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Progress Report on Sustainable Funding for FAO's Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme

I. Introduction

1. The 24th session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) discussed FAO's strategy for improving food safety globally.¹ The Committee endorsed the key areas of work outlined in the strategy and recommended FAO, its Members and its partners explore new sources of funding to be allocated in order to meet the challenge of the growing demands on FAO's Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme.

2. This information paper provides a more in-depth look at the role and scope of FAO's Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme and the challenges to adequate and sustainable funding. It also provides an update on how the situation is being addressed within the framework of the implementation of FAO's strategy for improving food safety globally.

II. Role of FAO Scientific Advice Programme in Global Food Safety Governance

3. FAO plays a key global role in food safety governance. FAO together with WHO provide for the operations of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), the world's preeminent body for global food standards. The Joint FAO/WHO CAC is administered by a single joint secretariat that is hosted at FAO. The operating costs for the secretariat are borne by the budget of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards to which FAO contributes 80-85% and WHO 15-20%. Additionally, FAO implements a programme of food safety capacity development that aims to increase developing country participation in the work and decisions of Codex and to enable increasing numbers of countries to implement national standards and regulations that are consistent with the Codex Alimentarius.

4. Each of the food safety advice programmes of the two Organizations, which provide scientific advice and risk assessment in support of Codex standard setting, are a key element of a science-based global food safety governance serving the deliberations of a number of subsidiary Committees to the

¹ COAG 2014/5: www.fao.org/3/a-ml159e.pdf

This document can be accessed using the Quick Response Code on this page; an FAO initiative to minimize its environmental impact and promote greener communications. Other documents can be consulted at www.fao.org



CAC. Without the independent, authoritative and globally-relevant advice from the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committees JECFA, JEMRA and JMPR² and ad hoc expert meetings, the CAC would not have the scientific basis upon which it can set, by consensus, the globally accepted pesticide MRLs, veterinary drug MRLs, maximum limits for contaminants in foods, additive specifications and risk-based codes of practice. Given the recognition of Codex food safety standards in the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) of the World Trade Organization, these Codex standards play a vital role in trade facilitation.

5. Whereas FAO hosts the single Joint Secretariat for CAC as noted above, the Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme is run separately in each of the Organizations. FAO and WHO each provide independently staff and non-staff costs for their individual contributions to the Programme, leveraging fully the complementary knowledge and expertise available within the respective Organization. The operating costs of the programmes are funded through very different models, however, while FAO covers almost all expenses through its regular budget (assessed contributions), WHO continues to rely for the majority of costs to be covered through voluntary contributions.

III. Recognizing the need for adequate and sustainable funding

6. For many years, Codex members have repeatedly called on FAO and WHO to provide stable and adequate staff and financial resources for the Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme as they recognize that this is essential for a well-functioning Codex Alimentarius system.

7. In 2012, a sub-committee of the Executive Committee of the CAC (CCEXEC) was formed to identify the various funding options and strategies that might be available to ensure sustainable support for the scientific advice provided by FAO/WHO for Codex activities. Since then there has been heightened attention to the question of adequate and sustainable funding for scientific advice at each meeting of CCEXEC and CAC.

8. To understand why the funding situation led to this concern of CAC, it should be noted that WHO has regularly reported to the CAC that its Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme receives limited regular budget funds only partially covering salary cost and no activity cost. The high reliance by WHO on voluntary funding creates instability for the Programme.

9. In the case of FAO, all staff resources and most of the activity funding (approximately 80%) for the Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme is provided from the FAO regular budget. The level of FAO regular budget support has remained largely constant over the last several biennia in the context of the Organization's overall no-growth budget. Since the 2014-15 biennium, FAO's staff and non-staff resources related to the work of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committees have been protected as Corporate Technical Activities, providing for the required stability and predictability of FAO funding.

10. The CAC has welcomed the actions of FAO in providing stability to the funding of its Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme. However, the CAC has noted that both organizations, FAO and WHO, need to ensure that their Scientific Advice Programmes are both adequately supported so that the Commission can rely on the continuity and predictability of the provision of scientific advice from the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committees.

11. Requests for scientific advice from Codex have been increasing in number and in complexity. The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committees have increased their efficiency in delivering scientific advice by utilizing better tools for more efficient communication and data sharing. Nonetheless, there is a growing backlog of requests. For example, the current requests for scientific advice from CCFA and CCPR have led to a two year backlog for JECFA and JMPR, respectively. This demonstrates an

² Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA); Joint Expert Meeting on Pesticide residues (JMPR); Joint Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA),

urgent need to expand the capacity of FAO and WHO to prepare and implement an increased number of Joint Expert Meetings in order to respond to CAC's increased demands.

