



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

Twenty-fifth Session

Kampala, Uganda

27 - 31 January 2025

Submitted by the African Union

UPDATE ON FOOD SAFETY ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE AFRICAN UNION, 2023 TO 2024

1. Introduction and background

This report provides an overview of the African Union's key food safety activities and their impact on achieving the goals of the Food Safety Strategy for Africa (FSSA). It outlines initiatives designed to strengthen food safety systems, enhance capacity, and promote collaboration among Member States, in line with the AU's commitment to improving public health and trade opportunities across the continent.

The FSSA envisions an Africa where food safety systems are robust, sustainable, and effective in protecting public health while promoting intra-African and global trade. It prioritizes six strategic objectives:

- i. Strengthen food safety policy, legal and institutional frameworks
- ii. Strengthen the human and infrastructure capacity for food control systems
- iii. Promote food safety culture, evidence-based advocacy, communication, information and knowledge
- iv. Facilitate trade and market access at national, regional, continental and global levels
- v. Strengthen research, innovation, technology development and transfer
- vi. Establish and strengthen coordination mechanisms and enhance cooperation and investments

2. Key Activities and their impact

2.1. Strengthening Policies and Legal Frameworks

The African Union has focused on creating robust regulatory and institutional systems to manage food safety risks effectively. Notable achievements include supporting Zambia in reviewing and finalizing its National Food Safety Policy, complete with actionable implementation plans. Consultations were initiated to establish the AU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed in Africa (AU-RASFF). The AU RASFF is a critical mechanism to enable timely responses to food safety emergencies. Additionally, the African Food Safety Agency (AFSA) statutes received approval through AU legal and technical committees, paving the way for continental harmonization of food safety, once approved by the AU Heads of States and Governments. The AU-RASFF, once operational, will strengthen Africa's capacity to respond swiftly to food safety crises, while AFSA will serve as a central body for coordinating food safety across the continent.

2.2. Building Capacity for Food Control Systems

The African Union has prioritized building the technical and institutional capacities of its Member States to better manage food safety risks. As part of this effort, 15 Member States received comprehensive training on risk-based food inspection methodologies, to ensure that inspections focus on the most critical areas of risk within Africa's food systems. Additionally, 22 Member States were trained in foodborne disease surveillance and the management of food safety events, to equip them with the skills to monitor, detect, and respond to potential public health threats. Furthermore, 12 Member States benefited from specialized training in food safety risk assessment and Codex data generation requirements.

The African Union has made significant strides in strengthening food safety through enhanced antimicrobial resistance (AMR) surveillance and capacity-building initiatives. To improve regional coordination and data sharing, the Africa AMR Surveillance Network (Africa-AMRSNET) was established, providing a platform for harmonized AMR surveillance across Member States. Key capacity-building activities included:

- AMR Surveillance and Laboratory Training: Training on AMR surveillance, laboratory testing, and pathogen isolation was provided to 10 Member States to enable the effective detection and monitoring of AMR pathogens.
- AMR Stewardship and Responsible Use Training: 12 AU Member States were trained on antimicrobial stewardship and the responsible use of antimicrobials, with the aim of promoting practices that reduce the risk of resistance development while safeguarding public health and food safety.

2.3. Fostering Advocacy and a Food Safety Culture

High-impact advocacy campaigns have raised awareness and facilitated a food safety culture. The AU organized various awareness events on food safety emergency preparedness and on World Food Safety Day jointly with FAO, WHO, WFP and CCAFRICA. At the 2024 United Nations General Assembly's High-Level Meeting on AMR, the African Union presented the African Voice on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), reflecting the continent's unified perspective and strategy to combat AMR. Key recommendations in the African Voice on AMR include:

- Strengthen leadership to ensure the effective implementation of AMR strategies across Africa, leaving no country or sector behind.
- Expand and harmonize surveillance and data systems to support informed decision-making and impactful policy development.
- Promote the responsible use of antimicrobials by increasing awareness of AMR and enforcing stricter regulations.
- Enhance public and animal health systems, focusing on infection prevention in healthcare and agrifood systems to reduce antimicrobial dependency.

