

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda Item 7

CX/EXEC CRD 3

Original language only

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Seventy-eight Session

WHO Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland, 10 – 14 February 2020

CHAIRPERSONS REPORT OF THE PHYSICAL MEETING OF THE CCEXEC SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE APPLICATION OF THE STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLE CONCERNING THE ROLE OF SCIENCE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The CCEXEC Sub-committee on the Application of the Statements of Principle (SoP) on the Role of Science held its first physical meeting at Domaine de Penthes, Geneva, on 9 February 2020. The Chairperson recalled the Terms of Reference of the sub-committee, recalled the process so far and the interim report available in document CX/CEXEC 20/78/7. The Chairperson emphasized the importance of the sub-committee using this meeting to progress on its task.

2. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Through a series of facilitated discussions the sub-committee considered i) strengths of Codex as a standard setting organization, ii) areas for improvement, iii) the meaning of operationalization of the Statements of Principle and iv) key actions to support this.

2.2 The sub-committee highlighted the science and risk-based nature of Codex standards; the inclusive, transparent, multisectoral and global nature of the process; the universality of Codex; its food safety mandate; its clear separation between risk assessment and risk management; its efforts to be forward thinking and solution oriented; and efforts to progress by consensus as some of the positive characteristics of Codex. Nevertheless, room for improvement remains and the sub-committee identified a number of areas in this regard including:

- The need to focus on timely delivery and the overarching commitment to deliver globally relevant standards, acknowledging that these may not match every national context;
- Prioritization of work and promotion of efficient and timely standard setting
- Further uptake of technology to improve efficiency and participation
- Improved accessibility to Codex meetings by greater geographic distribution of meetings
- Respect for procedures, scientific advice and mutual respect of Members and their views
- Improved timeliness both internally (e.g. document availability) and externally (response to new food safety issues)
- Data to support standard setting
- Improving awareness of Codex and reviewing uptake and impact of Codex standards
- Ongoing improvement of the science-based approach including financial sustainability, consideration of other relevant areas such as social science and improving risk communication and understanding of the science-based approach

- Processes to facilitate understanding and addressing differences of opinion
- Providing criteria to facilitate clarity of risk management decisions
- Monitoring and evaluation of Codex work

2.3 Having reflected on a range of areas within Codex which could benefit from improvements, the sub-committee sought to clarify what is meant by operationalization of the SoP. Noting that a simplification of the language might be a beneficial starting point, the sub-committee highlighted that the SoP do not exist in isolation and the broader Codex environment needs to be considered in making the SoP work effectively for Codex. In this context, operationalization was considered to include:

- Promoting an awareness and common understanding of the SoP among both Chairpersons and Delegates to Codex meetings
- Providing clarity on some of the aspects related to the application of the SoPs such as other factors/other considerations
- Understanding the needs of Chairpersons from the specificity of the guidance to the relationship with other tasks of the Chairperson such as working towards consensus (e.g. through a survey)
- Developing a mechanism(s) on how to systematically apply the SoP (structured approach; decision tree)
- Improving communications between risk assessors and risk managers

2.4 With these aspects in mind, the sub-committee then worked to identify some specific actions, which could support their understanding of operationalization. These actions can be grouped into two areas as follows:

Awareness and understanding

- Outreach to chairpersons to get their feedback on understanding and application of the SoP
- Improving understanding of the SoP among chairpersons through briefings, etc
- Providing opportunities for informal discussions as well as targeted capacity development on the SoP
- Sharing experiences on the application of the SoP
- Clarification for Members on the consequence/implications of abstaining from acceptance of a particular standard

Guidance on application

- Development of a decision tree to support application of the SoP (using existing documents such as CX/EXEC 19/77/10 as an input)
- Clarity on related issues such as other factors/other considerations
- Development of a mechanism to systematically apply the SoP by a neutral group (Codex Secretariat together with FAO and WHO)
- Capacity development of chairpersons on application of the mechanism
- Guidance (toolbox approach) for chairpersons on when to apply the SoP to build the confidence of chairpersons in applying them

2.5 The discussions highlighted a range of issues that need to be further considered in moving forward as well as different mechanisms for progressing. Having adequate time to address the issues appropriately will require time and the timeframe for the work of the subcommittee may need to be reconsidered.

3. CONCLUSIONS

CCEXEC78 is:

- invited to note the discussions of the sub-committee;
- advise on whether the sub-committee should consider to develop this guidance or whether to request Codex Secretariat/FAO/WHO to work on guidance for consideration by a future session of CCEXEC;
- review the timelines for this work noting the experience of the sub-committee that a stepwise approach that explores all options but takes some additional time may promote the achievement of a successful outcome; and
- request the Codex Secretariat to provide support in reaching out to the chairpersons of subsidiary bodies to get the input on this issue.