



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

Seventy-seventh Session

WHO Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland, 1 - 5 July 2019

**FOLLOW-UP TO REGULAR REVIEW OF CODEX WORK MANAGEMENT 2017-2018:
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

(Prepared by the Codex Secretariat)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Regular Review of Codex Work Management 2017-2018 focused on collaboration between the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and other international standard-setting organizations¹. The review made four recommendations for consideration by the Executive Committee (CCEXEC), the last of which focused on the additional actions that the Codex Secretariat could take to enhance collaboration with these organizations and Observers to Codex in general.

1.2 CAC41² noted that the Codex Secretariat participated in relevant activities of other international organizations pursuant to its mandate, which included such coordination, but that its capacity to do so depended on committee workloads. Members queried the resource implications for the Codex Secretariat of implementation of recommendation (iv). As follow-up CCEXEC76 requested the Secretariat to prepare a paper to support further discussion on the feasibility of implementation of this recommendation which consisted of the following points:

- A.** Create a single focal point within the Codex Secretariat for Observers;
- B.** Explore Information and communications technology (ICT) solutions to tailor information on Codex activities to the needs and interests of standard setting organizations (and Observers in general) and enhance the training support and help desk solutions of the Codex platform for EWGs;
- C.** Assess the specific needs of Codex Contact Points (CCPs) that act as contact point for other standard setting organizations in addition to Codex;
- D.** Consider, in cooperation with FAO and WHO, whether the OECD led “partnership for effective international rule-making” could serve as a suitable forum for discussing better monitoring and evaluation of the use of international norms;
- E.** Publish an entry level guidance document for Codex Observers (e.g. on how Codex Committees interlink);
- F.** Liaise with the reviewed organizations on a case-by-case basis to discuss the need for participation of Codex representatives in any of their activities and follow-up on their suggestions for future collaboration.

1.3 This paper reviews each of these points noting the current status (where relevant), highlighting some of the key aspects to be considered in terms of implementation and provides some analysis of options for next steps.

¹CX/CAC 18/41/13

²REP 18/CAC, paras. 109-121

2. A. SINGLE FOCAL POINT WITHIN THE CODEX SECRETARIAT FOR OBSERVERS

Current situation

2.1 There are currently 229 Codex Observers (56 IGOs, 156 NGOs, and 16 UN), with different levels of participation in Codex work; some have a focus on the work of one particular committee while others are engaged in multiple committees often with very different technical areas of work. Within the Codex Secretariat there is currently a single entry point for communications from all Members and Observers (codex@fao.org), which is monitored daily. In order to facilitate the interactions, officers of the Codex Secretariat have been assigned as specific focal points with other international standard-setting bodies and those Observers with whom there is a high level of interaction. Focal points are appointed based on the specific interests of the Observer and its priority Codex Committees. In this context Observers are already interacting directly with different Members of the Codex Secretariat in line with the committees that they have most interest in. One senior officer has been assigned to oversee relations and communications with Observers.

2.2. The Codex Secretariat already monitors multiple communication entry points (mail, email, social media etc.), thus establishment of another entry point does not necessarily improve efficiency of communications. Maintaining the current level of interaction with Observers on issues related to membership, registration/participation in meetings, maintenance of updated contacts etc. already depends on non-staff human resources.

Aspects to be considered in terms of feasibility

2.3. Some of the aspects to be considered in establishing a single focal point include the challenge of having a single focal point to effectively deal with over 200 Observers. Responding to and interacting with Observers will always require a team approach, not only to address the volume, but also to ensure that interactions are addressed by the most relevant member of the Codex Secretariat according to the issue.

Analysis and options

2.4 A key consideration for this recommendation relates to the sense that the organizations included in the review considered the absence of a single focal point as a challenge for them. While establishing a unique focal point for all Observers is not feasible within the current resources of the Codex Secretariat, providing more clarity to organizations on the way communications are managed and in the case of other standard-setting organizations, indicating the primary focal point within the Codex Secretariat and providing simple guidance on how to direct communications to facilitate a response may be a more feasible option to implement in the short term (2020-2021).

3. B. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) SOLUTIONS TO PROVIDE MORE TAILORED INFORMATION AND SUPPORT TRAINING

Current situation

3.1 International organizations play a vital role in ensuring Codex texts are of the highest quality and based on sound science. Codex would have little authority in the field of international standard setting if it did not acknowledge the valuable contributions made by international organizations. In this context information is currently shared with Observers in the same way as with Members, thus maintaining transparency and openness of all Codex work. Much of the information that is shared through the Codex website, the Codex distribution list and social medial targets both Members and Observers.

3.2 Taking into consideration the findings of the Regular review of Codex Work Management Report 2017-2018³, in May 2019 a page on the Codex website dedicated to Codex Observers was established. This includes details of all Observers, quick access to the information on how to become an observer and news items on and interviews with Observers and their particular interests in Codex. Details of this have been communicated to all Observers through email, an online news story and social media with a positive response to date. The webpage will be further developed in line with feedback and input from Observers. This is also in line with objective 5 of the current Codex communications workplan⁴ to engage Observers to support collaboration and cooperation in the development of Codex standards.

