CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

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Agenda Item 3   **CX/EXEC 23/85/3**

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

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BLUEPRINT ON THE FUTURE OF CODEX – FINAL REPORT FROM CCEXEC SUBCOMMITTEE

1.   BACKGROUND

1.1   CCEXEC84 considered the draft blueprint for the Future of Codex that had been developed by the relevant CCEXEC sub-committee based on the inputs received via post meeting surveys and informal consultations primarily involving the Chairpersons of Committees, Host Secretariats, Regional Coordinators and Working Group Chairs. Discussions in both CCEXEC and CAC had acknowledged the importance of seeking input from the broader Codex Membership on this topic.

1.2   CCEXEC84 agreed that Section 2 that relates to context and drivers should form the basis for discussion of the narrative on drivers for change in the development of the Strategic Plan 2026-2031. Members feedback has already been sought on this through Circular Letter CL 2023/65/OCS-EXEC.

1.3   As regard Section 3-– Model for future Codex work, CCEXEC84 proposed that in seeking input from the wider Codex membership, there should be specific questions addressing the strengths and weaknesses of different meeting formats depending on the complexity of the issues to be discussed; how the meeting formats compared in terms of resource and time costs; and whether any of the meeting formats were better or worse from Member/Observer perspectives in demonstrating the Codex core values of inclusivity, collaboration, consensus-building, and transparency. To this end in addition to providing feedback on the text itself, Members and Observers were requested to address six questions through Circular Letter CL 2023/82/OCS-EXEC. The comments have been published as CX/EXEC 23/85/3 Add.1.

1.4   In order to seek further feedback on Section 3, an informal side event open to all Members present was convened in the margins of CCGP33 on 4 October 2023.

1.5   The following provides an overview of the comments received. A summary of the replies to specific questions is included in Appendix I. Proposed updates to the model for future Codex work are included in Appendix II.

2.   OVERVIEW OF COMMENTS RECEIVED

2.1   The comments indicate broad agreement that the four meeting formats currently identified provide greater flexibility, inclusivity, accessibility, and accountability and have helped Codex meet the demands of an ever-changing world. Technology has enabled Codex to work in ways that have promoted its core values of inclusiveness and transparency and are more accessible to Members and Observers. The four meeting formats can each be used to accommodate a particular committee's needs and preferred meeting format within Codex and there is no "one size fits all" for all committees and issues.

2.2   Sentiments expressed highlight the need to be cautious to avoid over-engineering any mechanisms for judging the efficacy and appropriateness of different meeting modalities, and codifying rules until clear issues or benefits have been identified.

2.3   There is great preference for "*in-person meeting (physical)*". However, "*In-person with the possibility of virtual interventions*" is gaining prominence especially for CAC since it's considered effective in achieving the Codex core values. Though it has been expressly stated that this format is costly to host countries of Codex subsidiary committees.

2.4   "In-person with webcast" though listed as a meeting format is considered by some Members as not fitting the description since it only allows the viewer access but no opportunity to intervene (unless you have a

delegate in the hall), and there is no recognition in the participants list. Webcasting is considered an added service to the in-person meeting format.

2.5   Future meeting format options need to be extensive and enabling to allow for circumstances we may not be able to envisage now. The options may be enhanced by setting out some overarching principles to help guide the choice of a format appropriate to circumstances in each case.

2.6   There is need to acknowledge the important role of new inter-session working mechanisms, which have provided a solid basis to support the work of Codex committee meetings.

3. NEXT STEPS

3.1   CCEXEC84 agreed that CCEXEC85 would review Section 4 and the recommendations in Sections 5.1.1 and 5.2 in CX/EXEC 23/84/3 Annex 1 in the light of comments from Members on Section 3 - Model for future Codex work and make relevant recommendations for consideration by CAC46. As some of these go beyond the focus of the model for future Codex work, the main focus of discussion for CCEXEC85 may be Section 5.2 (attached as Appendix III for ease of reference) which focus specifically on the model for future Codex work.

3.2   CCEXEC85 might wish to recognize that issues on the nature and direction of future Codex work will now be addressed in the discussions on the Strategic Plan 2026-2031. In this context there will not be a blueprint for Codex as such but rather a recognition of the different directions the outcome of CCEXECs work in this area have taken and that the document forthcoming from this discussion be presented as having a focus on Codex working models.

3.3   With regard to the model for future Codex work, CCEXEC85 might wish to:

- consider whether any further updates are needed to the current version (Appendix II) based on the comments received (e.g., strengthening aspects of cross-committee work to address emerging cross-cutting issues);

- recognize that the Model for Future Codex Work provides a relevant guide for planning and implementing future Codex meetings;

- suggest that the model be updated with new experiences regarding working modalities as they become available;

- note that it and future versions might inform procedural considerations/amendments based on the experiences form the current learning phase; and

- identify any specific issues that should be brought to the attention of CAC, FAO, WHO or the Codex Secretariat, including consideration of the recommendations included in Appendix III.

SUMMARY OF REPLIES TO QUESTIONS RECEIVED IN RESPONSE TO CL 2023/82/OCS-EXEC

QUESTION a): With regard to the four meeting formats presented in Table 1, are there any additional strengths or weaknesses of the meeting formats that should be highlighted?

