage of development, however the chamber of commerce and manufacturing industries, though they do not directly represent consumers, were involved in the work of standards setting, therefore there was a need for assistance from Consumers International in order to make sure that their voice was heard.

SOUTH AFRICA

107. South Africa encourages the participation of consumers in its legislative process as well as its Codex activities. Consumers, through the National Consumer Forum, are represented in the National Codex Committee (NCC) as well as the Food Legislation Advisory Group (FLAG) and other bodies.

CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL (CI)

108. The Observer from Consumers International expressed its thanks to the Delegations for their work on the *Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees – African Region* which had been submitted for final adoption to the Commission and which were in the interest of consumers. The Observer also informed the Committee about the various capacity building activities that CI had undertaken to improve the expertise of consumer organizations, including the organisation of training workshops, providing publications about the Codex which were directed to increase consumers participation in standards setting, and spread their activities within countries. The organization had also been supporting its members to work under national umbrella organizations such those created in Nigeria and Ghana.

CONCLUSION

109. The Committee welcomed the presentations of the Delegations and reiterated its request that consumers should be actively involved in the Codex Decision making process.

CONSIDERATION OF TRACEABILITY/PRODUCT TRACING (Agenda Item 10)¹¹

110. The Coordinating Committee recalled the request from the 49th (Extraordinary) Session of the Executive Committee for Codex Regional Coordinating Committees to consider the question of traceability in the framework of Codex¹², undertook a discussion on the subject. The Secretariat recalled that the Executive Committee had asked that the Committee on General Principles consider aspects of traceability relating both to its use as a food safety objective (i.e., as an SPS measure) and as legitimate objective as a TBT measure; that first consideration be given to the use of traceability as a risk management option in the Working Principles for Risk Analysis; and that Committees concerned, particularly the Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS), undertake work on traceability as they deemed appropriate within their mandate.

111. The Coordinating Committee also noted that the 17th Session of the Committee on General Principles¹³ (CCGP) had discussed the matter and had called on the Codex Secretariat to prepare a discussion paper considering how CCGP could contribute to the consideration of this issue in Codex, including the preparation of a definition for Codex use. The Secretariat had announced that this paper would be prepared only after the Regional Coordinating Committees had provided their views and inputs on the matter.

112. The Delegation of Switzerland, as the country chairing the Working Group established by the CCFICS to begin work in this area, reported that the Working Group had identified three main elements of traceability/product tracing, namely:

- Use for product identification, for example origin of the product;
- Use for product information, for example how the product had been transformed - but only in relation to food safety (one step forward/one step back);
- The linkages between the above.

113. In addition, the Delegation stated that Switzerland was interested in developing recommendations on access to this information by regulatory authorities and other stakeholders.

114. The Observer from the ISDC expressed the view that the most appropriate term was “product tracing” and that this should be confined to consideration of a “one step forward/one step back” approach for use in the management of food safety risks.

115. The Observer from Consumers International requested the Coordinating Committee to give its support to the concept of traceability/product tracing for food safety purposes and also for consumer information, including in relation to genetically modified foods.

116. The Delegation of Kenya expressed its preference for the use of the term “product tracing” and stated that a product tracing system should allow identification of the product(s) concerned and provide information to regulatory authorities and consumers to trace the country of origin or the manufacturer as needed.

117. The Delegation of Tanzania, supported by that of Morocco, stated that traceability/product tracing was a new area and, that as recommended by the Executive Committee, a full debate on the issue could only be undertaken following regional or sub-regional workshops, using case studies, to examine the cost implications of such a system. Without such a discussion, the information currently available to many developing Member countries did not allow countries to comment nor to take a position on the issue.

118. The Delegation of the Republic of the Congo stated that as a result of the handling of the 1999 dioxin crisis, it was convinced of the benefit of product tracing/traceability for food safety purposes especially where analytical facilities were unable to provide adequate assurance of the absence of contamination of the products concerned.

¹¹ CX/AFRICA 02/11

¹² ALINORM 03/3, paras. 29-33.

¹³ ALINORM 03/33, paras 5-13.

119. The Secretary of the Commission thanked the delegations and observers for their input, which, he assured them, would be taken into account in the preparation of the discussion paper for the CCGP.

NOMINATION OF COORDINATOR (Agenda Item 11)¹⁴

120. On the proposal of the Delegation of Tanzania, supported by that of Uganda and many other delegations, the Coordinating Committee unanimously nominated the Kingdom of Morocco for appointment as Coordinator for Africa.

