

Report of the FAO/WHO workshop on “National Food Control Systems”

Palais des Congrès
Yaoundé, Cameroun
28 January 2013

A workshop was organized by FAO and WHO, with support from the FAO/WHO Project and Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex (Codex Trust Fund), at the Palais des Congrès in Yaoundé, Cameroun on 28 January 2013. The workshop was hosted by Codex Cameroun as the Regional Coordinator for Africa and was organized immediately preceding the 20th session of the FAO/WHO coordinating committee for Africa (CCAFRICA).

In preparation for the pre-CCAFRICA workshop, a general consultation among member countries was organized by the regional coordinator, Cameroon, proposing to choose among four topics for the focus of the workshop. From among the responses, the topic of “national food control systems” was selected.

National food control systems set the framework and enabling environment for Codex standards to be transposed into national regulations and become meaningful. It should be noted that the topic chosen is coherent with the previous FAO/WHO workshop that was organized prior to the 19th session of CCAFRICA¹ which explored the process of transposing Codex standards into national regulations. Discussions at this workshop had resulted in initial exchanges on different dimensions of national food control systems, and how Codex Member States might monitor the implementation of these standards by food producers. A question raised at the end of the previous workshop was about the “best way” to organize this system, taken into account specific consideration like:

- scarce resources from the State to invest in national food control systems,
- lack of awareness from higher decision makers;
- the important role played by small scale food producers, that do not have technical or financial resources to allow immediate compliance, hence the need for the State to invest in an “enabling environment”;
- the “double track” systems that exist in many countries that often allow a very specific and well performing agency to certify high value-added products for export, while commodities traded domestically are subject to much less control.

Another contextual issue of importance are the discussions currently underway in the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) on proposed principles and guidelines for national food control systems. This text poses both challenges and opportunities for developing countries. Challenges include ensuring that the most crucial issues for developing countries are adequately reflected in this text. At the same time there is an opportunity provided by the text being drafted in an inclusive way. Both the challenges and opportunities highlight the importance of participation from developing countries, in particular from Africa, to ensure that the text reflects the needs and realities of national food control systems worldwide.

¹ “Implementing Codex standards- what does it entail?”(Accra, Ghana, 31 January 2011)

In light of this background and context, the objective of the current workshop, organized in conjunction with the 20th session of CCAFRICA, was to increase participants' understanding of the principles guiding the design and operations of national food control systems. The workshop facilitated the exchange of successful experiences in this regard, especially in a context of scarcity of public funds and important capacity development needs that characterize the majority of African countries. The programme of the workshop is attached as Annex 1. The list of participants is attached as Annex 2.

A first presentation was made by the Codex Secretariat aimed at introducing the [draft principles and guidelines for national food control systems being developed in CCFICS](#). Participants were given an update on the core components of this text which provides a harmonized framework for national food control systems.

This presentation was followed by discussions allowing countries to share their views and discuss their positions on this text. The question of the definition of “Competent Authority (ies)” in the document was raised by some delegations as needing more clarity to allow a proper identification of which institution was the Food Safety Authority. It was explained that any organisation/agency/department could be considered as a Competent Authority in relation to its responsibility and mandate within a national food control system; this must relate to clear technical competencies and resources to implement their mandate. One delegation pointed out that the issues of genetically modified organisms, illegal imported products, control of street-vended foods, and the lack of capacity in laboratories (diversity of analysis performed, quality assurance) were not sufficiently addressed in the document. Another delegation pointed out that the role of public health authorities was also not addressed sufficiently in the document. Participants were informed that the document was meant to be generic and related to national control systems in a broader sense. It was not intended to address specific issues.

Some delegations argued for the need of a short and concise document which could be used for advocacy purposes at the highest political level. South Africa informed participants that they had had the opportunity to participate in the work of the CCFICS in developing the document and requested other members to support this work.

The second part of the workshop was kicked off with two background presentations aimed at demonstrating: 1) how different coordination arrangements can still lead to efficient results; 2) how common principles can be implemented in different ways to fit national characteristics and resources.

The first presentation highlighted [mechanisms for cooperation, collaboration and coordination](#) which are crucial for efficient national food control systems. Different modalities for organizing a national food control system were illustrated, with the strengths and weaknesses of each highlighted. A phased approach for strengthening collaboration and communication in food control systems was discussed. A specific example on a collaborative programme on anti microbial resistance was shared with participants.

The second presentation provided information on [core elements and functions of national food control systems](#). Particular reference was made to issues frequently observed in African countries, arising from the current reforms at legal and institutional level, and taking into account the specific context of regional economic groups and regional initiatives. The importance of proper policy and regulatory frameworks was highlighted, as well as the underlying principles that have shaped these in the last 15 years. The presentation also

discussed institutional frameworks, linking to collaboration and coordination issues and control and surveillance programmes, as a way of obtaining relevant information that may be used to strengthen the risk basis for sanitary measures, inspection services, laboratory capacities, information education, and communication strategies and programmes.