Additional strengths and weaknesses identified in comments received have been added to table 1 (see Appendix II)

QUESTION b): From your perspective as a Member country or Observer, is there a particular meeting format that is most effective in terms of time, cost and efficiency? Please provide the rationale for your answer noting that more than one option may be selected. Please also indicate the resource implications for you with regards with the four meeting formats, i.e., in-person only, virtual only, in-person with webcast, in-person with possibility of virtual interventions.

A number of factors were identified that impact how a Member or Observer may participate in a particular meeting. These include:

- Meeting time zone: this presents challenges when following from a very different time zone to the meeting, from both practical (internet access) to personal (working overnight) perspectives, which also impact performance and drive a preference for in-person meetings. Nevertheless In-person with possibility of virtual intervention was considered most inclusive.

- "In-person with the possibility of virtual interventions" meeting format provides Members/Observers the opportunity to choose. If there is an agenda that is necessary and important for the Member to attend in person, then they can physically attend the meeting. However, if the agenda of the session may not be particularly engaging, virtual attendance may be considered appropriate.

- In-person participation typically requires significant travel costs and long travel times for many delegations. However, despite such a burden, many delegations choose in-person participation due to the necessity of taking part in decision-making or the importance of face-to-face interaction with other delegations.

- Where countries have a general interest in a meeting, but the agenda items are less critical to them, the option of joining an in-person meeting on-line is likely to be an effective option, provided the ability to make interventions is possible.

The choice of a specific meeting format will depend upon the complexity of the issues to be discussed, and the extent to which a Member is intending to engage/influence the development of Codex text. While the cost of attending a meeting can be significant, the rewards in terms of the efficiency of time spent, and effective outcomes gained in terms of matters that are of high food safety and trade interest are likely to outweigh member costs.

QUESTION c): Are the core values of Codex, transparency, inclusiveness, collaboration, and consensus-building guaranteed by the four meeting formats described? Do you have any concerns that would need to be addressed with regard to using a particular format for a Codex meeting?

There is general agreement that the core values of Codex are met by all four meeting formats, but in varying degrees.

Flexibility: Different committees operate differently and have different needs. A good approach for enabling more experimentation with hybrid approaches would be to encourage committees to clearly set the rules for participation ahead of the respective meeting. For example, when the delegate information is published it could clearly articulate how the meeting would be run with respect to the hybrid nature. With physical meetings we tend to read the housekeeping rules to delegates at the opening of the session (and are not strictly codified in the PM). Perhaps guidance could be made available on the website in advance to allow Members to make informed decisions about the value of travel for them. Such guidance would no doubt evolve over time, and we could use the post meeting surveys to collect specific feedback related to their efficacy and appropriateness.

For virtual only formats, time zone challenges need to be taken into consideration so that specific time zones are not always disadvantaged by the scheduled meeting times. As the current term used "possibility", it appears to differentiate between the opportunities for members attending meetings in person and those attending virtually. Therefore, it is proposed that this meeting format be changed to "*in person with the option of virtual*

interventions". The Codex Secretariat should prepare technical guidance for conducting meetings in this format to ensure that every Member has an equal opportunity.

With regard to in-person with webcast format, it is proposed that the names of delegates following webcast are included in the participant list. They can be distinguished from general public by registering through ORS with the permission of the Head of Delegation. They can also be distinguished from in-person delegates by annotating the participant list with "webcast participants."

It is proposed that Codex meetings' webcasting should be made available for some period, for example a week to allow the delegates to follow the discussion. Otherwise, the arrangement of the webcasting especially how long it will be available on the web should be clearly communicated to Codex Members and observers to enable appropriate preparation to follow the web stream. It is particularly crucial for delegates whose time zones differ significantly from the host country's. Codex should consider how webcast could be made more efficient and consistent across committees.

For CAC meetings, "In-person with the possibility of virtual intervention" seems to fully address all core values of Codex. It is however very costly and challenging for host countries, as this comes down to organizing a virtual and a physical meeting simultaneously (extra screens, cameras and operators).

There are some concerns expressed about the core values of inclusiveness and transparency for the in-person and in-person with webcast format options, where members are not able to travel due to financial circumstances. Inclusiveness and transparency issues are able to be addressed if funds are available for developing countries to attend meetings within which they have a particular interest, and/or the provision of funds to support the host country in the provision of a virtual option with interventions possible. The latter is perhaps an issue that could be raised with the Codex Trust Fund for consideration.

QUESTION d): Are there other meeting formats that should be considered?

Suggestions to have a full tool kit of meeting formats should be made available for the Codex hosts and the Secretariat to draw upon. This should include Committees Working By Correspondence (CWBC) which have been found to be effective and less costly in the past.

Another format that could be made available for the CCEXEC membership is virtual regional hubs where a region may form a regional virtual hub to participate in CCEXEC. This has been done in the past with good result in terms of collaboration and consensus building within a region.

Caution has been expressed that Codex should avoid being too prescriptive in setting out the format options, but rather provide an enabling environment where various formats can be chosen from a list, perhaps with the aid of some high-level principles.

QUESTION e): How can we continue to improve inter-session working mechanisms to ensure they provide a good basis for the work of Codex committee meetings?

