

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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ASIA21/CRD1

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR ASIA

Twenty-first Session

Goa, India 23 - 27 September 2019

Opening speeches

Mr. Sunil Bakshi, Chairperson of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia

Namaskar! And a very good morning to all of you!

It indeed is a privilege and honour for me to be welcoming the dignitaries of the 21st Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia (CCASIA) and India is proud to host this second consecutive session of the Committee. On behalf of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, the National Codex Contact point and the host organization, and in the capacity of the Regional Coordinator, it gives me immense pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all the dignitaries on and off the dais.

Indeed, it is an honour for us to have Ms Rita Teatotia, Honorable Chairperson of FSSAI, amongst us for this inaugural program. She has been an astute administrator whose experience spans across different fields related to food safety ranging from health to commerce and now directly on to food safety ecosystem. She has been a great support and she has taken time to be amongst us on this session, I extend a warm welcome to you Madam.

Prof Purwiyatano Hariyadi and Mr Steve Wearne, the vice chairs from the Codex Alimantarius Commission have graced this inaugural session on behalf of the Commission, and I extend a warm welcome to both of them too.

Dr Sridhar from the Asia Pacific Regional office of the FAO, Dr Gyanendra Gongal from WHO SEARO and Ms Sarah Cahill from the Codex Secretariat are also here with us representing their respective organizations in this inaugural session and I extend a warm welcome with thanks to all of them for being here. At the same time I also welcome other officials of the WHO and the Codex Secretariat who are here with us and would support and guide the Committee in its deliberations over the next few days. Last but not the least, I extend my heartfelt and sincere welcome to all the distinguished delegates from CCASIA member countries, member observers and all the other observer organizations. We are happy and proud to have you all here at this picturesque city of GOA for an important meeting that focuses on regional co-operation.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you all are aware, the main objective of CCASIA is to promote mutual co-operation among Asian member countries and promote mutual communication and resource sharing to develop regional standards and regulations for food products. During the course of this meeting, many topics related to the situations of food safety and quality in the region will be deliberated, new work proposals for development of regional standards will be discussed and an effort would also be made to showcase the capacity building initiatives on the sidelines of this meeting as well. These deliberations would help us identifying a way forward that further strengthens the food safety preparedness in the region as a whole.

May I also pleasantly remind the delegates that all of us are in this beautiful coastal city of Goa that boasts of scenic beaches and unique culture. Do take some time off your busy schedule to experience the uniqueness of GOA.

With these words, I once again welcome you all to the 21st CCASIA meeting. As the host, it is our duty to assist the delegates and should you have any matter where we can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our colleagues. I hope this Session of the Coordinating Committee will be yet another opportunity for mutual learning and drawing lessons on various aspects of food safety. I wish to end my welcome speech with a quote by Sir CV Raman, the Noble Laureate from India and I quote "Success can come to you by courageous devotion to the task lying in front of you" quote unquote – and am sure the delegates will have a successful and productive discussion apart from enjoying the stay in India, especially the State of Goa.

Ms. Sarah Cahill, Senior Food Safety Officer, Codex Secretariat

Ms Rita Teotia, Chairperson of the Food Standards Authority of India, Mr Rajeev Kumar Jain, Executive Director, Food Standards Authority of India, Mr Sunil Bakshi, Chairperson of the 21st session of CCASIA, Vice chairpersons of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, FAO and WHO colleagues, Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to join this 21st session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia and welcome you today on behalf of the Codex Secretariat.

Coordinating committees are unique among Codex meetings. The focus here is not only on standard setting but also to shine a light on food safety and quality issues in the region. With these meetings we want to provide a forum for sharing information and improving collaboration, for promoting discussions on the critical food safety and quality issues you are facing as well as new issues emerging on the horizon and then to take decisions on setting standards that are central to addressing food safety and quality in the region.

This is one of six Coordinating Committees taking place in each of the Codex regions within a three-month period. A few years ago, we moved towards harmonization of the agendas for these six meetings, while still leaving the space to address specific needs and priorities of each region. As a result, these meetings and their reports are now opportunities for sharing experience and information not just within a region but also across regions.