The background presentations were followed by three country presentations ([Mali](#), [Kenya](#) and [Morocco](#)) which provided information on how different countries organize, their national food control systems, discussed the recent reforms that were undertaken, and highlighted the challenges they still face.

This was followed by an open debate which allowed participants to exchange their experiences, highlight common challenges and identify different possible options for moving forward. Participants were interested to discuss the challenges faced by the three countries when building their systems, and the decision making process when faced with multiple players such as that encountered in the Kenyan example. Questions also explored the role of industry in these systems, and the flow of information between various partners of the national food safety control system. Specific questions relating to the control of fraud were addressed to Mali.

In conclusion the following key points were highlighted from the day's discussions:

- The CCFICS draft principles and guidelines are a reference framework for countries allowing them to set their objectives and raise awareness among policy and decision-makers.
- It was noted that many countries have established food safety authorities or agencies. While the mandate of these authorities may vary, it is important that they result from a progressive process based on a specific analysis of the needs.
- While system may differ in their organization, they combine the same core components.
- The exchange of information provided countries with the basis for better identification of their working priorities in upgrading their national food control systems.
- For FAO/WHO the workshop was an opportunity to better define priorities of work for the region and the tools that may need to be developed to respond to the needs of the region.

It was agreed that better understanding of national food control systems prevailing in the region was a first step toward working together to develop systems that are harmonized and coherent.

An end of workshop evaluation tool was administered. From among the validated questionnaires received, the results below present the average of the answer to the different questions appearing on the questionnaire. Questions were answered using a five-point scale where 1 indicates the lowest level of satisfaction and 5 indicates the highest level of satisfaction.

Questions related to workshop administration and organization

- Travel arrangements were satisfactory: 3.48

- The workshop facilities were conducive to learning: 3.41
- The workshop was well organized: 3.14

Questions related to the objectives of the workshop

- The objectives of the course were clearly explained: 4.39
- To what extent were the objectives of the workshop achieved:4.15

Questions related to learning from the workshop

- The topic of the workshop was relevant to furthering use of Codex standards and ensuring effective participation in Codex: 4.34
- The workshop was relevant to my workplace needs: 4.42
- The trainers were of high quality: 4.36
- The workshop materials aided my comprehension of the course: 3.49
- There was sufficient time for group discussion and questions: 3.44

Questions related to which workshop sessions were most useful

- Presentation on CCFICS guidelines; 4.51
- Presentation on cooperation and collaboration: 4.21
- Presentation on food control systems components: 4.35
- Presentation on national examples (Kenya, Morocco, Mali): 4.13
- Discussions: 3.87

Additional topics recommended by participants for future pre-Regional Coordinating Committee workshops:

- focus on selected principles for national food control systems as per guidance developed by CCFICS – what does this mean in practice?
- legislation and regulation (adoption of regulations at national level deriving from Codex Standards).
- risk analysis in the specific context of African countries.
- awareness raising approached among high level policy makers about food safety and Codex.
- national codex committees: criteria for efficiency.
- consumer education programmes.
- traceability and certification systems.

The quantitative evaluation results, in conjunction with the qualitative results (responses to open-ended questions) will be used by:

1) the Secretariat of the Codex Trust Fund and Codex Cameroun as host country to identify what worked well and where problems were encountered in administration and organization of the workshop in order to ensure that the learning is used in the organization of future workshops;

2) FAO/WHO, the Codex Trust Fund Secretariat and Codex Cameroun as regional coordinator for Africa to evaluate:

- a) The extent to which the workshop achieved its objectives;
- b) The relevance of different modules and learning gained by participants;
- c) Topics that might be addressed in future FAO/WHO workshops aimed at further enhancing the participation of African countries in Codex.

Annex 1: workshop programme

Topic	Timing	Presentation by	Objective of the presentation
Registration of participants	8.00-9.00		
Welcome and introduction	9.00-9.15	FAO/WHO	Introduce workshop, setting the stage
Presentation of the draft CCFICS guidelines	9.15-9.45	Verna Carolissen, Codex Secretariat	Update participants on the core components of the text
Discussion	9.45-10.30		Share and discuss national positions about this text
Coffee break	10.30-11.00		
Efficient food control system : cooperation, collaboration and coordination	11.00-11.30	Samuel Kariuki, WHO	Explain the fundamental role of coordination. Demonstrate how different coordination arrangements can lead to efficient results
Food control systems- core elements and functions	11.30-12.15	Catherine Bessy, FAO	Provide structured information of food control system pillars and their main characteristics Show how common principles can be implemented in different ways to fit national characteristics and resources
Discussion	12.15-13.00		Clarify and discuss the 2 previous presentations
Lunch break	13.00-14.00		
Presentation by 3 countries of their national food control systems	14.00-15.30	Kenya, Mali and Morocco country Representatives	Explain different national arrangements for implementing similar functions
Coffee break	15.30-16.00		
Discussions	16.00-16.45		
Conclusions and wrap up	16.45-17.00	FAO/WHO	

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