The administrative process of hosting and applying to participate in an EWG could be made less burdensome. The current process is burdensome on EWG chairs – i.e., managing the verification of emails requesting access to the EWG, followed by verifying a request process in the forum, where usernames are not easily reconcilable with participants' names. Integrating a single workflow in the forum that could include a verification step to be done by a member's codex contact point could be useful.

Consideration could be given to how a virtual meeting functionality could integrate into inter-session working mechanisms to promote the use of virtual meetings to progress the work, without having to schedule these in advance within the Codex calendar. This may allow some more flexibility to use these mechanisms in response to issues as they arise.

QUESTION f): Are there other key issues that need to be considered in developing the model for Codex work that will ensure its efficiency and effectiveness in the coming years?

Four areas have been suggested that could impact efficiency and effectiveness of Codex work:

- The contribution of timely independent scientific advice as a key determinant of Codex efficiently and effectively setting standards.

- Codex Secretariat resourcing.

- Encouraging and retaining new talent to ensure there are sufficient succession arrangements.

- Seeking feedback from Members and Observers on a regular basis will likely be useful in identifying emerging issues and for ensuring that the work of Codex remains efficient and effective.

MODEL FOR FUTURE CODEX WORK[*]

1.   **Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on the conduct of Codex work affecting scheduled meetings, which had to be postponed for a significant period of time and then convened in non-traditional formats. This situation albeit overwhelming presented an opportunity for Codex to undertake a strategic reassessment of meeting structures and processes against the background of significant technological advances particularly regarding remote working and audio/video conferencing.

In response to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, the 79th Session of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CCEXEC79) agreed to create a subcommittee to work quickly and collaboratively examine the impact of the pandemic on Codex work management and identify approaches CCEXEC may recommend to the Commission to ensure that Codex was well placed to deal with similar events in the future considering the elements presented in the paper on *Codex and the Pandemic – Strategic Challenges and Opportunities*[i].

CCEXEC80[ii] considered the report on Codex and the pandemic prepared by a subcommittee of the CCEXEC[iii]. In doing so, it confirmed its support for the content of the report, appreciated the approaches taken in Codex in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, noting that virtual meetings and participation therein were critical to the success of Codex in 2021. CCEXEC80 made a number of recommendations with the aim of ensuring that despite the pandemic, with pragmatism and engagement, the work of Codex could continue in 2021.

CCEXEC81[iv] in its considerations of the Codex response to the COVID-19 pandemic[v] recognized both the opportunities and challenges the global crisis presented. Considering both recent and past experience and the broader global food context, CCEXEC81 agreed to lead the development of a blueprint for the future of Codex for consideration by CAC on its 60th anniversary in 2023[vi].

CCEXEC82[vii] reviewed the issues related to the future of Codex based on a working paper on initial thoughts for a model for future Codex work[viii] and the report of the subcommittee on Codex and the Pandemic to CCEXEC81[ix] and CCEXEC82 recognized the importance of this work and supported the establishment of a CCEXEC subcommittee to develop in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat a report including a proposed blueprint for the future of Codex for CCEXEC84.

CCEXEC84 considered the draft blueprint for the Future of Codex and agreed that Section 2 of the revised draft blueprint – Codex Standards for the future – context and drivers would serve as an input to the next strategic planning process with input from Member. Comments were also sought both formally and informally on Section 3 on the Model for future Codex work and that has been updated accordingly below.

In its 60-year history, Codex has proven to be adaptable to advances in food production technology and food safety, and its mandate has proven to be fit for purpose to address issues that arose from these changes. The disruption to the usual working practices brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, provided an opportunity to reconsider how Codex works. It is timely and appropriate to carefully consider the environment within which Codex is currently operating and analyse the relevance and impact on the work of Codex. The underlying question is how Codex can support the broader global goals around sustainability in the context of climate change, food systems changes and environmental challenges. It is important to promote a common understanding on the role of Codex in addressing these challenges, consistent with its mandate as defined as Article 1 of the Statutes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission[†x].

2.   **Model for future Codex work**

The disruption of in-person meetings in recent years, while initially overwhelming, presented an opportunity for Codex to undertake a strategic examination on how meetings could be conducted against the background of rapid development and increasing accessibility of technological capabilities particularly regarding remote working and audio/video conferencing. Consequently, 2021 saw the emergence of a truly virtual Codex with sixteen virtual Codex sessions being held with good results.

The continued evolution in technology impacts the modalities that can be used to bring people together to develop Codex texts as well as improve the accessibility of those texts together with tools to improve

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[*] Proposed changes from the version published as Appendix II in REP23/EXEC1 are indicated in bold and underline (for additions) or strikethrough (for deletions)

understanding and application. For example, these advances, which will no doubt continue, are allowing Codex to:

- access a range of technologies, tools and approaches to support meeting preparations and conduct;

- effectively progress work in the absence of physical meetings;

- apply mixed working models with physical and virtual meeting elements, including pre-session virtual events, remote intervention in physical meetings, informative webinars, virtual working groups, virtual report adoption etc.;

- webcast (live or on-demand) the majority of Codex meetings, allowing greater access to observe such meetings;

- improve accessibility of Codex texts;

- improve tracking of use of Codex texts through the use of a digital object identifier; and

- facilitate sharing of companion material, for example tools to support implementation of a revised Codex guideline, together with Codex texts while still keeping them separate.