3.3 Overall, the Codex Secretariat continues to work on improving the ICT tools that are used to support the development of Codex texts including the Online Commenting System (upgrade due by 2020) and the forum for Electronic Working Groups. These tools are available to all Members and Observers but training efforts to date have focussed on Members. However, help desk support is equally provided to Members and Observers on request.

³CX/CAC 18/41/13

⁴CX/EXEC 17/74/4

Aspects to be considered in terms of feasibility

3.4 The use of ICT to improve communications and promote broader and more effective participation in the work of Codex is an overarching consideration for all Codex Members and Observers. In this context, consideration needs to be given to ensure that:

- All Members and Observers benefit from improvements in ICT;
- Resources are available not only to ensure initial set up of new systems but also ongoing maintenance and support;
- Introduction of new tools and systems are accompanied by training, for which additional resources are set aside / made available.

Analysis and options

3.5 The development of the webpage dedicated to Observers is a starting point in providing more tailored information to and more visibility for Observers with regard to the work of Codex. Building on this and responding to the needs and feedback of Observers will continue to be part of the Codex communications workplan. This will enable progress to be made in terms of providing more tailored information to Observers at a modest rate in the short term (2020-2021).

3.6 A more accelerated approach would require additional resources. In terms of training, this is an area where more support is needed for all participants in Codex work. Additional training in this area would need to be considered as part of the future budget planning of Codex as well as in the development of the implementation plan for the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Given the lead time needed for budget planning this could only be proposed in the 2022-2023 budget proposal. Alternatively, extra-budgetary resources would be needed to increase training in the shorter term.

4. C. NEEDS OF CODEX CONTACT POINTS (CCPs) THAT ALSO ACT AS CONTACT POINTS FOR OTHER STANDARD-SETTING ORGANIZATIONS

Current situation

4.1 The Codex Secretariat, together with FAO and WHO, provide support to CCPs of all 189 Members, through face to face and virtual means (e.g. webinars, e-learning⁵) in an effort to assist them in effectively fulfilling their function. There is currently no explicit consideration of the needs of CCPs that also act as contact points for other standard-setting organizations in existing guidance or training tools.

Aspects to be considered in terms of feasibility

4.2 While the review provides initial data, the issue of CCPs having multiple focal point roles would require a more in-depth analysis to be undertaken on their explicit needs and situation in order to determine the nature of any support or guidance that could be provided to such CCPs. As these CCPs serve multiple functions such work would need to be undertaken in collaboration with other relevant organizations for which there is an overlap of focal point function to ensure the appropriateness of the guidance. Whether this can optimally be led by the Codex Secretariat or more appropriately by FAO and WHO or even the countries themselves should also be considered. This would require engagement with multiple players given the potential complexities and individual needs of and situations in countries.

Analysis and options

4.3 The nature of the work indicates the need for a phased approach starting with a more thorough assessment of the situation and progressing to the development and implementation of guidance. While the Codex Secretariat could take the lead in the needs assessment of CCPs, the Secretariat should only be one of the players involved in developing such guidance. Moving ahead with this recommendation would require additional resources and could be a self-contained project. It should also consider other assessments ongoing in countries such as the use of the Codex diagnostic tool (CTF funded countries) or the FAO/WHO food control systems assessment tool. Considering both the budgetary and partnership requirements this could be planned under the 2022-2023 budget and workplan. In case others were willing to take the lead on guidance development and implementation in the short-term (2020-2021), then the Codex Secretariat could aim to provide periodic input to ensure the needs in relation to Codex are well captured.

⁵Available at <http://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/capacity-development/participation-codex/codex-course/en/>

5. D. OECD LED “PARTNERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL RULE-MAKING” AS A SUITABLE FORUM FOR DISCUSSING BETTER MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE USE OF INTERNATIONAL NORMS

Current situation

5.1 Any participation of Codex in the OECD led “partnership for effective international rule-making” needs to be through FAO and WHO. This means that participation requires commitment from not only the Codex Secretariat but also the legal offices of FAO and WHO, which are currently participating in this OECD led initiative. Efforts have been made to date by the Codex Secretariat to participate in the partnership through FAO and WHO, but challenges have been identified in terms of timely participation in the context of many competing priorities.

Aspects to be considered in terms of feasibility

5.2 There are currently discussions on the use of Codex standards under way in several fora. Use of Codex Standards is under consideration as a new goal in the draft Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Recent discussions at CCGP31⁶ also reflected on the importance of monitoring use of Codex standards and a discussion paper is expected at CCGP32. Other standard setting organizations have also embarked on initiatives to monitor use of their standards (e.g. OIE in collaboration with OECD).

