



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA
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OTHER BUSINESS

**DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE ELABORATION OF REGIONAL STANDARDS IN
AFRICA**

The African continent has always been interested in the elaboration of standards concerning its food supply and food commodities that are traded internationally within Africa and in the world.

Since the first session of the CCAFRICA, which was held in Rome in 1974, African delegates have drawn attention to the need for a list of African food products that could be the subject of a regional standard.

For more than ten years, there has been intense activity within the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa to develop regional standards for foods produced in Africa, including: gari, sorghum, millet, maize, groundnut, pulses, fresh tropical fruits and vegetables, roots and tubers and products derived from these foods.

However, work undertaken within the CCAFRICA has often been taken over by more specialist Codex subsidiary bodies because, although produced in Africa, these foods are traded internationally because consumed throughout the world. The main reasoning behind this is that the formulation of regional standards would be restrictive and could thus create barriers to trade of these foods.

At present, Africa has only two sets of regional guidelines:

- Guidelines for the design of control measures for street-vended foods in Africa. CAC/GL 22-1997, Rev.1999.
- Guidelines for Codex contact points and national Codex committees in Africa. CAC/GL/ 43-2003.

All works initiated to elaborate food standards have ended up as Codex international standards.

Work on the elaboration of Codex regional standards for Africa has been overshadowed by implementation of the CCAFRICA Strategic Plan 2008-2013, whose Objective 7 is nevertheless to elaborate regional standards. Yet, many African food products are currently traded in the continent at national, sub-regional and regional level, for example: cassava sticks, safou, leafy vegetables, Ricinodendron seeds, wild mango kernels, sheanut butter, cassava leaf purees or purees from Vernonia Amygdalina leaves (ndolè), Gnetum Bucholziamum leaves (okok/eru) and baobab leaves.

These foods are widely consumed in Africa and are popular among the African diaspora in Europe, America and Asia. They are also starting to interest consumers worldwide.

There is every justification for Africa to consider drawing up corresponding food standards, both regional and international standards as the case may be.

Aware of this situation, the African delegates attending the 34th session of the CAC recommended, in a meeting of the African group, that the Delegation of Cameroon initiate debate on the elaboration of African regional standards.

Codex Alimentarius provisions on the initiation of new work:

The Codex Commission, one of its subsidiary bodies or a member country may submit a proposed draft standard, for critical review by the Executive Committee and subsequent approval by the Commission, by providing a project technical document with the following information:

- ✦ Purpose and scope of the standard.
- ✦ Relevance and timeliness of the standard.
- ✦ Main aspects to be covered.
- ✦ Assessment against criteria for the establishment of work priorities.
- ✦ Relevance to Codex strategic objectives.
- ✦ The relation between the proposal and existing Codex documents.
- ✦ Identification of any need for technical input to the standard from external bodies so that this can be planned for.
- ✦ The proposed time-line for completion of the new work, including the start date, the proposed date for adoption at Step 5, and the proposed date for adoption by the Commission. The time frame for developing a standard should not normally exceed five years.

The critical review by the Executive Committee considers the following aspects:

- An examination of proposals for development/revision of standards, taking into account the «**Criteria for the Establishment of Work Priorities**», the strategic priorities of the Commission and the support work needed for an independent risk assessment.
- Identification of the standard-setting needs of developing countries.
- A preliminary assessment of the need for expert scientific advice and the availability of such advice from FAO, WHO or other relevant expert bodies, and the prioritisation of that advice.

Criteria for the establishment of work priorities

Codex Alimentarius work priorities generally focus on:

- ✦ Food safety to ensure consumer protection against any danger from the food.
- ✦ Fairness in trade.
- ✦ The identified needs of developing countries.

For standards on general subjects, the main criteria determining work priorities are:

- ✓ ***The diversity of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade.*** Information should be provided on the existence of differences between national legislations likely to lead to potential or real impediments to international trade. Details of such impediments should be provided in the form of quantitative information on volume and/or frequency of rejection of shipments, expressed, for example, in absolute or relative value.
- ✓ ***The scope of work and establishment of priorities between the various sections of the work.***
- ✓ ***Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field*** and/or work suggested by relevant international or intergovernmental organizations.
- ✓ ***Amenability of the subject to standardization.*** Information should be provided on:
 - The essential qualitative factors to identify a product (for example, by definition, composition etc.).
 - The characteristics of the product (for example, differences in definition, composition and other qualitative factors that could vary between countries and regions) that need to be taken into account in the standard.
- ✓ ***The international dimension of the problem or subject.***

With regard to commodity standards, certain specific aspects also need to be considered:

- ✓ ***The volume of production and consumption in individual countries, and the volume and pattern of trade between countries.*** Information should be provided on:
 - The volume of production and consumption in individual countries, expressed in monetary terms, tonnes, proportion of GDP etc.
 - The volume of trade patterns, including trends in trade volumes and patterns, expressed in monetary terms, tonnes, proportion of GDP etc. :
 - between countries,
 - in intra-regional trade, i.e. between countries of the same region or within those countries,
 - in inter-regional trade, i.e. between different regions,
 - to the extent possible, reliable sources or data and/or reference details to support the credibility of the above information.
- ✓ ***The international or regional market potential.***
Information should be provided on:
 - the potential of the international and/or regional market; and, as appropriate,
 - the potential of regional products to enter the international market, including an analysis of current production trends and short-term market potential.
- ✓ ***Coverage of the main consumer protection and trade issues by existing or proposed general standards.***
Information should be provided on any overlapping or gaps in existing standards. Where overlapping or gaps are identified, the new work proposal should indicate why amendment of the current standard would not be sufficient to meet the need for a standard.
- ✓ ***The number of commodities which would need separate standards, indicating whether raw, semi processed or processed.***

Conclusions on the elaboration of Codex regional standards for Africa:

The elaboration of Codex regional standards for Africa requires the prior gathering of information and the production of project technical documents that comply with CAC procedures and justify the priority of the intended work.

It would therefore seem appropriate to begin by establishing a physical working group tasked with:

- identifying regional products suitable for a Codex international or regional standard. Such identification would be by commodity group (grains, pulses, vegetables, spices, aromatic plants, oils etc.). Countries presenting a product for inclusion in a list should prepare documentation supporting their proposal;
- ranking the identified products in order of priority.

The CCAFRICA should agree on the country to host this physical working group, on a schedule of meetings, on the working language and, as appropriate, on arrangements for financing those meetings. Once its task has been completed, the working group will submit its report to a session of the CCAFRICA for approval.

N.B.: Drafting of the technical documents and their submission to the physical working group could be done electronically.