However, one size does not fit all, and flexibility will be important to remain resilient. It is also important to ensure that the Codex Procedural Manual reflects the full range of meeting modalities for Codex sessions and that Members and Observers can rely on guidance that is clear and assures consistency when applying different approaches.

3.1 A new working model for a new era

Any model adopted for Codex work should encompass high level governance principles that ensure the Codex core values of inclusiveness; collaboration, consensus-building and transparency are respected. When evaluating the extent to which the core values are achieved, it is important to take into account: the application of the statutes, rules and principles in the Procedural Manual; a framework that embeds flexibility in decision making; the scientific basis that underpins Codex standards; and adoption of new technologies in the digital space.

Based on consultations undertaken, three highly inter-related areas have emerged as being key to any model for Codex work. These are:

- Meeting models (format (physical, virtual and mixed formats within and across committees), reporting);

- Schedule of Codex meetings; and

- Inter session working mechanisms e.g., Electronic Working Groups (EWGs) and other virtual informal working mechanisms.

The experience of moving to virtual working mechanisms has already been captured elsewhere[xi] and the focus here was to continue consultation and extract the lessons learned from that experience as well as the ongoing experience of returning to in person meeting formats with different virtual dimensions.

3.2 Meeting models

3.2.1 Experience of different meeting formats

Over the past four years Codex went from physical only meetings to virtual only meetings to a mixture of physical and virtual formats. The first big leap from physical to virtual was eye-opening, leading to unprecedented registrations for Codex meetings. When reviewed against the Codex core values it was observed that virtual working modalities provided an opportunity for more Members and observers and larger delegations to join meetings hence contributing greatly to achievement of the Codex core values of inclusivity and by gaining participants transparency also increased.

However, more work was needed to ensure virtual meetings were also in line with the other core values of consensus-building and collaboration. It became clear that the requirements of virtual meetings for reaching consensus on complex issues were different from those of face-to-face meetings. In the case of face-to-face meetings, "informal meetings" (e.g., ad hoc working groups, inter-session working groups to address specific issues or coffee break discussions) play an important role. In virtual meetings, it is possible to recreate somewhat equivalent mechanisms but the experience in Codex to date has been mixed.

Where physical meetings are held without the capacity for virtual participation (without possibility to make interventions remotely), the now general practice that such meetings are webcast can help broaden access to Members, and support transparency on Committee meetings and resulting decisions. Webcasting of physical

meetings has supported the development of "hybrid delegations", where one or a small number of delegates of a Member or Observer are present at the physical meeting location and a larger number of technical or policy experts from that delegation are able to follow proceedings in real time and contribute to the interventions made by delegates in the physical meeting. However, for those who are not able to have anyone attend in person, they are not able to participate in the discussion. There have been suggestions that continuation of such an approach should come with the possibility of providing those following from a distance with other means to share their views. **Thus, webcasting cannot be considered a true alternative to virtual participation. Codex core values should be the common base line for meeting modalities, and for some webcast is not a meeting modality but rather an observing modality only taking care of transparency at best.** Another issue is that there is no recognition for those following a Codex meeting via webcast as such individuals are not recorded in the list of participants since they cannot actively engage in the meeting and there are no means by which to monitor whether or not they actually follow the discussions. While logical from the perspective of recognizing participation as having the ability to contribute as well as listen, it does present challenges in terms of monitoring the value of webcasting with perhaps the only data being total view numbers.

As with all meeting formats, there are resource implications related to virtual meetings, with many host secretariats indicating that the costs of such meetings, while not exceeding in person meetings, were still high due to the need to incorporate a whole different level of technology. This has presented challenges when it comes to combining in person and virtual formats (hybrid meetings). Webcasting being a one-way system, that does not allow remote intervention, has been reported as less expensive and therefore more feasible for host secretariats who are financially responsible for the Codex meetings they host. While used for many recent meetings, the approach to webcasting is not yet systematic, with different webcasting tools being applied as this approach is extended to subsidiary bodies and a lack of consistency in terms of providing live, on-demand or both formats.

There have been a couple of experiences with hybrid meetings, (defined as an in-person meeting with the possibility of making verbal interventions virtually, though not all decision-making processes e.g., voting is available to virtual delegates), such as CCEXEC83, CAC45, CCNASWP16 and CCFICS26. From the experience to date we have learned that:

- It is difficult to define the additional cost associated with hybrid meetings as these are dependent on many factors such as whether or not meeting facilities are already equipped with the technology for hybrid.

- There are concerns with regard to equity of participation of in-person and virtual delegates though a number of those who participated virtually in hybrid meetings considered it a positive experience and better than no participation at all. For Members for whom in-person participation is never or rarely an option, the option to participate as a virtual delegate remains a high priority.

- There is a need for clear guidance on hybrid meetings so there is uniform understanding of how such meetings work, including the differences between virtual and in-person participation for delegates. Guidance similar to that on virtual meetings provided by the Codex Secretariat and an assessment against the existing procedures outlined in the PM would be useful.

