

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
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JOINT OFFICE: Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00100 ROME Tel: 39 06 57051 www.codexalimentarius.net Email: codex@fao.org Facsimile: 39 06 5705 4593

Agenda Item 10

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Twenty-sixth Session, FAO Headquarters, Rome (Italy), 30 June-7 July 2003

JOINT FAO/WHO EVALUATION OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS AND OTHER FAO AND WHO WORK ON FOOD STANDARDS

Addendum 5: Implementation of Other Recommendations

1. INTRODUCTION

1. The major areas covered by the recommendations not addressed elsewhere in this document concern aspects of the management structure of Codex, developing country involvement, expert advice and scientific risk assessment, and capacity building. The majority of these recommendations are addressed to the parent organizations.

Management structure of Codex

2. The Executive Summary of the Evaluation report (para. 11) states that within the overall structure of FAO and WHO, Codex should have greater independence for proposing its work programme and for the execution of that work programme, once approved by the two parent organizations. Proposals are designed to improve business management and strengthen central management of standards development, leading to greater speed in standard setting.

3. Paragraphs 151 to 161 of the Evaluation report raise several issues in this context, including the need for the Secretariat to be strengthened with respect to its capacity to give guidance to committees and to developing communication with all interested parties. The need for increased resources for the Secretariat is addressed, while also pointing out that streamlining in reporting procedures might to a certain extent offset the immediate increase in documentation requirements implicit in the recommendations (see also recommendation 21 on meeting reports).

4. Other relevant paragraphs of the Evaluation report are 79, 86-87, and 100-107. Relevant recommendations are 5, 7, 13, 14, 15, 29, 30 and 31.

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Expert advice and scientific risk assessment

5. According to para. 22 of the Executive Summary of the Evaluation report, expert advice to Codex needs to have greater identity and coordination and significantly increased resources, and its independence and transparency need to be further reinforced within FAO/WHO. There should also be greater distinction between the function of risk assessment undertaken by experts and that of risk management undertaken by Codex committees. A consultation on strengthening scientific support for Codex decision making was regarded as an immediate priority (para. 25 and recommendation 37). The relevant paragraphs of the report are 162 to 202. Recommendations related to this area are Nos 32-40.

Capacity building

6. Paragraphs 203 to 249 of the Evaluation report outline the findings of the Evaluation Team and Expert Panel in this area, while paragraphs 250-256 suggest improvements, leading to recommendations 41 and 42.

3. AREAS FOR ACTION BY FAO/WHO

7. Most of the recommendations addressed to the parent organizations are requirements for additional resources in three main areas: the Codex Secretariat, scientific advice/risk assessment and capacity building. The priority importance of scientific advice was underlined by many countries, as was the need to reinforce the Secretariat to enable it to provide support to the improved working of the system.

Codex Secretariat (management and reporting process)

8. Most respondents considered that the current rules of procedure provided sufficient scope for adequate reporting by the Commission to the governing bodies of FAO and WHO.

9. In its management response (ALINORM 03/25/3-Add.1), FAO has indicated that the procedure exists for the Commission to report, as necessary, to the respective governing bodies through their directors-general, while noting that ways of improving the transparency and efficiency of the process might be explored. While WHO has not made any official comment, the trend observed in its governing bodies over the past decade has been towards the reduction of standing items on the agendas, in order to streamline business and effect economies.

10. All respondents were in favour of greater independence for Codex in the planning and execution of its work programme, as approved by the two parent organizations, within the overall structure of FAO and WHO. This recommendation has also been endorsed by FAO and WHO. FAO and WHO management are jointly reviewing the specific modalities necessary to meet the requirements of this recommendation.

11. Respondents have unanimously supported the recommendation to increase the seniority of Secretariat staff, while some have also pointed out that, in addition to an elevation in seniority, an increase in the number and an orientation towards more strategic and analytical functions in support of the Executive Committee and subsidiary bodies would be desirable. One respondent has suggested that it might be useful to draw up a mandate for the Codex Secretariat, in order to clearly define the new strategic and managerial responsibilities of the Executive Committee and the Secretariat respectively. FAO has indicated in its management response that it considers that in view of the recent upgrading of the post of Executive Secretary, further upgrading at this stage would be premature. Both organizations have however agreed that the overall seniority of staff should be raised, and steps have already been taken to that effect.

12. While most respondents supported the recommendation to relocate the Codex Secretariat within FAO, both FAO and WHO are of the view that the current location is appropriate, and have recalled that the appointment of the Secretary is the prerogative of the Directors-General of FAO and WHO. The Secretariat is not in a position to make any comments in this respect.