This week we will discuss issues of key importance to the global Codex family such as use of our Codex standards and how we will implement our new Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Codex is a member-based and both member-driven organization. Your participation here demonstrates your commitment to the ongoing Codex work and to contribute to the future of Codex and I commend your efforts.

I would like to use this occasion to express particular appreciation to India as the Coordinator for Asia and our hosts for this meeting. Coordinators not only chair the Coordinating Committees but also play an important role between sessions in promoting Codex in the region and leading the development of many of the items on our agenda. They are also a conduit for bringing regional issues and concerns to the attention of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. India has provided fantastic leadership in their role as Coordinator since 2015, have been an excellent partner and ambassador for Codex. In this meeting, you will nominate a new coordinator for the region and we look forward to working with them to bring the same energy and engagement to Codex work.

Our role as Codex secretariat is to both support and promote the great work you do on standard setting for food safety and quality. We look forward to working with you during this meeting and to continue to build the relationships that will enable all of us all to do an even better job between now and CCASIA 22. Thank you for your kind attention and I wish you a very successful meeting.

Mr. Steve Wearne, Vice Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission

Chairperson and Executive Director of FSSAI, representatives of FAO and WHO, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends.

My thanks to the Regional Co-ordinator, Sunil Bakshi and our hosts in the Government of India for allowing me the opportunity and honour to speak briefly on the occasion of the opening of the 21st session of the FAO/WHO Co-ordinating Committee for Asia, and to complement the comments we have just heard from my fellow vice-chair, Pur.

When Guilherme, Mariam, Pur and I took office in 2017 as the chair and vice-chairs of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, we wrote to all member countries setting out our intention to be close to member countries and to Codex subsidiary bodies. This round of regional co-ordinating committee meetings, which started earlier this month in Nairobi, is of vital importance to Codex. Codex is a member-driven organisation. The regional co-ordinating committees and member countries collectively set the direction and the priorities for Codex. And that is why our agenda item on a roadmap to implementation of our new strategic plan is so important – we need to identify and commit to the activities that will drive Codex forward.

Beyond the new strategic plan, we have an important agenda of work this week. So let us reflect on our agenda, and particularly the keynote address and our subsequent discussion of current and emerging risks. We often hear, in Codex and in FAO discussions, that there can be no food security without food safety. I would also add that if we don't know what is in a food, we cannot know whether it is safe. Food fraud and traceability is an issue for all of us – not just as a current or emerging risk but as a risk that has been with us for centuries – and equally an issue for countries around the world. It was no surprise to me that food fraud featured in the top issues for Asia region. It also featured among the top issues in this survey in Africa and Europe, perhaps illustrating the serious global reach of the problem and collective desire to tackle it. There

is work on food integrity and authenticity underway in CCFICS, which among other things will conduct a comprehensive analysis of existing relevant Codex texts. I look forward to seeing the results of this analysis and continuing the discussion on what more Codex can do to ensure our international and national food control systems are fit for purpose.

I am pleased too that our agenda for this week is forward-looking. When we reflect on the food safety conferences earlier this year in Addis Ababa and Geneva, we are invited to consider food safety challenges in the coming decade. To help us do this, we should take up the challenge that will be laid down by our keynote speaker today to share the concerns, approaches and practices in the region, that would contribute to ensuring safety through the entire food chain end to end.

When thinking about the capabilities that will support our future work I always come back to two themes – data and science.

On data and digitisation, this forum and others like it allow us to identify common objectives on areas such as predictive analytics, data trusts and data ethics, and to share approaches, challenges and opportunities. With the plummeting cost of technology and the ever-increasing rate of innovation in the development of real, practical solutions, cost is now far less of a barrier to entry. Barriers remain, relating to imagination and skills, but I'm confident that together we can overcome these challenges.

On science, I completely agree with the call I often hear that Codex texts need to be science-based. And we need to be open to insights from across the spectrum of sciences to inform our work. So, let us continue to recognise the robust insights that may be provided by the economic and other social sciences, both in terms of regulatory design, and also in evaluation of the impacts of different interventions in different national and international settings. And also on the theme of science, let us recognise and celebrate the growing analytical laboratory capacity across in many sub-regions, exemplified by the new International Training Centre on Food Safety and Applied Nutrition here in India.