- There is somewhat of a divide in terms of support for hybrid meetings with some applauding while others noted that hybrid meetings limited their opportunity to participate in person as the option to participate virtually was often seen a means of saving resources and so travel may not be approved.

3.2.2 Selection of meeting format

- There is need for flexibility when considering the meeting format with the opportunity to combine the benefits of both physical and virtual meetings depending on the committee and/or agenda. However, having many different meeting formats can create confusion and even logistical challenges for host secretariats, for example when it is not clear if all registered delegates are planning to attend in person or not. Hence, clarity on the format and procedural guidance where appropriate as well as a certain amount of consistency in format across committees is important.

Table 1: Overview of strengths and weaknesses of different meeting formats

Format	Strengths	Weaknesses
In-person only	Face to face interaction facilitates collaboration, informal interactions, network development, relationship building, ad hoc meetings and consensus building Faster work pace – more can be achieved All in same time zone so can work full days **All forms of decision making including voting available**	Accessibility is resource dependent, limited to those who have the resources to travel and are able to secure necessary travel documentation in a timely manner Limited **inclusiveness and** transparency for those not present (meeting report) Carbon footprint Resource limitations of hosts and/or **Codex** secretariats
Virtual only	Increased inclusivity as accessible to more members and observers Increased transparency as more accessible to all members Can proceed even when outside factors prevent physical meetings Decreased carbon footprint Cost effectiveness / less financially demanding for delegates **Schedule can be adapted to virtual participation (e.g., limited number of hours per day)**	Time zone challenges Limited work time per day No opportunity for informal interaction Takes longer to make progress and may need to be spread over more days Little flexibility for the organization of in session working groups Challenges for delegates to join and participate virtually while also fulfilling expectations to undertake their daily work role/tasks **Technology failure at participant and/or meeting level** **Resource limitations of hosts and/or Codex secretariats**
In-person with webcast	As for in-person with some increase in transparency and some increase in inclusiveness (by allowing hybrid delegations) Increased transparency as all members/observers can access discussions	Limited inclusivity as in-person participation is still limited to those who have the resources to travel Time zone issues can make it challenging to follow live online Still some transparency limitations as cannot follow informal discussions No record in the list of participants for those who follow webcast **Resource limitations of hosts and/or Codex secretariats**
In-person with possibility of virtual interventions	Increased inclusivity as more accessible to all members Increased transparency as more accessible to all members. Facilitates progress, networking and consensus building Delegates can still participate even if last minute issues (flight cancellations, weather etc.) prevent their travel	Integration of participation of both in person and virtual participants is challenging. Challenging to match quality of online experience with the in-person experience (e.g., time zone issues). No opportunity for virtual participants to take part in informal discussions. Delegations who would wish to participate physically might not receive funding for travel if the meeting modality offers hybrid participation. **Unpredictable in-person attendance for**

		host country planning
		Technology failure at participant and/or meeting level
		Resource limitations of hosts and/or Codex secretariats

- When selecting a meeting format consideration needs to be given to a number of factors which range from accessibility and cost to the nature and priority of the work. Essentially the host country, the Codex Secretariat, FAO and WHO when considering the modality of Codex meeting need to undertake a multifaceted assessment which may need to consider in particular the following aspects:

The meeting agenda and status of work, e.g.

  - Extent of agenda

  - Priority or urgency or work items

  - State of advancement of work and expectations for progress, (including input from EWG chairs)

  - Nature of work – are there difficult or controversial items to be addressed

  - Flexibility of agenda to different meeting formats – do all items need to be addressed

Accessibility e.g.

  - **Advance** information from Codex Members ~~concerning their inability to~~ **on their intent to** participate in physical meetings

  - security concerns (global, regional or local as appropriate to the meeting of interest)

  - Any UN declared emergency situation; the extent of travel restrictions or changes/expected changes in travel restrictions

  - Access to virtual meetings - While the benefits of in-person meetings have been highlighted, for some Members, this is not or rarely an option and the option to participate as a virtual delegate remains a high priority for such Members

  - Time-zone issues for virtual delegates~~, =- ensuring~~ **issues to consider include** equity of **virtual** participation **vs making optimal use of the presence of in person delegates**)

Technology e.g.

  - Availability of technology for different meeting formats

  - Costs associated with different options and related risks and benefits

  - Provision of technical support for delegates

  - Member and observer feedback on the different meeting formalities

Meeting management e.g.

  - Time management for virtual meeting

  - Integration of both virtual and physical participants in hybrid format

  - Need for informal discussions, in session working groups

All of these considerations are related one way or another to the core values of Codex. The experience with virtual meetings and to a more limited extent hybrid meetings has given us some insight into how different meeting formats might impact adherence to the core values. Table 2 was developed as a means of ~~providing~~**undertaking** a quick **assessment**~~overview~~ on how one meeting format compares to another in terms of achieving the core values of Codex. ~~The intent is that it~~ **It can be used to** provide a qualitative relative comparison as opposed to an absolute comparison between different meeting formats. ~~The assessment provided here is based on the combined feedback received through post meeting surveys and the consultations with committee chairs, hosts and EWG chairs and CCEXEC sub-committee. However,~~**The outcome** **of** **such** ~~if this~~ **an** assessment ~~undertaken~~ **will likely vary depending on whether it is undertaken** from the perspective of one country or group of countries, an individual delegate or one host country secretariat. ~~a different picture may emerge as more definitive data could be used when applying the~~

~~assessment to a limited population~~. This may serve a starting point for decision making ~~on Codex meeting formats and could potentially be as tool to aid decision making~~ with regard to individual Codex sessions while also taking other aspects into account such as agenda, urgency of work, complexity of issues etc.