2.4. Facilitating Trade and Market Access

The African Union has achieved substantial progress in advancing the harmonization of food safety standards at the Codex level. In 2023, the AU supported 40 CCAFRICA Member States in engaging with Codex harmonization efforts, and in 2024, facilitated the participation of 15 CCAFRICA Member in various Codex Committee meetings. Furthermore, the AU, IICA and U.S Codex Office coordinated eight inter-regional dialogues on Codex standards, fostering collaboration and consensus-building among the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees for Africa (CAFRICA), Latin America and the Caribbean (CLAC), the Near East (CCNE), and the United States. These initiatives have significantly enhanced Africa's capacity to contribute to the development of global food safety standards and promoted cross-regional partnerships.

2.5. Driving Research and Innovation

As part of leveraging public-private partnerships to raise food safety standards in Africa, the African Union, in collaboration with DataStream Connexion, organized a webinar titled "Expediting and Interconnecting Africa's Food Safety Initiatives through Digitalization." The event showcased the transformative potential of digital platforms in driving collaboration and enhancing food safety management. This initiative aims to establish a similarly interconnected ecosystem in Africa, bringing together stakeholders to address food safety challenges collectively. It emphasizes the critical role of digital platforms in integrating data, improving communication, and fostering a culture of shared responsibility across the continent.

2.6. Strengthening Coordination and Partnerships

The African Union continues to enhance the coordination of food safety initiatives across the continent through the AU SPS Coordination Forum, which brings together AU institutions, technical partners, and development partners working on SPS issues related to food safety, plant health, and animal health. This platform ensures synergies and strengthens collective efforts to address SPS challenges effectively.

In 2024, the AU organized the 16th Pan-African Codex Contact Point Officers Meeting, fostering alignment on Codex standards and promoting collaboration on food safety among Member States. Additionally, the AU supported Eswatini, Somalia, and Mauritania in reviving their national Codex committees, with the aim of ensuring that these countries are better equipped to engage with and implement Codex standards. The AU also provided support to CCAFRICA leadership, enhancing their capacity to coordinate Codex issues effectively across the region and amplifying Africa's voice in global food standard-setting processes.

3. Conclusions

The African Union continues to make remarkable progress in advancing food safety across the continent, achieving significant milestones in policy reform, capacity building, advocacy, and fostering collaboration through partnerships. These efforts have strengthened Africa's capacity to harmonize food safety standards, align with global frameworks such as Codex, and address critical public health and trade challenges. Through innovation, digital solutions, and enhanced coordination, the AU has laid a strong foundation for a safer and more resilient Africa. However, sustained commitment and strategic focus are essential to fully realize the vision of a food-secure continent.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the U.S. Codex Office for its unwavering support of Codex activities in Africa, the European Union for its vital contributions to building resilient food safety systems, and to partners such as FAO, WHO, WFP, IAEA, ILRI, IFC, and UNIDO for their invaluable support in strengthening food safety technical capacity across the continent.

4. Recommendations

Codex Members in the Regional, Regional Economic Communities and Development Partners are encouraged to:

- i. **Support National Codex Committees:** Support Member States in establishing or revitalizing national Codex committees or comparable coordination mechanisms, to ensure active engagement in global food standard-setting processes and effective implementation of Codex standards.
- ii. **Expand Codex Standards Implementation in MSMEs:** Strengthen support for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to adopt and comply with Codex standards, focusing on capacity-building and resources tailored to their needs.
- iii. **Enhance Technical Training for Food Safety Systems:** Provide targeted training for Member States on risk-based inspections, foodborne disease surveillance, and Codex data generation to improve compliance and competitiveness in global food markets.
- iv. **Leverage Digital Platforms:** Promote the adoption of digital tools to enhance food safety data integration, collaboration, and emergency response in food safety management.
- v. **Secure Sustainable Investments for Food Safety:** Mobilize dedicated funding to support the implementation of food safety systems, including infrastructure development, technical capacity-building, and compliance with international trade requirements.