121. The Delegation of Morocco expressed its appreciation for the confidence expressed by the Members of the Coordinating Committee and noting the progress and the level of excellence achieved by the Committee under Uganda as Coordinator, pledged to continue the work of the Committee in a manner that would benefit all of the countries of the Region.

OTHER BUSINESS (Agenda Item 12)

122. The Delegation of Tanzania reported that as a result of the recommendations of the 24th Session of the Commission to hold more sessions of Codex Committees in developing countries, Tanzania, as the Member of the Executive Committee elected from the Region of Africa, had initiated informal discussions with The Netherlands, as host country of the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants, and the Secretariat with a view to holding a meeting of that Committee in Africa. The Delegation reported that following detailed negotiations, arrangements were now in place to hold the 34th Session of the Committee in Arusha, Tanzania, in March 2003. It was hoped that in addition to furthering the work of the Committee, holding the meeting in Africa would help to ensure a significant participation of Member countries of the region and sensitize Africa to the work of the specialist Codex Committees. The Delegation expressed the hope that all African Members of the Commission should be able to attend the meeting.

DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT SESSION

123. The Coordinating Committee was informed that its next Session would be held in Rabat, Morocco, in about two years' time, subject to confirmation by the Commission.

¹⁴

SUMMARY STATUS OF WORK

Subject matter	Step	Action by	Document Reference in ALINORM 03/28
Proposed Draft African Regional Guidelines for National Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees	8 (Omission Steps 6 and 7)	Governments, 26 th CAC	para. 25

Appendix I

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Appendix II

**PROPOSED DRAFT AFRICAN REGIONAL GUIDELINES FOR CODEX CONTACT
POINTS AND NATIONAL CODEX COMMITTEES
At Step 8 of the Procedure (by omitting Steps 6 and 7)**

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These guidelines serve as recommendations for the Codex member countries in Africa.

The operations of Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees will differ from country to country depending on national legislation, government structures and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Codex Alimentarius Commission is a joint Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Health Organisation (WHO) food standards programme responsible for formulating the standards, codes of practice, guidelines and recommendations that constitute the Codex Alimentarius. Its members consist of governments members of the United Nations organisation who subscribe to become its members.

Over the years, the Codex Alimentarius has become an important global reference point for consumers, food producers and processors, national food control agencies and all those involved in the international food trade. The code has had an enormous impact on the thinking of food producers and processors as well as on the awareness of the end users - the consumers. Its influence extends to every continent, and its contribution to the protection of public health and fair practices in the food trade is immeasurable.

The role of the Codex Alimentarius Commission has expanded with developments in food trade and the need for enhanced protection of public health. Codex standards and other related texts are now regarded as the international reference points by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and are also being adopted by many countries as minimum food standards. Several countries are now realising the need to actively participate in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission to effectively protect the rights and interests of their consumers and their traders.

The activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission is immense in itself as it needs a critical balance of the interests of all stakeholders involved, namely the consumers, policy makers and those in the food trade industry. Codex activities at the national level are equally intricate as the varying interests of all stakeholders need to be taken on board even as the country's response on the Codex proposals are being formulated.

Creating standards that at once protect consumers, ensure fair practices in food trade and facilitate trade is a process that involves several stakeholders including consumers, food producers and traders among others.

Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees are amongst the essential organs of the Codex Alimentarius Commission that enhances the active involvement of various stakeholders at the national level which translates to effective participation of Codex member countries in the activities of the commission, results of which are a credible food code.

This document outlines basic guidelines for the establishment, structure, functions and organisation of an effective Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee. Should there be an existing Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee, then these guidelines could serve to further improve on their efficiency.

CODEX CONTACT POINTS

DESCRIPTION

In order to facilitate efficient and effective communication and working relationship between the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the government, the commission recommends the establishment of a Codex Contact Point in every Codex member country.

The Codex Contact Point shall serve as the official link between the Codex Alimentarius and the respective member country. In essence, the Codex Contact Point shall serve as the official national communication

agent (for and on behalf of the member country) to the Commission. This implies that all communication from the member country to the commission and vice versa shall go through the Codex Contact Point.