Table 2: Meeting formats and the core values of Codex

Format	Inclusiveness	Collaboration	Consensus building	Transparency
In-person only				
Virtual only				
In-person with webcast				
In-person with possibility of virtual interventions				

- The meeting format negatively impacts adherence to the core value compared to other meeting formats
+ The meeting format positively impacts adherence to the core value, compared to other meeting formats
+/- The meeting format can have either a positive, negative or no impact on adherence to the core value compared to other formats.

Resources and feasibility are also a critical part of the equation when taking decisions on meeting formats. In this case it is absolutely clear that the assessment will vary depending on the role in the meeting. ~~Completing~~ **Assessing** this from a global perspective would be very challenging, but ~~it~~ **Table 3** could facilitate evaluations for individual committees.

Table 3: Resource implications of different meeting formats

Format	Resource implications for host secretariats	Resource implications for delegates	Resource implications for Codex secretariat
In-person only			
Virtual only			
In-person with webcast			
In-person with possibility of virtual interventions			

3.2.3 Report format and adoption

3.2.3.1 Report format

With virtual meetings came the possibility to record meetings and have an audio recording or an almost verbatim transcript of the session. To date the primary use of recordings has been to aid in drafting the report and such recordings or transcripts have not been shared widely. A question raised in the development of this paper was whether the current report structure was useful or whether a verbatim report with a short decision-based report might be an option. The general view was to uphold the current structure with particular emphasis on having a list of decisions supported by a clear summary of what led to those decisions. Therefore, the main use of new tools at this point is to facilitate the preparation of the report while the current approach can be maintained with efforts for continuous improvement within that structure.

3.2.3.2 Report adoption

Adopting the report in person has been the practice for physical meetings ever since the founding of Codex. It allows participants to depart with an agreed upon report of the results of the session which gives a sense of completion and delegates can move on to other activities. However, it is also stressful to the Codex and host secretariats and translators as well as delegates as it limits the time for Members to review the report.

The virtual tools actively used during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted other ways to consider report adoption, with one option being virtual report adoption after an in-person or hybrid meeting. Virtual report adoption more than 2 days after the plenary session was dominant in virtual Codex meeting and has been

used by some Committees that held in-person sessions. In this case, the Codex Secretariat has more time to draft the report and translators have more time to translate it, potentially reducing translation costs. Scheduling report adoption by virtual means some days after the conclusion of a session could reduce travel expenses and allows more time for delegations to review and consider the report. It may also mean less days for renting venues and thereby potential savings for host secretariats. Other benefits of virtual report adoption, include on screen text changes that are easy to follow, and delegates being able to write their suggestions in the chat.

Some negative aspects have also been voiced. These include the challenge of joining virtual report adoption effectively from different time zones, a prolonging of the session which can be challenging in terms of time commitment and a sense of incompleteness when leaving the in person session, loss of participation and the possibility that it may be more difficult to obtain consensus on the report at a later date, leading to an extended adoption period and there has been a general feedback that the format of report adoption should be the same as the meeting format. Some host secretariats have noted that this can also lead to increased costs at their side as they still need a venue with the appropriate technical set up to run the session.

Consultations to date suggest that report adoption in the same format as the plenary discussions was generally preferred. However, this is another tool that can be considered when planning meetings which might allow more time to be dedicated to valuable in-person discussions and has been successfully used for several recent meetings e.g., CCFH53, CCCF16 and CCMAS42.

3.3 Assessing the delivery of meetings

To enable continuous improvement on the meeting model, the efficient and effective delivery of a Codex meeting needs to be regularly assessed.

Presently the most used tools are post session satisfaction surveys. These are being adapted, as working modalities evolve (e.g., use of hybrid modalities) to get feedback on a series of dimensions related to the implementation of a Codex meeting. Attendance at Codex meetings is another dimension that needs to be considered when assessing the delivery of meetings. Previous assessments, including through the Strategic Plan monitoring framework, have looked at meeting attendance before and during the pandemic. Continued efforts to monitor this aspect will need to be maintained, through the post session satisfaction surveys and the monitoring framework of the Strategic Plan. Dimensions that will need to be monitored include:

- Number of participants (registrations) physically and virtually in the meeting:

  - Number of Members and Observers participating in Codex Committees (physical and virtual)

  - Number of Member countries that replied to CLs in the biennium (a Member will be counted if they replied to at least two CLs during the biennium)

  - Number of Member countries who participated in EWGs during the biennium (participation is defined as registration to at least in one EWG during the biennium)

Proportion of formal invitations and meeting documents distributed in a timely manner consistent with the Codex Procedural Manual or timeframes established by committees.

- Satisfaction ratings on meeting efficiency, role of chairs and host and Codex secretariats

Much of this information is already collected as part of the monitoring of the implementation of the Codex Strategic Plan hence the outputs of that monitoring process can be used to inform continuous improvement efforts.

