



INFORMATION GUIDE FOR FIRST-TIME DELEGATES TO A CODEX SESSION

All Codex Members and observers are encouraged to participate in the process to develop Codex texts, through sending written comments and attendance at meetings. However, Codex sessions are complex events and require good preparation to ensure smooth operation and timely decision making. This document aims to assist those who are attending a Codex meeting for the first time.

It is important for delegates to understand:

- The essentials of the Codex Rules of Procedure, especially the terms of reference of the respective subsidiary bodies (committees and task forces) and the 8-Step elaboration procedure (available online in the Codex Procedural Manual on the Codex website: http://www.codexalimentarius.net/web/procedural_manual.jsp);
- How to obtain documentation and which documentation to carry (relevant to the meeting they are about to participate in as well as previous and related sessions);
- The format of meetings;
- How to make interventions during a meeting;
- The procedure of the review and adoption of the report.

DOCUMENTATION

It is the responsibility of delegations to obtain all documentation from their respective Contact Points prior to attendance of a Codex session in order to familiarise themselves with the topics under discussion. Delegates are kindly requested to bring with them to the meeting all documents which have been distributed. Only limited amounts of documents are provided at meetings.

All documentation for the meeting is normally circulated in advance of the meeting by the Codex Secretariat to:

- National Codex Contact Points; and
- International governmental and non-governmental organisations in observer status with the Commission.

Documentation may be distributed in hardcopy to Codex Contact Points if required, otherwise documents are distributed through Codex electronic distribution lists, and are also downloadable from the Codex website (<http://www.codexalimentarius.net>).

Documents include circular letters, the invitation and provisional agenda, working papers and conference room documents. Reports, final texts and publications are available on the website.

Invitation

The invitation contains information such as the date, time and venue of the meeting. The schedule of working group meetings held prior to the plenary is also included in the invitation. Personalised invitations cannot be issued. The names of the representative and other members of the delegation should be communicated through the Codex Contact Point as early as possible and in any case not less than 30 days before the opening of each session.

Visa requirements

It is the responsibility of participants to ensure that they have the proper documentation for travel, including visas. Therefore, where required, participants must apply for entry visas as early as possible. The Codex Contact Points in host countries can provide the location of embassies or consulates but cannot expedite visa applications.

Trust Fund Arrangements

If the FAO/WHO Trust Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex (Codex Trust Fund) pays for the travel of the delegate, arrangements should be made well in advance of the meeting, with the WHO secretariat managing the fund (codextrustfund@who.int; <http://www.who.int/foodsafety/codex/trustfund/en/index.html>).

Neither the Codex Secretariat nor the host government secretariat is in a position to assist in this regard.

Provisional agenda

The provisional agenda is prepared by the Codex Secretariat in collaboration with the national secretariat and the chairperson. Provisional agendas comprise three distinct groups of items:

- fixed items linked to procedure (e.g. adoption of the agenda, matters referred by other committees);
- items stemming from previous sessions (e.g. standards being elaborated); and
- other business

Working papers

The Codex Secretariat (in some cases the host government secretariat) is responsible for the preparation and distribution of working papers. Working papers (e.g. draft standards, discussion papers and comment papers) form the basis for discussion during meetings and are normally distributed where possible at least two months prior to a session.

All working texts have the same reference, CX (for Codex) followed by the acronym for the committee e.g. FH for Codex Committee on Food Hygiene, followed by digits representing the session number and then finally by the consecutive number allocated for the document for discussion on the agenda.

When eliciting comments, the Codex Secretariat communicates with Members and observers through Circular Letters (CLs) which are numbered consecutively, indicating the calendar year and committee or task force to which each pertains, e.g. CL2006/23-CCFICS. Only those comments that have been received by the deadline are reproduced in a working document.

Conference room documents

Comments received after the due date or unsolicited documents are circulated during the session itself and are referred to as conference room documents (CRDs) which are consecutively numbered. The disadvantage of CRDs is that their distribution is limited to those Members and observers present at the meeting, and usually in the original language only. A further disadvantage is that CRDs may not be fully considered due to other Members and observers not having sufficient time or knowledge to consider the contents and to formulate a position. Members and observers are thus encouraged to submit written comments by the deadline indicated in the CL.

