CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION E

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy - Tel: (+39) 06 57051 - E-mail: codex@fao.org - www.codexalimentarius.org

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

Twenty-third Session

Nairobi, Kenya, 2 - 6 September 2019

AFRICA CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA) – A QUEST FOR TRADE IN SAFE FOOD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
(Prepared by Dr Jean Kamanzi)

This year 2019, on the 30th of May, a new and important chapter of the African Union on its journey towards unity as dreamed by its founding fathers in 1963 was written when the Agreement of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) came into effect after the ratification by 22 countries considered as the minimum threshold of ratification required under Article 23 of the AfCFTA. The African Continental Free Trade Area, (AfCFTA) brings together the member states of the African Union covering a market of more than 1.2 billion people, including a growing middle class, and a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than US$3.4 trillion.

It creates a single continental market for goods and services with free movement of capital and business persons as well as lay the foundation for the establishment of a continental customs union

The roadmap for the Agriculture sector had already been set at the African Union Summit held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in June 2014, where the Heads of State and Government adopted a remarkable set of concrete agriculture goals to be attained by 2025 and which are contained in what is now known as the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods.

Goal no.5 out of the seven goals is the Commitment to Boosting Intra-African Trade in Agricultural commodities and services with an objective to triple, by the year 2025, intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services.

One of the major challenges in meeting this objective will be without any doubt the SPS requirements and in particular food safety standards for traded food products. Based on what we know about the food safety situation on the continent, it can be easily concluded that African countries will not be able to meet this objective unless massive investments are made to improve food safety and turn around the current situation. Several member states to the AfCFTA are at different levels in terms of their regional and economic integration, regulatory frameworks for managing SPS, transport and communication infrastructure as well as quality infrastructure and technical capacities for food safety enforcement.

In fact, we know through the World Health Organization FERG report that Africa with its 91 million annual foodborne illnesses and its 137,000 deaths has the highest burden of foodborne diseases and the highest death rate in the world.

This is as a result of consumption of unsafe food products produced and marketed by producers often unfamiliar with basic food safety concepts in the context of weak and very fragmented national food control systems. In addition, the predominance of unregulated informal food sector versus a very small formal and regulated sector for exported products and limited human capacities and financial investments in food safety both by the public and private sectors exposes African consumers to immense risks.

However, we also do know that challenges come with opportunities and if African countries can seize the current available opportunities and built on the current momentum in food safety, chances are that they will be able to meet the set goals in the Malabo Declaration.

Among those opportunities to name few are the new available tools such as the new FAO/WHO assessment tool for national food control systems and the new African Food Safety Index which if used efficiently and strategically can help build strong national food control systems and secure the resources needed to improve and uplift food safety.

To facilitate intra-African food trade, improvement of food safety at country levels will have to be coupled with major initiatives of harmonizing regulatory and policy frameworks, implementation of trade facilitation agreements with the use of available new technologies such as e-certification.

CCAFRICA in partnership with the Food Safety Agency to be created by the AU will have in this regard a critical role to play. In particular, the following areas will need to be addressed in order to manage the continental trade as well as food safety aspect:

- Development of food safety standards for products that are highly traded in the region; or goods that have high market potential for trade.
- Harmonization of already existing food safety standards within the Regional Economic Communities (RECS)
- The need to establish cross-border coordination and cooperation frameworks for eliminating non-tariff barriers to trade.
- Focus on awareness creation, trainings and other capacity building initiatives for the informal sector, farmers, SMEs, food distributors and traders including street food vendors.
- Develop technical cooperation arrangements among the RECs and the Partner States on the management of Sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

The landscape in food safety is changing favorably and African countries should seize the current momentum created by events such as the two recent international food safety conferences organized this year in Addis Ababa and Geneva by FAO/WHO/AU and WTO and use the World Food Safety Day adopted by the UN General Assembly.

Only such sustained mobilisation can help secure the massive resources and investments that will be needed by the private and the public sectors to improve food safety if African countries are to meet the objective of tripling intra-African food trade by 2025.