3.4 The Schedule of Meetings

3.4.1 Scheduling of meetings in advance

Advance scheduling of meetings provides predictability to support timely resource allocation by Host country secretariats and planning by participating Members and Observers. This was reiterated in all consultation rounds. Appropriate scheduling of meetings enables proper development of work plans by host governments and EWG chairs/leads. Committee work is normally planned according to the CAC schedule, and all EWG work is planned around the next Committee meeting. This provides an indication of timelines or "deadlines" which facilitates effective progress of Codex work.

The pandemic disrupted the schedule of Codex meetings, including CAC, and re-establishing a stable schedule as committees still work to return to full agendas is challenging.

The Codex Secretariat has convened meetings with all Host Country Secretariats and Chairpersons with the task of setting meeting schedules for Codex Subsidiary body meetings for 1-2 biennia. Discussions have also addressed whether there should be a move to a more needs-based approach, to convene the plenary session according to work progress, or if it is more important to ensure all committees have clarity on their schedule

and then according to the agenda, the length and format of the meeting could be adjusted accordingly.

3.4.2 Needs-based approach to meeting schedules

An approach to needs-based scheduling of meetings that allows best use of time in the Codex calendar, while still allowing host countries to budget and plan effectively has been considered. "Needs-based" is taken to mean that meetings are scheduled when there is a sufficient volume of business to be undertaken.

The criteria to be used when applying the needs-based approach to meeting schedules should be well defined recognizing the quantitative and qualitative factors that influence meeting dynamics. Some of the items that influence meeting dynamics include; volume of work; level of priority and complexity of the work; anticipated challenges in reaching consensus; whether the work can be completed within a traditional 5 day meeting; whether a meeting should be extended, (e.g. to 7 days), or reduced, (e.g. to 3 days by providing for virtual report adoption after conclusion of an in-person plenary session) and loss of predictability on the date of the next meeting, which would therefore affect planning and budgeting.

The needs-based approach to meeting scheduling may benefit the delivery of work by committees that are heavily loaded and could make use of extraordinary sessions planned according to their needs, with such sessions potentially being held virtually. These extraordinary sessions could focus on a specific agenda item that could not be adequately covered during the ordinary session or that needs to be progressed at a faster pace due to its high priority or urgency.

However, the needs-based approach risks causing loss of momentum when applied to committees with few work items because the passage of too much time between committee sessions can disrupt the work dynamics of the committee. This may prevent in the long term the emergence of new ideas and the launch of new works that could have been beneficial, although this may be somewhat mitigated by the use of virtual meeting approaches.

Consideration for scheduling Codex meetings when there is a sufficient volume of business could apply to those committees where there is limited work underway or few proposals for new work, or that appears to be of lower priority for Members, as evidenced by participation in working groups and past sessions. However, options of shortening or extending the duration of Codex Committee meetings should be explored in conjunction with a meeting mode that is less burdensome for participants. Also alternating between virtual and physical meetings could be resource-saving for all.

In relation to notice of Codex meetings, regardless of the meeting format, ideally there should be no difference in the timing of advance notice of Codex meetings. A minimum of twelve months advance notice would be preferable to allow for Members to include necessary travel within their budgets. Current rules of the PM should be kept as they are regarding formal invitations to any Committee meeting, irrespective of its format, and submission of working documents well in advance of Committee sessions.

3.5 Inter session working mechanisms e.g., Electronic Working Groups (EWGs) and other virtual informal and pre-meeting working mechanisms

3.5.1 *The important role of working groups in Codex*

EWGs and other pre-meeting working mechanisms have gained prominence as significant drivers of standards development work of Codex. They were very instrumental in progressing work when Codex sessions could not be convened in the early days of the pandemic, thus minimizing the impact of the crisis on standards development.

Codex WGs have specific Terms of Reference (TORs) aimed at delivering text suitable for decision-making by Committees and the CAC, consistent with working group guidelines in the PM. Underpinning this expectation is the importance of clarity when scoping the work, outlining the format and defining the main issues that need to be addressed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, working groups also convened deliberations by virtual means, a practice which is expected to continue, as deemed appropriate by working group chairs, the Secretariat and pending available resources.

WGs have provided a conducive arena for advancing work and consensus building, where WG members actively debate the issues and often reach agreement on recommendations, informing and forwarding issues identified for further discussion to the full committee. Consensus building through the WGs can be greatly facilitated by having a predictable schedule of the committee meetings; holding virtual working group (vWG) meetings in between committee sessions and physical working group meetings prior to committee meetings.

Regular in-person committee meetings may serve as good anchors for the WGs since they provide an opportunity for Members to build new networks and renew previous ones therefore fostering engagement and enthusiasm for working virtually in the WGs. Some EWG chairs have noted the challenge in maintaining active engagement in EWGs as the time between face-to-face meetings was prolonged.

To further enhance efficiency of WGs, logistical/administrative support is required, and facilitating the WGs to

work in multiple languages.

Due to the large number of working groups (47 at the close of CCEXEC84), it is difficult for many Codex Members to participate in the each one. As a result, proposals may be advanced in a working group without full consideration of their global impact, and issues may be raised at the Committee or Commission level that could have been addressed in a WG had Members had the resources to participate in it. An approach that makes participation in WGs by Codex Members a more realistic prospect for them could improve results while remaining consistent with the Codex core values.