13. FAO and WHO should be strongly urged to implement all necessary measures to support the increased responsibilities of the Secretariat. One of the urgent tasks of the reinforced Secretariat should be to work with the Executive Committee to clearly delineate their respective functions and responsibilities (see also the paper on Improved Process for Standards Management, ALINORM 03/26/11: Add. 3).

Codex Secretariat (resources)

14. Respondents were unanimously in favour of increased core funding for the Secretariat, while recognizing the practical difficulties for FAO and WHO. Some looked more particularly to WHO to take on a more active role. As stated in their responses to the Evaluation, FAO and WHO are aware that implementation of the recommendations represent very substantial budget increases for both organizations. Depending upon the total resource levels approved for the FAO and WHO budgets for 2004-2005, absorption of all additional resource requirements necessary to implement the recommendations would be difficult. Both organizations are actively seeking to mobilize resources for this high-priority area. The Secretariat is not in a position to make any comments in this respect.

15. All respondents supported the recommendation to upgrade the Codex web site, in view of its recognized usefulness. Although some countries (especially developing ones) considered that information on national standards would be very valuable, most of the countries which gave detailed comment on this issue expressed concern that the costs of implementation would be likely to outweigh the benefits. The difficulties of maintaining such a data base were recognized.

16. FAO and WHO should be urged to ensure that the Codex Secretariat has the necessary human/financial resources to maintain the Codex web site, in order to optimize its communication capability.

17. Countries should provide the Codex Secretariat with information on the relevant national web sites so that links can be established from the Codex web site.

Scientific advice and risk assessment

18. The majority of respondents supported the recommendation that JEMRA should be a permanent committee. Some felt however that the mandate and objectives of JEMRA should be clarified before the recommendation is implemented. Both FAO and WHO have agreed to this recommendation.

19. The recommendation for FAO and WHO to allocate a clear budget and human resources to scientific advice and risk assessment was identified to be of high priority by the majority of respondents. All respondents have expressed their support for increased funding for risk assessment. One respondent encouraged WHO to commit additional resources to risk assessment as one component of its increased support to Codex. FAO and WHO have agreed that the situation concerning joint scientific advice and risk assessment needs a complete review and have started to take the necessary steps to implement this recommendation. It is felt however that the parent organizations should retain full responsibility for the provision of scientific advice, which goes beyond the needs of Codex, while having due regard for Codex priorities.

20. Respondents broadly supported the need for good quality data, especially from developing countries with distinct dietary patterns. It was suggested that, in view of the breadth and scope of work involved, priorities should be established and agreed to, and cost implications carefully reviewed by FAO and WHO.

21. Most respondents agreed in principle to the payment of experts, as have FAO and WHO. It was stressed that the main criteria for selection of experts should still be transparency, scientific credentials and expertise, and experts should be required to provide a statement of interest.

22. Most respondents supported the proposed separation of risk assessment and risk management, while several cautioned that these functions were interdependent and that communication between them was critical.

23. All respondents strongly supported the recommendation for a consultancy study/expert consultation on expert advice. FAO and WHO have already agreed to go ahead with the implementation of this recommendation. A progress report is being provided to the Commission (ALINORM 03/26/13).

24. While several respondents supported the recommendation to establish a scientific committee and a post of Joint Coordinator, most nevertheless expressed a certain caution and the majority of those who expressed an opinion on this issue suggested that a decision on the matter should be held in abeyance until the completion of the consultancy and expert consultation.

Capacity building

25. Those respondents who commented on this recommendation supported the need for closer coordination and cooperation between FAO and WHO in respect of technical assistance and capacity building activities. The establishment of the FAO/WHO Trust Fund for Participation in Codex was also welcomed by several respondents, while the need was stressed for careful coordination with any other organizations managing projects in related areas.

26. There was no support for the extension of the mandate of the Codex Trust Fund beyond direct participation in Codex activities. The FAO/WHO Consultative Group for the Trust Fund has also indicated that such an expansion would not be appropriate. See ALINORM 03/26/12 for more detailed information concerning the status of the Trust Fund and arrangements for its operation.

27. ALINORM 03/26/14 contains a report of FAO and WHO initiatives, also in collaboration with other agencies, on capacity building and detailed information will be provided in an Information Document (CAC/26 INF/4) for the Commission.

28. The Codex Secretariat is not in a position to make any comments with respect to the recommendations on capacity building.