IV. Addressing the need for increased and sustainable funding

12. Within Codex, a number of possible approaches to achieving a sustainable increase in funding of the FAO/WHO Scientific Advice Programme have been discussed since 2012. These are mainly:

- a) A mandatory contribution from Codex member countries based on the value of their food exports – This was rejected by the CAC.
- b) Broadening the base for voluntary contributions from countries – Discussions on this point included suggestions to consider renewing GIFSA³ in the light of lessons learned from more successful resource mobilization efforts.
- c) Expanding donor base to include non-state actors – On this point it was acknowledged that there were major challenges in light of strict FAO and WHO policies and rules regarding avoidance of conflict of interest or the perception of conflict of interest with regard to the Organizations' standard-setting work.
- d) Having both organizations, FAO and WHO, provide equitable and sufficient funding from their respective regular budgets – During discussions at the 38th Session of the CAC, the Codex Members stated that their preferred approach to achieving adequate and sustainable funding was for FAO and WHO to fund the entire Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme through their regular budgets in the same way that the Codex Secretariat is funded. However, it was recognized that this could only be feasible as a long-term solution requiring a decision of FAO and WHO governing bodies.

13. While discussions within the CAC have focussed on FAO and WHO staff and non-staff resources for scientific advice, both FAO and WHO have repeatedly advised Codex members that the successful working of the scientific advice programme is critically dependent on the willingness of countries to continue to provide experts to participate in the Joint Expert Committees. In recent years, there has been increasing difficulty in this regard.

V. Actions taken by FAO since the 24th Session of COAG

14. In response to the need for more stable funding, FAO has designated its Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme as a "Core Technical Activity" and has "ring-fenced" all staff and non-staff regular budget allocations related to this Programme within the Organization's overall and persistent no-growth regular budget and competing priorities.

15. In view of the need for increased funding for scientific advice, FAO has taken steps to facilitate extra-budgetary contributions from FAO Members. FAO and WHO have developed a project outline that describes the proposed approach to building an enhanced Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme that meets the growing needs of Codex. This project outline was presented to the 39th Session of the CAC in June 2016 where it was well received by members. This will be expanded to a full project document to further support resource mobilisation efforts.

16. In addition, FAO is in ongoing discussion with donors to mobilize resources through established as well as new channels. These activities have resulted in the much appreciated two-year secondment of a risk assessment expert by the government of Canada to strengthen the staff resources of FAO's scientific advice program from June 2016.

³ The Global Initiative for Food-related Scientific Advice (GIFSA) was established in 2007 to ensure the sustainable funding of the FAO (in collaboration with WHO) programme on the provision of scientific advice to the Codex Alimentarius Commission and member countries.

17. Furthermore, FAO is exploring possible approaches for engaging with non-state actors to increase the donor base and consequently the reliability of an adequate funding pool. It should be noted that FAO's strategy for partnerships with the private sector precludes the possibility of accepting support from the private sector for the FAO Scientific Advice Programme.⁴

VI. Conclusions

18. The Food Safety Scientific Advice Programmes of FAO and WHO are an essential pillar of the work of the CAC. The FAO and WHO Programmes carry out complementary functions and the smooth delivery of joint scientific advice depends on both programmes being adequately resourced.

19. FAO has protected its regular budget support for scientific advice as a Corporate Technical Activity ensuring a predictable source of funding whereas WHO relies heavily on voluntary contributions to provide scientific advice. Uncertainty and instability in the WHO funding situation creates uncertainties for the delivery of joint scientific advice.

20. The requests for scientific advice from various Codex committees have been steadily increasing in number and often in complexity. Currently the demand for scientific advice significantly outstrips the capacities available at FAO and WHO which, unless remedied, will undermine the global standing and significance of the food safety standards of the CAC. To reliably meet the demands of the Codex committees, FAO and WHO Programmes need to be strengthened with additional staff and non-staff resources. These resources must be stable and predictable in order to allow effective planning and efficient running of the system.

21. In line with the recommendation of the 24th Session of COAG, FAO must, as a priority, explore means of attracting additional resources that enable medium to long term planning to effectively meet the expanding demands on its scientific advice program.

⁴ CX/CAC 14/37/12 Add.2