Analysis and options

5.3 The OECD led “Partnership for Effective International Rule-making” is one initiative which may be of benefit to the ongoing discussions on the use of Codex standards, currently a topic under consideration in several fora. If the use of Codex standards remains a goal under the final Strategic Plan 2020-2025, then there will be a need to develop a workplan on how to follow up on achievement of that goal. In this context, this recommendation could be considered as part of a more overarching discussion on and approach to the use of Codex standards, either in the follow-up to the Strategic Plan and/or in future discussions in CCGP. This would contribute to a more streamlined approach, and potentially integrated into the implementation plan for the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

6. E. ENTRY LEVEL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT FOR CODEX OBSERVERS

Current Situation

6.1 Guidance for Observers is currently included in Section VII of the Codex Procedural Manual. No additional guidance tailored to Observers is currently available.

Aspects to be considered in terms of feasibility

6.2 Any guidance that can facilitate more effective participation in Codex work benefits Codex overall. As with any additional guidance there is a resource requirement and therefore advance planning would be required to ensure that resources are available. In terms of feasibility, the development of such a product would require cross-secretarial input as well as input from Chairs of Codex Committees and Observers to ensure that it meets the identified needs. This could be considered in future update to existing tools such as the e-learning course on effective participation in Codex.

Analysis and options

6.3 With on average three Observers joining Codex every year and changes in Observer organizations meaning that there are changes in the individuals representing Observers in Codex meetings, the value of such a product is well recognized. If identified as a priority, this could be considered in the Codex publications workplan for 2020-2021, noting that delivery will also rely on collaboration of the indicated contributors.

7. F. CASE-BY-CASE DISCUSSIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION OF CODEX REPRESENTATIVES IN ACTIVITIES OF OTHER STANDARD-SETTING ORGANIZATIONS AND FUTURE COLLABORATION

Current Situation

7.1 The Codex Secretariat currently makes efforts to participate in selected meetings of other standards setting organizations based on the relevance to Codex work and considering the existing workload and Codex meeting calendar. Those organizations with standard-setting work of relevance to a particular Codex subsidiary body are also invited to present a paper on that work to the relevant meeting to ensure that Members are aware of their ongoing work and its relevance. The Secretariat also receives and welcomes visits from Observers in the course of the year, which provides an opportunity to discuss current and future collaboration.

⁶REP 19/GP

Aspects to be considered in terms of feasibility

7.2 There is a limited capacity of the Codex Secretariat in terms of participation in external meetings due to the extensive annual calendar of Codex meetings and the need to maintain sufficient desk time to allow efficient and timely preparation for meetings. Therefore, there is a need to prioritize those external meetings attended such that it does not negatively impact Codex work. Availability of virtual participation in meetings needs to be considered where feasible to maintain the collaboration, but in a time and cost effective manner.

Analysis and options

7.3 While the Codex Secretariat does not have the capacity to participate in all relevant and useful external meetings, efforts to make optimal use of Codex Committees to meet with the standard-setting organizations are made. This allows a case-by-case approach, although currently in an informal manner, without putting additional travel burden on the Secretariat. This is enhanced when Observers have an opportunity to visit the Secretariat. Virtual participation in meetings is sometimes an option, which could further be developed. While not always optimal it provides an opportunity to maintain and build collaboration between physical meetings. Continuing to make use of all potential opportunities for discussion on collaboration could be encouraged.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 This document highlights the need for a phased approach in the possible implementation of the recommendations proposed in the Regular Review of Codex Work Management 2017-2018. In some cases, follow-up initiatives are already underway and progress can be made within the next biennium, while in others the need for additional resources or engagement with both other partners and processes means a longer term approach is needed. The options presented can be summarised as follows:

A. Implementation to the extent feasible is currently ongoing within the Codex Secretariat and more clarity on communications pathways can be provided within the existing resources of the Codex Secretariat in the short-term (2020-2021).

B. Partial implementation can be achieved through the ongoing initiatives to improve ICT for all Members and Observers and ongoing development of the Observers webpage. More targeted ICT improvements as well as training to address the explicit needs of Observers would require additional resources and would therefore need to be proposed and considered as part of the longer-term (2022-2023) programme of work and budget.

C. Implementation would require additional resources as well as engagement with multiple parties and also take into considerations existing tools and opportunities to update and would therefore need to be proposed and considered as part of the longer-term (2022-2023) programme of work and budget.

D. Implementation would need to be considered in the context of other initiatives related to the use of Codex standards and the inclusion of a goal on the use of Codex standards in the final version of the Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Increased emphasis on this would also have resource implications and would therefore need to be proposed and considered as part of the longer-term (2022-2023) programme of work and budget.

E. Implementation would be feasible in the short-term (2020-2021) under the Codex publications workplan if identified as a priority area of work.

F. Implementation to the extent feasible is currently ongoing within the Codex Secretariat with the potential for further exploration of more virtual participation in Observer meetings in the short-term if prioritized.

9. RECOMMENDATION

9.1 CCEXEC is invited to consider the above information and identify which options are to be pursued and how selected options should be prioritized in both the short (2020-2021) and longer term (i.e. beyond 2020-2021).