



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

33rd Session

Geneva, Switzerland, 5-9 July 2010

EVALUATION OF THE CAPACITY OF THE CODEX SECRETARIAT

Background

1. The evaluation included in the Strategic Plan 2008-2013 under *Activity 3.7 Evaluate the capacity of the Codex Secretariat to perform its function effectively* was entrusted in 2008 to an independent consultant, who considered the replies of members to a questionnaire as well as the views of FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat in the process and presented a final report in 2009. The Commission considered the report and recommendations presented in ALINORM 09/32/9B Part II¹.
2. Some delegations indicated that they supported the general intent of the recommendations; however as these were complex issues involving FAO, WHO and member states, they required more consideration at the national level. The Commission considered more specifically Recommendations 5 and 11. The discussion and conclusions of the Commission are presented in ALINORM 09/32/REP, paras 139-156.
3. The Commission agreed that no decision would be taken at this stage and that all Recommendations, except Recommendation 11, which was not supported, would be referred for further consideration to the 63rd Session of the Executive Committee and to the 33rd Session of the Commission..
4. All recommendations from the Evaluation are reproduced in Annex 1 for ease of reference.
5. The 63rd Session of the Executive Committee considered Recommendations 1 to 10 of the Evaluation, and its comments or recommendations are presented in ALINORM 10/33/3, paras. 63 to 94, for consideration by the Commission as agreed at its 32nd Session.
6. The Executive Committee generally agreed with Recommendations 6-10 and noted that work on some of these had already been initiated by FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat. The Executive Committee requested the Secretariat to provide updated information and work plans for these activities to be available for the 64th CCEXEC and the 33rd CAC to allow monitoring.
7. The Secretariat clarified that the Commission would take the ultimate decision on recommendations from the consultants report. For those items for which work had already started independently (Recommendations 8, 9 and 10) work plans could possibly be provided but not on the others.
8. Some updates or clarification on the recommendations directed to the Secretariat are presented below for consideration by the Commission.

Updated information

Recommendation 6: The Codex Secretariat should improve the daily operations of the Codex work, more specifically through:

- a more rigid management of workflow
- the timely availability of working documents

¹ (see <ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/CAC/CAC32/al329Bbe.pdf> - english; <ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/CAC/CAC32/al329Bbf.pdf> - french and <ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/CAC/CAC32/al329Bbs.pdf> - spanish)

9. The Secretariat is responsible for a number of working documents and in that case all efforts should be made to prepare them in time. The delays are often due to the nature of the documents, especially for the CCEXEC and the Commission, and to the relatively short time between the last Codex Committee session held in May and the Commission. This is why documents referring to the output of committees are presented in two parts, such as the list of standards for adoption, the first part being sent in April and the second in May.

10. As regards “workflow” and as indicated earlier, many documents for Committees are prepared by individual delegations or working groups and they are distributed by the Secretariat as soon as they are received. The delays may originate from practical or technical issues in their preparation.

11. Regarding documents that are under the responsibility of the Secretariat, Circular Letters to be sent after the Commission are generally prepared directly after the Commission. Reports of Committees in English are prepared in conformity with the requirements of the Procedural Manual (one month afterwards), and in most of the cases earlier. The report of the Commission in recent years was generally distributed at the end of July in English and at the end of August in French and Spanish.

12. The question of availability of documents in other languages than English was discussed on several occasions, as related to the Evaluation or in other perspectives, such as improvement of the participation of countries. Working documents and final reports are not translated by the Codex secretariat, but either by the FAO translation services or by the host country. However, in a number of cases, and in order to save time, documents in French and Spanish are produced internally when there is no need for translation of additional text and the relevant sections can be taken from existing reports, such as lists of standards at various steps for the Commission, or documents on “matters referred”. A number of translated documents are also reviewed internally in the Secretariat, as applicable.

- the timely finalization of adopted texts including the uploading to the website

13. The majority of adopted texts are placed on the Codex website within 3-4 months following the Commission session and the same is true for the updated databases for numerical standards. In recent years there were delays especially with the updating of the pesticide MRL database due to an outdated updating system which since then has been replaced. Sometimes there are delays because of workload or duty travel of officers. It should be noted that the secretariat not only updates the texts but also checks for consistency between language versions. The secretariat aims at having 100% of adopted texts available on the website four months after the Commission and the Codex annual CD-ROM produced by December but this does not only depend on the secretariat but also on the availability of the internal services producing the master CR ROM.

- the proper planning of publications

14. The possibility to prepare printed publications depends on resources. Since the recommendations of the Evaluation, several publications were issued in several areas of Codex work. The Codex Secretariat plans publications taking into account the progress made in the relevant work areas and the available resources. Delegations are invited to provide their specific views or request on the publications that would be useful, with the understanding that in the future, such publications may not be available in printed form. It could also be envisaged to request input from all members to which extent they consider paper publications to be useful and which should be the thematic priorities.

- the timely conclusion of Letters of Agreement

15. Substantial discussion took place concerning the question of co-hosting and more generally the question of conclusion of letters of agreement, at the Commission and at the Committee on General Principles. It was clarified that timely conclusion of Letters of Agreement (LOAs) does not depend on the Secretariat, which only prepares the draft LOA for submission to FAO Protocol. This can be prepared only once concerned host countries have submitted a letter indicating their willingness to host the committee. If this letter is not received, the process of preparing the LOA cannot be initiated. Subsequently, once the LOA is finalised and sent to the country concerned, delays in acceptance of the LOA depend on the specific situation and requirements in each country. In order to facilitate the preparation and conclusion of Letters of

Agreement, and as agreed at the 26th Session of the Committee on General Principles, the relevant information, including the model letter of intent and LOA, with the proposed timetable, will be placed on the Codex website in order to provide practical guidance to member countries who wish to host Codex committees.