3.5.2 Issues/ ideas for improvements

Beyond the ability for members to participate in each WG, feedback has suggested that the three most significant variables to consider when facilitating the WGs are the platform, time differences and language. Language is becoming less of an issue with captioning available, but there is no solution for multilingual WGs in the short term. In the long term, suggestions have been made to have a cost sharing arrangement between the host of the WG, host of the Committee and Codex Secretariat in Rome, though an increase in costs for the host secretariats or WG chairs would likely diminish the ability of member countries to chair or co-chair working groups in the future.

Consistent with the core values and the Codex Strategic Plan, CCEXEC should explore ways to engage more Members in WG leadership as currently the workload associated with leading WGs falls disproportionately on a limited number of countries. This could be complemented by each committee agreeing to a recommended number of WGs to be active at any one point in time with well-aligned work plans that would allow for more Codex members to engage in the work.

Recognizing that WG chairs may not have experience in this role, further guidance on best practices of chairing, including on how to document, how comments are considered, could be beneficial. A practical handbook for WG Chairs, similar to the Chair's handbook, is already under development by the Codex Secretariat and could meet this need and be useful towards encouraging delegates take up leadership roles. A delegate's handbook will be an important tool for use by all participants in Codex.

When EWGs complete their work, the draft proposed text is circulated for comment using the Codex Online Commenting System. This step has potential to be further developed in terms of openness and transparency and build upon the efforts of the EWGs. Codex could consider changes to existing online systems, for example, by allowing members to view each other's comments in OCS during the commenting period, to further promote and support transparency and consensus-building.

Model for future Codex work

(Reproduction of section 5.2 from CX/EXEC 23/84/3)

Considering the experiences of recent years, it is recommended that:

- Future meeting formats provide flexible approaches balancing in-person and virtual participation and taking into account the Codex core values and consideration of key issues identified in this document. Appropriate guidance on meeting formats and their implications for hosts, chairs and delegates will be important to ensure consistency and clarity.

- Virtual technology has contributed greatly to enhance access to Codex meetings by Members and Observers. This opens opportunities for Codex to raise the profile of Codex within competent authorities and national committees; enable better succession planning; and enhance electronic working groups, which could include virtual meetings in the EWG work plan developed by EWG chairs and co-chairs.

- The feasibility of procuring a technical platform that could be used across all subsidiary bodies to webcast committee meetings, reducing costs for host country secretariats and ensuring a consistent participant experience be considered.

- The virtual format and webcast of physical meetings be used, in addition to existing FAO and WHO training courses, to provide training opportunities for delegates to better understand their role, the Codex Procedural Manual and the conduct of meetings, how to intervene, what to take into account when developing positions and interventions, how to develop written positions and to take written positions of others into account, and how to work effectively in various formats. Such training can help build knowledge and capacity for effective participation, as well as contribute to the success of meetings in various formats.

- Medium-term scheduling be implemented noting the need to balance innovation with predictability when seeking to optimize the planning process. This should aim to facilitate planning by all parties involved noting that this equally requires the timely collaboration of all parties while retaining the option to apply the needs-based approach to provide, for example, an opportunity to advance specific issues of high priority.

- The criticality of intersessional work to the functioning of Codex be fully recognized with its benefits and limitations. Benefits include advancing work quicker between sessions and providing time for in-depth discussions and consensus building. Limitations include the resource-intensive nature for all involved due to the number of working groups and challenges for participation due to no or limited language support. To begin to address some of the challenges associated with intersessional work and particularly EWGs it is recommended that:

    o Committees consider the resources of Members when establishing new working groups, prioritize schedules of work, and limit the number of WGs to allow for more Members to participate actively in the work.

    o The handbook for WG chairs and participants under development be shared widely and effectively.

    o Work to review and harmonize the guidelines for EWG and PWG to one "Guidelines for Codex Working Groups" in the Procedural Manual be considered and if needed assigned to CCGP.

    o Efforts be made to identify resources for multilingual translation of WG documents and deliberations, For the present, we will continue to be dependent on host WG chairs and co-chairs to undertake these expenses when multilingual working groups are established.

- The Codex Secretariat should also examine global best practices with regard to capturing debates, deliberations and conclusions taking into account the evolution of technology.

- The Codex Secretariat as appropriate and possible (resources) re-start the practice of bringing

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‡ Taken from CX/EXEC 23/84/3, section 5.2. Other language versions are available on the CCEXEC84 webpage here.

forward proposals that could improve Codex work management practices and systems such as was done in the past e.g., on EWGs to help address Goal 5 in the Codex Strategic Plan.

[i] EXEC/79 CRD/01
[ii] REP21/EXEC1
[iii] CX/EXEC 21/80/3
[iv] REP21/EXEC2
[v] CX/EXEC 21/81/4
[vi] REP21/EXEC2, paragraph 85
[vii] CX/EXEC 22/83/5
[viii] CX/EXEC 22/82/5
[ix] CX/EXEC 21/81/4
[x] Codex Procedural Manual – 28th Edition
[xi] CX/EXEC 21/80/3