

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda Item 14

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION
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THE ROLE OF THE CCEXEC

(Prepared by the Chair and the Vice-Chairs of the Codex Alimentarius Commission)

BACKGROUND

1.CCEXEC74 requested the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) to prepare and submit a paper on the role of CCEXEC based on the discussions held at the CCEXEC workshop immediately prior to CCEXEC74 for consideration at CCEXEC75.

2.The Workshop for the Chairs of the Codex Committees and the Regional Coordinators (Rome, 23 - 25 September 2017) counted on a broad participation which ensured an adequate representation of the various geographical areas of the world to which the Members of the Commission, the new Bureau and the Codex Secretariat belong. It also counted on the participation of facilitators to better guide the discussions over two days.

3.One of the issues discussed during the Workshop was how to improve the work developed by the CCEXEC to act as the Executive organ of the Commission.

4. According to Rule V of the Procedural Manual, the Executive Committee may, in particular, make proposals to the Commission regarding, general orientation, strategic planning, and programming of the work of the Commission, study special problems and shall assist in the management of the Commission's programme of standards development, namely by conducting a critical review of proposals to undertake work and monitor the progress of standards development. It shall consider specific matters referred to it by the Directors-General of FAO and WHO as well as estimate of expenditure for the Commission's proposed programme of work.

COMMENTS

5. Many elements came up for discussion during the Workshop. The purpose of this document is to collect and present these main elements to start and guide a more in-depth discussion on how to improve the work of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

(i) *Prioritization of emerging issues among others and identification of ways to address them*

6. The CCEXEC needs to be an efficient Codex Subsidiary Body to identify innovative issues aiming to strengthen the science-policy interface of Members and regions of the world to prioritize the Codex work. This capacity of science-policy interfaces refers to the many ways in which technicians, negotiators, policy-makers and other stakeholders of the different CCEXEC regions link up to prioritize emerging issues and jointly develop knowledge to address them in the Codex agenda. While many approaches exist for identification of emerging issues, common features include the involvement of experts and formalized processes drawing on scientific evidence, assessments, and projections.

7. Furthermore, it is paramount to keep in mind that the CCEXEC is more than a negotiation body and should always work towards benefiting the Codex Alimentarius Commission and, of course, food safety and fair practices in food trade in the broadest context when priority issues are involved. Information from assessment on Member Country Needs is essential to establish priorities.

(ii) Investment in time to reach consensus because this leads to robust and transparent standards.

8. The Codex Alimentarius Commission - seeking every effort be made to reach agreement on the adoption or amendment of standards upon consensus - recommends the following measures to facilitate consensus: proposals in the step process upon well-established scientific bases on current data; detailed documentation providing for thorough discussions of the issues at meetings of the committees concerned; informal meetings of the parties concerned should disagreements arise; relevant concerns be taken into account and adequate commitments reached; highlighting to Committees and their Chairpersons that matters should not be passed on to the Commission until such time as consensus has been achieved at the technical level.

9. Reaching consensus requires upright relationships and communications between Members. It requires high levels of respect and trust, and effective dialogue that allows Members to explore the issues, consider other members' interests and challenge assumptions before they reach agreement. As a result, agreements made by consensus are often more creative and more readily implemented. The CCEXEC should be an environment for work based on these elements.

(iii) Monitoring the scientific basis and resources

10. Applications of science and technology within the food system have allowed production of foods in adequate quantities to meet the needs of society, as it has evolved. Today, our production-to-consumption food system is complex, and our food is largely safe, tasty, nutritious, abundant, diverse, convenient, and less costly and more readily accessible than ever before. Scientific and technological advancements must be accelerated and applied in developed and developing nations alike, if we are to feed a growing world population.

11. The foundation of Codex standards is sound scientific evidence. From the very beginning, the Codex Alimentarius has been a science-based activity. Experts and specialists in a wide range of disciplines have contributed to every aspect of the Codex Alimentarius to ensure that its standards withstand the most rigorous scientific scrutiny.

12. CCEXEC plays a paramount role in prioritizing the standards development setting process, also basing this work on scientific risk assessment developed by the expert groups. Furthermore, the Executive Committee should monitor the activities, budgetary and financial matters related to the FAO/WHO Scientific Support to Codex. In doing so, the CCEXEC should help the Commission on decisions or recommendations related to science.

(iv) More active/substantive role in critical review.

13. The Codex Alimentarius relies on the expertise and collective knowledge of experienced professionals from different regions of the world to consider whether changes, revisions or proposals of new standards are indicated or needed. The process conducted by the Organization is based on transparency, robust negotiation and consensus building processes.

14. The Codex Procedural Manual states that: "An on-going critical review shall ensure that proposals for new work and draft standards submitted to the Commission for adoption continue to meet the strategic priorities of the Commission and can be developed within a reasonable period of time, taking into account the requirements and availability of scientific expert advice".

15. The CCEXEC should actively and critically review the work of the committees in accordance with the Uniform Procedure for the Elaboration of Codex Standards and Related Texts, Part 2 and for each Committee, take into account the recommendations of the Secretariat and the comments of the Chairs to:

- Examine standards and related texts submitted to the Commission for adoption;
- Review the status of development of standards against the timeframe agreed by the Commission; and
- Review proposals for development/revision of standards.

(v) Consider actions between CAC sessions

16. As the Executive arm of the Commission, the CCEXEC should clearly identify actions between the CAC Sessions that can advance and improve the Codex Alimentarius work.

17. These actions, e.g. Subcommittee activities, Electronic Working Groups and Physical meetings, should be proposed based on the priorities established by the Regions and Members, and always related to the Codex mandate.

18. In doing so the standards setting negotiation process is accelerated and gaps sometimes filled by other Organizations, especially those related with Private Standards - can be avoided.

(vi) Understanding finance/budget role and process

19. It is known that due to financial crises, international organizations have also been suffering financial and budgetary restrictions in their activities.

20. In order to give effective advice for decisions and actions to the various Subsidiary Bodies and the Commission, the CCEXEC should revise and give advice to the Commission on the Codex and the FAO/WHO Scientific Support to Codex Budgetary and Financial Matters.

(vii) Working as a team

21. "Two heads are better than one." Everybody has heard the old saying encouraging teamwork, but it is necessary to have a clear sense of what working together really does for Codex.

Teamwork usually produces and fosters creativity and learning, blends complementary strengths, builds trust, and teaches consensus resolution skills, thus promoting a wider sense of ownership and encouraging healthy negotiation processes.

22. The CCEXEC should be the forum to act as the executive branch of the Commission instead of just one negotiation environment. To accomplish this task, it seems essential to work as a team, understanding that it is paramount to act towards world food safety and fair practices in trade.

RECOMMENDATION

23. CCEXEC creates a sub-committee with the following terms of reference:

- to discuss the seven topics as raised above; and
- to make recommendations to CCEXEC77 as appropriate.