In conclusion, I add my voice to that of Pur, and wish us all a productive week. And I stand ready to support our work in whatever way I can.

Thank you.

Dr. Purwiyatno Hariyadi, Vice Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission

Excellency's, Representatives of FAO and WHO, Chair of the CCASIA, Codex Secretariat, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

A very Good Morning to you all. It is a great honour for me to be here, participating in the 21st session of the CCASIA. In this special occasion, my fellow Vice-Chair, Steve is also here, and will deliver his remark later on. Steve and I are here to be close to all members, to offer support if necessary.

I would like to use this opportunity to highlight the importance of the 21st session of the FAO / WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia (CCASIA). In particular, I want to underline the importance of the word coordinating. From the dictionary, I learned that coordinating means "bringing different elements of something complex into a harmonious and efficient relationship". This coordinating forum, is very important not only for the Asian region, but also for a better and safer global food supply chain.

As we know, the world increasingly depends on a global supply chain to source food and agricultural products. And Asia region has a major role to play in this global supply chain. One study estimated that Asia region contributing for about 19% of total global food and agriculture exports and 31% of total food and agriculture imports.

Codex has worked developing and encouraging implementation of harmonized international standards, codes of practices and guidelines covering all aspects of food safety and quality, including handling and distribution of food along the food chain. And this include many varieties of food and agricultural products exported (and imported) by Asian countries. Consequently, many codex standards are of immense importance to Asia.

In addition to strengthening respective national food control regulatory frameworks, developing regional collaboration and coordination to enhance active participation of Asia in Codex is also very important. Active participation is an important component to (i) ensure that the standards adopted by the codex are truly applicable and relevant for the region, and (ii) ensure that no one, including small farmers and SMEs, will be left behind. Considering that there are many similarity of food and agricultural product produced in the asian regions, then establishing a coordinating forum to address shared concern and interest is very logical way forward.

The importance of this coordination forum becomes even more apparent, especially because food safety issues that arise increasingly involve more and more countries. Most of us are familiar with the "From Farm to Table" approach to food safety management. With international trade; we should remember that the "Farm" might be located in country A, while the "Table" might be located in country B, or C. Consequently, if we want to manage food safety globally, then joint efforts involving many countries, along the global food supply chain, should be done.

Example of such joint effort is the initiatives taken by India, Bhutan and Nepal. These three countries have jointly developed the successful Codex Trust Fund Project, focusing on, among other, capacity building on Codex standard procedures and processes. This initiative, I believe, begins with the identification of common concerns and interests, and then comes up with the logical proposal to achieve a common goal of increasing the capacity to participate more actively and effectively in the Codex system. I think we, Asia, should aim to have more of such initiatives. Other innovative mechanism of coordination should be explored as well, to ensure that key issues for Asia are thoroughly discussed and considered in the codex standard development procedure.

Finally, I would like to wish all delegations a successful session.

And, as stated before, Steve and I will be happy if our presence here can provide any support, to all members.

Thank you.

Mr. Sridhar Dharmapuri, Senior Food Safety and Nutrition Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Ms. Rita Teotia, Chairperson, FSSAI; RC of CCASIA, Vice Chairs of the CAC, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to join the Regional Committee Co-ordinator, WHO and the Codex Secretariat in welcoming you to the 21st session of CCASIA in Goa. I am also pleased to convey warm greetings from the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok and from Mr Tomio Shichiri, the FAO Representative in India.