Some important documents that should be brought to a Codex session

- Invitation, Provisional Agenda and other Working documents
- Report(s) of the last Session(s) of the Codex committee or task force to be attended;
- Back-to-Office Report (personal report) of the head of delegation who attended the last session;
- The Codex Procedural Manual;
- A Briefing for the head of delegation containing the position on relevant agenda items and related comments;
- All other relevant documents such as the report of the last Commission session.

FORMAT OF MEETINGS

All Codex meetings follow the same uniform format and are conducted in accordance with the *Guidelines for Codex Committees and ad hoc Intergovernmental Task Forces* as set out in the Codex Procedural Manual.

Opening of the session

Sessions are normally opened by a senior representative of the host government. After the opening, the Chairperson proceeds to the adoption of the agenda. It is at this stage of the proceedings that Members may propose additional items for consideration, which, if agreed upon will be discussed under Other Business as time permits. Once comments on the provisional agenda have been considered, the Chairperson will request that the committee or task force adopt the provisional agenda or amended agenda as the agenda for the session.

Role of the Chairperson

The Chairperson will ensure that all questions are fully discussed, including written comments of Members and observers not present at the session.

At appropriate intervals during the discussion of each agenda item, the Chairperson will summarise the discussion by stating what appears to be the generally accepted view. The Chairperson ensures that conclusions of the discussion are clearly understood by all participants.

How are decisions reached?

Decisions at committee or task force level are normally reached by consensus. Voting at this level is extremely rare and efforts are made to come to a solution that is acceptable to all. At the Commission level, voting may take place including for the adoption of amendments to the Rules of Procedure.

INTERVENTIONS

Who is allowed to speak?

Members and observers are permitted to intervene on issues under consideration. Normally the head of delegation has the right to speak, but with the Chairperson's permission, another member of the delegation may speak (e.g. on technical matters). Comments are always directed at the Chairperson. Protocol states that Members speak before observers and delegations speak only when acknowledged by the Chairperson.

How do I indicate my delegations desire to speak?

Delegations indicate their desire to intervene by holding up the country/organisation nameplate and placing it in an upright position

until acknowledged by the Chairperson. In some cases, an electronic system is used.

How many times may a country intervene?

There are no uniform rules within Codex regarding the number and duration of interventions. The general practice is to intervene only once on a particular issue, although a second intervention may be allowed at the discretion of the Chairperson, normally to clarify a point or reply to a question raised by another delegation.

It is important to keep interventions short and concise (not more than 1 – 2 minutes) and to speak slowly to allow for effective and accurate simultaneous interpretation. Should a delegation read from written comments that appear in one of the working papers, it is essential to indicate the reference to the comments at the start of an intervention.

REPORT OF THE MEETING

A draft report of the session's proceedings is prepared by the Codex Secretariat for consideration on the final day of the session. It is customary, depending on the workload, that the second to last day of the meeting is set aside for the drafting of this report (i.e. no plenary session is held). The draft report is made available early on the last day of the session to allow delegates to familiarise themselves with its contents.

As the report is the official record of the Codex meeting it is essential that delegations carefully read it to ensure that it accurately reflects the meeting's views, recommendations and conclusions. To the benefit of the conciseness of the final report, views and opinions summarised may not be associated with the names of specific delegations and observers.

During the review of the draft report, the Chairperson calls up each paragraph or section. This allows delegations who wish to amend the text to intervene at the appropriate moment. When doing so, it is important to make concrete proposals for changes (e.g. additions or deletions). At this stage, it is not possible to re-open discussions; nor is it possible to record in the report what was not stated during the discussion.

Once adopted the report becomes the official record of the committee or task force session and is called an ALINORM. ALINORMs are identified by the term ALINORM followed by a standard numbering system. The number following the term ALINORM indicates the year in which the Commission will consider the report, followed by the Commission session numbering and a number allocated to each of the respective committees or task

forces, e.g. Food Hygiene is xx/13 or Fresh Fruits and Vegetables is xx/35.

The Secretariat distributes the final report, in all the working languages of the respective committees or task forces, to all Codex Contact Points. The report is also posted on the Codex website.

To further assist delegates the FAO/WHO training package "Enhancing Participation in Codex Activities" is available from the FAO website at http://www.fao.org/es/esn/food/capacity_codex_en.stm

For further information about Codex Alimentarius:

Website: www.codexalimentarius.net

e-Mail: codex@fao.org

Trust fund enquiries: codextrustfund@who.int