- further enhancement of language skills

16. Unless this recommendation referred specifically to Arabic and Chinese, it was not entirely clear as all members of the Secretariat in permanent positions in all grades use more than one language and several of them use three languages. The English, French and Spanish versions of final texts are prepared inside the Secretariat. Arabic and Chinese versions are sent for translation. The Russian version, when applicable, is sent for translation and checked internally.

Recommendation 7: The Codex Secretariat should play a more proactive role in the standard-setting process and the strategic orientation of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and should explore new means of conducting international negotiation on food standards.

17. As mentioned in the 63rd Session, the Secretariat is preparing several documents putting forward proposals for discussion especially in the Committee on General Principles, in cooperation with the Legal Offices of FAO and WHO where required. The main subjects covered are procedures and risk analysis. The Secretariat also prepares several documents for the Executive Committee in relation to the critical review and the Strategic Plan for example, and other documents as may be required to facilitate its discussions. The Secretariat prepares general documents such as matters referred and endorsement for other Committees, and other documents on a case by case basis.

Recommendation 8: The Codex Secretariat should improve communication with host governments member states, through the national Codex Contacts Points, and the public at large, and should explore new ways of communicating.

18. The Codex secretariat has started in 2008 to publish a regular newsletter to improve communication with contact points and also to give more visibility to contact points by letting them introduce themselves to a broader audience. The Secretariat plans to review the usefulness of the newsletter via an online questionnaire. The reprogramming of the Codex website will also offer new ways of communicating (see Recommendation 9)

Recommendation 9: The Codex Secretariat should fundamentally rethink and redesign the Codex Website as a function of more proactive communication with the membership, observer organizations and the public at large.

19. Present communication with members and observers is mainly by email, the Codex website and the ftp server. The website is useful for insiders but its internal structure is not flexible enough to offer different ways of communicating. One year ago the Codex Secretariat launched a major project for the reprogramming of the website in order to be able to make use of new technology and to explore new ways for communicating such as chat rooms, multimedia content and an interactive protected part of the site for members and observers. It is expected that the new site can be put online this summer. The site will also offer new ways to coordinators of electronic working groups to manage the groups and make them more interactive and a viable alternative to physical working groups.

Recommendation 10: The Codex Secretariat should further integrate IT into the daily work of the Secretariat.

20. The interactive capabilities of the new website will allow to integrate it better in the workflow of the Codex secretariat. Many steps from the creation of a Committee agenda to the distribution of the final report are presently done "manually" and are repetitive and take time away from the secretariat that could be used for technical work and proactive communication with members. Using the website as a workflow management system will allow to make some of the steps semi-automatic. It is planned to implement this (resources allowing) over the next year (2011).

Summary Table of Recommendations

No.	Addressed to	Recommendation
1.	FAO and WHO	FAO and WHO should agree as a matter of urgency on the desirable balance in their contribution to the Codex budget.
2.	FAO and WHO	FAO and WHO should allocate sufficient resources (staff and non-staff) to the Joint Codex budget to create a sustainable Secretariat, able to support current activities of Codex, to implement the necessary improvements in their daily operations and to enhance their role in the standard-setting process, the strategic orientation of the CAC, communication with member states and the public at large, including well defined capacity-building initiatives targeting CCPs and exploring new means of conducting international negotiation on setting standards.
3.	FAO and WHO	FAO and WHO should agree in a timely manner on the Codex budget for a biennium and should allow the Codex Secretariat to use a saving account in order to have the possibility to transfer money from one biennium to the next when the balance is positive at the end of a biennium.
4.	FAO and WHO	FAO and WHO should improve their communication about the Codex Trust Fund, particularly regarding the responsibilities for the management of the Codex Trust Fund.
5.	FAO and WHO	FAO and WHO should initiate a joint evaluation of the relationship of FAO and WHO to each other as they support Codex and of each organization's separate interaction with Codex with a view to improving the efficiency of the Codex Secretariat and strengthening its relative autonomy where possible
6.	Codex Secretariat	<p>The Codex Secretariat should improve the daily operations of the Codex work, more specifically through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a more rigid management of workflow • the timely availability of working documents • the timely finalization of adopted texts including the uploading to the website • the proper planning of publications • the timely conclusion of Letters of Agreement • further enhancement of language skills
7.	Codex Secretariat	The Codex Secretariat should play a more proactive role in the standard-setting process and the strategic orientation of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and should explore new means of conducting international negotiation on food standards.
8.	Codex Secretariat	The Codex Secretariat should improve communication with host governments member states, through the national Codex Contacts Points, and the public at large, and should explore new ways of communicating.
9.	Codex Secretariat	The Codex Secretariat should fundamentally rethink and redesign the Codex Website as a function of more proactive communication with the membership, observer organizations and the public at large.
10.	Codex Secretariat	The Codex Secretariat should further integrate IT into the daily work of the Secretariat.
11*.	CAC, FAO and WHO, Codex Secretariat	Biennial meetings of the CAC should be reinstated and the CCEXEC should be revitalized.

* For reference only.