This does not however mean that the national Codex Contact Point shall usurp the governments' role in the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Since the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission affect and should include all relevant stakeholders such as consumers, food industry etc, the principal objective of the Codex Contact Point shall be to facilitate the member country's active and effective participation in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Just as the Codex Secretariat in Rome functions to facilitate the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, so shall the Codex Contact Point operate as the national codex secretariat. The Codex Contact Point shall be headed by a competent and knowledgeable person in matters relating to Codex Alimentarius Commission objectives and functions. Additional staff can be engaged as per the needs and capability of each country. The person who heads the Codex Contact Point shall also serve as the secretary to the National Codex Committee.¹

FUNCTIONS

In order to meet her principal objective of facilitating the country's active and effective participation in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the functions of the national Codex Contact Point shall include the following among others²;

- a) receiving all Codex communications, documents and publications from the commission;
- b) studying the documents and initiating relevant action either directly or through the National Codex Committee and/or the relevant sub-committee(s) or institution;
- c) maintaining a library of all Codex standards, Codes of Practice, Guidelines and any other documents and publications on or related to Codex;
- d) distribution of Codex documents, publications and other information to all stakeholders;
- e) serving as the country's link to the Codex Secretariat and other Codex member countries;
- f) establishing a website (or webpage within an existing website) for promotion of Codex activities;
- g) any other task that shall be recommended by the NCC and/or the government.

LOCATION

Upon carefully reading and understanding the role and functions of the national Codex Contact Point, the decision on where to locate the Codex Contact Point basically rests with the respective member country.

This decision could either be made by the government and/or through consultation with the relevant stakeholders at the national level.

¹See page 7

² Other possible functions of the Codex Contact Point as outlined in the Codex Alimentarius Commission Procedural Manual eleventh edition are in the annex.

It is however common practice that the government takes up the responsibility to host the national Codex Contact Points since;

- Codex is an intergovernmental body and it is governments who take decisions at the Codex Alimentarius Commission with the expectation that they would interpret and implement them accordingly at the national level, hence it is more convenient that the government coordinate Codex activities;
- Looking at the functions³ and the requirements⁴, it is in most cases the government that is better placed to effectively host the Codex Contact Point;
- There is a need for the very possible neutrality in terms of meeting the basic Codex objective of protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade and the government is seen to be able to provide this.

If it is agreeable that the government hosts the Codex Contact Point, then a relevant or suitable ministry such as the Ministry of Health or Agriculture or a suitable government department or institution such as the National Bureau of Standards or the Government Chemist could serve as a good host.

Whichever the location of the national Codex Contact Point, it is desirable that the location meets the following criteria;

- is as neutral as possible as regards to all interested parties' involvement in the Codex work;
- is capable of performing the functions of the Codex Contact Point;
- accessible to all parties interested and/or those involved in the activities of Codex.

REQUIREMENTS⁵

Noting the functions of the Codex Contact Point, it is imperative that the selected/established Codex Contact Point be fully equipped and facilitated to effectively perform these functions.

The basic requirements for a Codex Contact Point could be;

- committed staff;
- adequate office space;
- communication facilities e.g. telephone, fax, email, postal address etc;
- stationary;
- printing and photocopying equipment e.g. computer, printer, photocopier etc.

³ See page 4 on functions

⁴ See page 6 on requirements

⁵ These requirements are not mandatory and/or exclusive and will differ from country to country depending on the available resources and needs.

NATIONAL CODEX COMMITTEE

Recognising the fact that there are many stakeholders within any Codex member country whose interests and concerns need to be taken on board while taking decisions at the Codex Alimentarius Commission meetings, it is essential that a National Codex Committee (NCC) be established. Codex Alimentarius Commission in some of her publications encourages Codex member states to establish National Codex Committees due to their vital functions. NCC provides a forum for discussions and for the formulation of the national position(s) and responses to Codex proposals or policy.

NCC also enables stakeholders with no international affiliation or exposure to represent their interests, or those groups unable to attend the international meetings an opportunity to discuss the meetings' agenda with their national delegation.

The primary objective of the National Codex Committee is therefore to act as a consultative group to the government on matters related to Codex.

Representatives from all relevant national bodies, including consumers organisations, business associations etc should be invited to attend the National Codex Committee to put forward their views for consideration and inclusion in the national negotiating position.

FUNCTIONS⁶

The functions of the National Codex Committee will vary from country to country owing to a number of reasons. The primary functions could however be;

- a) formulating the country response to the proposals of the Codex Alimentarius Commission;
- b) nominating delegates to represent the country at various Codex meetings;
- c) advising the government on the best possible decisions as regards Codex standards and their implementation;
- d) appoint such technical sub-committees as may be necessary for the country's effective participation in Codex;
- e) undertake such other duties as may be advised by the government.

COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE

Ideally all government departments and organisations concerned with food safety, food production and trade in food should be included in the National Codex Committee. Further, owing to the functions of the NCC, some scientific organisations such as public universities and research institutions and any other notable experts in the relevant field and with keen interest in Codex matters could be co-opted to the NCC.

An example of a National Codex Committee could include representatives from the following institutions;

1. Relevant Ministries/Government institutions such as:

⁶ These functions are not obligatory and/or exclusive.

- Ministry of Health;
 - Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Livestock;
 - Ministry of Trade and Industry;
 - Ministry of Consumer Protection,
 - National Bureau of Standards,
 - Government Chemist.
2. Consumers' Organisations;
 3. Food Industry - Manufacturers [representatives from various sectors]
 4. Traders in Food items e.g. importers and exporters;
 5. University
 6. Leading Research Institutions
 7. Notable experts.

The NCC should however not be kept too large as to make it unmanageable. The NCC shall from amongst its membership elect a chairperson. The chairperson can be one representing any organisation or ministry. The position of the chairperson may be rotational may be on a two-year term. The responsibilities of the chairperson shall be decided by the NCC and may include conducting meetings of the NCC among others;

The person who serves as the head of the Codex Contact Point should also serve as the Secretary of the National Codex Committee. As a secretary to the NCC, his/her responsibilities shall be decided by the NCC and may include:-

- taking minutes at the NCC meetings;
- keeping all records relating to the activities of the NCC;
- drafting the agenda items and sending invitations to meetings in conjunction with the chairperson;
- undertaking such other duties as may be prescribed by the NCC and/or the government.

The NCC shall agree amongst herself on the basic operational procedures including the quorum and the schedule and procedure at her meetings. It is however recommended that the quorum for any meeting include a representative from all the key stakeholders such as the industry and the consumers. The documents should also be circulated as widely as possible and with ample time to enable those that are not able to attend any particular NCC meeting to submit their inputs which should be considered at the NCC meeting.

All sub-committees appointed by the NCC shall report to the NCC. Decisions at the NCC shall be reached by consensus and implemented by and as agreed at respective NCC meeting. Communication between the government and the NCC is conducted through the Codex Contact Point.

NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL CODEX COMMITTEE

As there are several interested parties who would want to be involved in and to represent their constituents at the NCC, the procedure for nomination/inclusion into the NCC must be known, open and transparent. Whereas different countries could use different methods to select those to sit at the NCC depending on resources and structures available, it is recommended that the Codex Contact Point identify and lists all key stakeholders and invite them to the inaugural meeting of the NCC. The participants at this meeting would then identify and invite [through the secretary] other members to the NCC.

Ideally the intention to form the NCC could be advertised in the media and organisations requested to recommend nominees. The sitting NCC could form a small subcommittee to sort out the list of applicants and make a selection based on a NCC predetermined criteria for representation at on the NCC. Possible criteria for selection could include:-

- track record on food issues relevant in Code Alimentarius;
- reasonable prospects of continuous existence;
- expertise;
- availability to attend meetings and comment on Codex documents.

Participation at the NCC meetings should be reviewed annually and new members appointed to replace dormant members.

FUNDING

For the Codex Contact Point and the National Codex Committee to operate efficiently and effectively, there must be identified a sustainable source of funding for their activities. A secure source of funding for Codex work at the national level would enable prompt response/reactions on Codex proposals, timely and adequate preparation for Codex meetings, representation and effective participation at Codex meetings among other things.