As we begin this conference of Asian countries today, let's reflect on the region we are in. It is the world's economic engine. GDP growth rates are among the highest in the world. The largest global producers of some key primary commodities – rice, pulses, oilseeds, millets, sugar, milk, fruits and vegetables, fish, eggs, pork – are all in Asia. These big volumes in the supply chain need to be managed, with consistent and safe practices. These commodities are traded globally. Also due to its increasing prosperity, Asia is importing more food from the rest of the world. Here's where the standard setting work of Codex acquires immense economic and public health significance. It enables countries across continents with diverse food control systems to become part of global food chains and trade seamlessly. Let's also not forget that the countries assembled here are home to world famous cuisines. Not only are these reaching hotels and kitchens worldwide, they are promoting more trade in high-value niche food sectors as well as tourism in Asia. Traditional and local foods, therefore provide a rich vein of work for Codex to develop regional and sub-regional standards. Major trade blocs – APEC, ASEAN, SAARC and possibly the RCEP – are anchored to the economies of this region. Food standards and especially the Codex way of multilateral, consultative standards formulation, therefore, contributes much to the ease of doing business in food and agriculture, especially for smallholder farmers, and ensuring good, safe food for everyone. In step with the rapid strides made by Asia, the use of new and improved production and processing and the adoption of information technology to facilitate e-commerce has grown at a fast pace.

The work of Codex is significant in the light of the FERG-WHO study that showed lack of hygiene and presence of parasites as the two major causes of food-borne illnesses in Asia and the Pacific respectively. Anti-microbial resistance is emerging as a major threat as well. Many of these risks can actually be mitigated by incorporating good practices across and within sectors. These are available freely as Codex texts and many of these are common sense measures across the food chain which can be put in place at home, school and in the work place. If systematically implemented, they can ensure that one-in-ten people in the world would not fall sick due to food-borne causes (WHO) and can probably save up to 95-billion-dollars annually in low and middle income countries (World Bank). The difference that such savings would make to the region, especially when most of the countries here are off-track with respect to achieving the SDGs, is evident.

This year has seen two major international conferences on food safety – the first was in Addis Ababa, co-organized by FAO, WHO and the African Union with a food control and public health perspective; and the second by FAO, WHO and WTO in Geneva on trade and standards. These two high-level events have firmly

placed the topic of food safety front and center of the food agenda, alongside ending hunger and tackling the consequences of climate change. Unlike the other two priorities, food safety is under-represented within the SDGs (notably SDG2) but we now have the opportunity to elevate its status on the international development agenda and integrate it as we proceed towards 2030. In this region, FAO is following up on the conferences with its ongoing effort to develop indicators for food safety and intends to organize a regional conference on food safety for the Asia and Pacific region in 2020.

Lastly, this session will nominate a new co-ordinator for this Regional Co-ordination Committee. We will have the opportunity to thank our hosts, India, for their able leadership over two terms and look forward to the election of a new co-ordinator to continue the important work of the CCSAIA. I conclude by thanking the organizers, FSSAI, the Government of the beautiful state of Goa and the Government of India for their excellent arrangements and warm hospitality. We look forward to engaging and fruitful discussions with all the distinguished delegates.

Thank you.

Mr. Gyanendra GONGAL, Scientist, World Health Organization Regional Office for South East Asia

Distinguished representatives and participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here with you for this timely event.

Although our Regional Director, Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, would have very much liked to attend this important meeting, she is unable to do so due to a prior commitment. I therefore take great pleasure in delivering these remarks on her behalf.

At the outset, the Regional Director notes that unhealthy diets and unsafe food are among the top risk factors for the global burden of disease. About 11 million people die every year due to excess consumption of salt, sugars and trans fats, and inadequate consumption of whole grains, vegetables and fruits. An additional 8 million people die from obesity and maternal and child undernutrition, while foodborne disease is responsible for a further 420 000 deaths.

Altogether, Dr Khetrapal Singh says, unhealthy diets, unsafe food and malnutrition in all forms account for about one third of all deaths globally. This has a substantial economic impact, costing Low- and Middle-Income Countries in Asia not less than US 63.1 billion in 2016.

The Regional Director emphasizes the need for international cooperation across all sectors to ensure food is safe. To that end, she says, trade and investment policies and agreements have a major influence on the food that ends up in shops, restaurants and our refrigerators. It is therefore critical that there is coherence between policies on trade, food and health. Notably, safe food boosts agricultural productivity and value chain development, improves market access, and enables people to prosper socially and economically.

Distinguished participants,

Food safety is key to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. There is no food security without food safety. The international food standards produced by the Codex Alimentarius Commission are among the most important global public goods WHO produces, together with FAO.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has played a vital role both in protecting the health of consumers, and in ensuring fair practices in the food trade. Codex standards and guidelines have critical roles to play in ensuring people have healthy diets and safe food. Today they are as important as ever in protecting people from unhealthy diets and contaminated food.

All countries have a duty to ensure that Codex standards and guidelines are developed and updated to achieve these goals. To help do that, the Codex Trust Fund has been established by FAO and WHO to support Member States to build strong, solid and sustainable national capacity to engage in Codex.

The current Codex Trust Fund is in its fourth year of operation and, thanks to donor contributions, is now supporting 14 countries. A further 13 countries will receive support to build strong and sustainable national Codex systems that will allow all countries to participate fully and effectively in the work of Codex.

Dr Khetrapal Singh notes that WHO SEARO and FAORAP were happy to facilitate the submission of a project proposal by Bhutan, India and Nepal.

She congratulates these three countries for their hard work and commitment to work together. It is the first multi country project approved by the Codex Trust Fund at global level, and the first CTF project in Asia.

The Regional Director is confident that this project will further strengthen national Codex activities in participating countries through inter-country codex collaborations, including common positions in Codex

standard setting process in the next three years. WHO will continue to provide technical support to implement this project. The future scope of group applications will depend on its successful implementation.

Distinguished participants,

Earlier this year, FAO, WHO, WTO and the African Union hosted two high level food safety conferences – the first International Food Safety Conference in Addis Ababa, and the International Forum on Food Safety and Trade in Geneva. Both events highlighted the need for urgent international action to bolster food safety, align food safety strategies and approaches across sectors and borders, and to reinforce efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Regional Director looks forward to hearing from countries about what they expect WHO and FAO to do to capitalize on the work started at these two meetings. For this reason, WHO and FAO have decided to discuss specific follow-up actions at each of the six FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committees, including at this meeting.

To that end, Dr Khetrapal Singh urges your full engagement and input, and looks very much forward to being apprised of the outcomes, and to further implementing the Region's Framework for Action of Food Safety.

She concludes by wishing you a successful meeting.

I echo that sentiment and hope you have a comfortable stay in Goa.

Smt. Rita Teotia, Chairperson of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India

Smt Rita Teaotia, Chairperson FSSAI during her inaugural address welcomed delegates & representatives from the member countries. Speaking at the event, Smt. Teaotia stated that "*FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia (CCASIA) is a very significant regional coordinating committee which affords its members the opportunity to focus on the concerns of the Asia region with respect to food safety and quality.*" She further mentioned that this gathering for the 21st Session of CCASIA would pave the way for furthering and ensuring food safety and public health as well as trade and economic development in our region and beyond. "*This is a difficult time for trade and globally economies of some significant and very large markets are slowing. Trade tensions and rising protectionism are increasing and in this environment the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and CCASIA in particular offer us a great opportunity to work together to strengthen both the Codex systems as well as our regional cooperation*" Ms. Teaotia highlighted while stressing on the importance of such deliberations.

She further emphasized that Asia, as a region, is perhaps, the most diverse of the Codex regions its member countries span from the most advanced countries to amongst the least; sophisticated; highly educated and well resourced nations to countries grappling with infrastructure and health challenges. With diversity in terms of linguistic, economic and cultural dimensions, Asia, no doubt is one of the fastest growing regions in the world and shares an ancient history of robust trading relations. "*Countries trade extensively with each other and at least in food, almost 60 percent of food trade is within the region. To my view, this alone is enough reason for us to develop a common ground for cooperation. She stressed upon creating a network of scientific and research institutions for collection and assimilation of scientific facts and data for the region and worthwhile, to create an IT enabled information platform to exchange information regarding food frauds and other areas of core interest*", she elaborated.

Ms Teaotia also highlighted the role of capacity building initiatives between the Codex member countries in Asia. She mentioned that the countries need to pool their resources and provide support to least developed countries in the region. FAO and WHO have taken several initiatives in this direction. "*On behalf of India, FSSAI is happy to offer the capacity we have built-up at the international training centre for food safety and nutrition at Mumbai for such capacity building programs*", FSSAI Chair remarked.