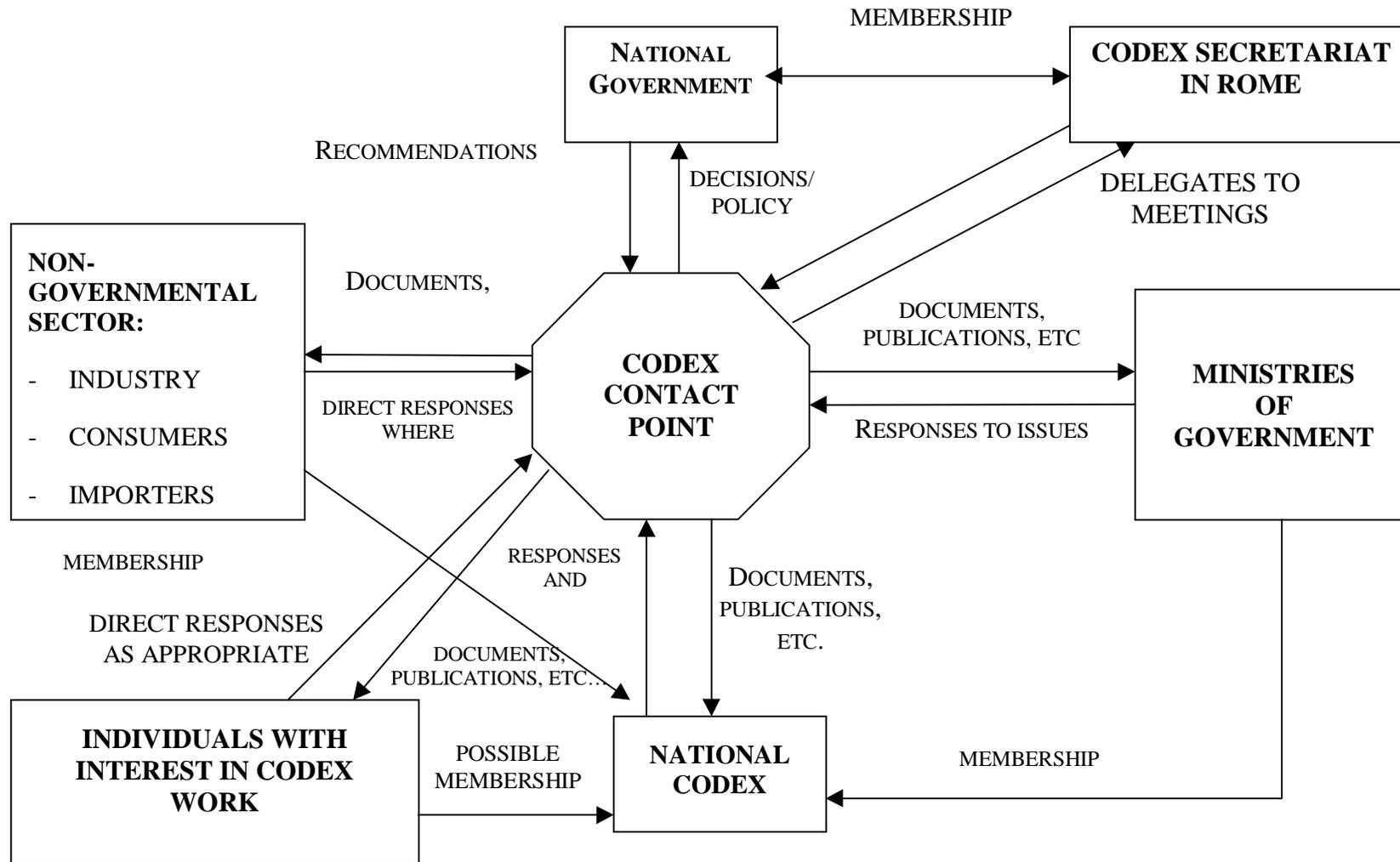
The source of funding for running and/or for activities of the Codex Contact Point and the National Codex Committee must however be known to all members of the NCC. Any contributions must not be attached to any conditions so as to enable the two bodies operate effectively without fear or favour.

Besides the support from the government, the NCC could seek additional financial support for the activities of Codex through the Chairperson and/or the Codex Contact Point (Secretary) from well-wishers and stakeholders in the Codex work. Possible sources of support for the codex activities include;

- Central Government
- Foundations & Trust Funds
- Industry Levy

- UN Organisations e.g. WHO, FAO, UNDP
- International Organisations

Figure 1. Interrelationships within the Codex System



ANNEX**Core Functions of Codex Contact Points**

The operation of Codex Contact Points will differ in each country depending on national legislation, government structures and practices.

1. Act as the link between the Codex Secretariat and Member countries;
2. Coordinate all relevant Codex activities within their own countries;
3. Receive all Codex final texts (standards, codes of practice, guidelines and other advisory texts) and working documents of Codex sessions and ensure that they are circulated to those concerned within their own countries;
4. Send comments on Codex documents or proposals to the Codex Alimentarius Commission or its subsidiary bodies and/or the Codex Secretariat;
5. Work in close cooperation with the National Codex Committee, where such has been established. The Codex Contact Point acts as the liaison point with the food industry, consumers, traders and all other concerned to ensure that the government is provided with the appropriate balance of policy and technical advice upon which to base decisions relating to issues raised in the context of the Codex work;
6. Act as a channel for the exchange of information and the coordination of activities within their own countries and with other Codex members;
7. Receive the invitations to Codex sessions and inform the relevant chairpersons and the Codex Secretariat of the names of participants from their own countries;
8. Maintain a library of Codex final texts; and
9. Promote Codex activities throughout their own countries.