



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

**24<sup>th</sup> Session**

**Virtual**

**5 - 9 and 13 September 2022**

**FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SITUATION IN THE REGION**  
(Prepared by FAO and WHO)

## **1. Introduction and background**

Members need to continue to address food safety issues in a timely and effective manner. Since the Codex family and the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa (CCAFRICA) experienced the first fully virtual year of work and recognizing the level of achievements and the resilience of regional committees, several challenges were noted. These include the relentless schedule, the difficulty in ensuring work is delivered in a timely manner, and the gap left by the lack of face-to-face interaction.

Since the last coordinating committee for Africa in 2019, CCAFRICA in collaboration with FAO and WHO, has increased the number of virtual events. For example, capacity development events were organized for ECOWAS, EAC, and SADC member countries.

The CCEXEC, and CAC at its 43<sup>rd</sup> session in 2020, recommended that the Codex family continue to deliver the work programme in a pragmatic and effective manner to ensure that Codex can continue to quickly and effectively respond to the ongoing uncertainties related to the pandemic or any new/emerging challenges.

## **2. Current and emerging food safety and quality issues**

At CCAFRICA23 a report was presented on the emerging food safety and quality issues, based on the data that had been gathered through a survey in member countries. Key issues were identified, namely antimicrobial resistance (AMR), pesticide residues, capacity of food control systems, food fraud, water contamination, consumer awareness, aflatoxins, and climate change. AMR and weakness of the national food control systems remain very high priority issues.

Recognizing the relevance of such issues in informing the implementation of the Codex Strategic Plan, member countries are encouraged to support the process for collection of information on current and emerging issues and to look for other mechanisms by which such data could be collected.

## **3. New issues relevant to food safety and quality in the African region**

### **3.1 COVID-19 (impact on FBO & Competent authorities)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an unprecedented challenge for competent authorities to continue conducting routine food control functions and activities in accordance with national regulations and international recommendations. With the establishment of teleworking as a preventive measure, many countries in the African region have experienced serious challenges in maintaining the integrity of their routine food control activities. These include the inspection of food business operations, certifying exports, control of imported foods, monitoring, and surveillance of the safety of the food supply chain, sampling and analysis of food, managing food incidents, providing advice on food safety and food regulations for the food industry, and communicating on food safety issues with the public<sup>1</sup>.

Similarly, the requirements of physical distancing have caused the closure of many food businesses. Because of the nature of their work, many food industry employees did not have the opportunity to telework and are

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<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 and Food Safety: Guidance for competent authorities responsible for national food safety control systems - <https://www.fao.org/3/ca8842en/CA8842EN.pdf>

required to be physically present in their usual workplaces<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, workers on farms and in food processing facilities have been more exposed to COVID-19.

FAO and WHO worked together to develop guidance materials on ways to maintain the effectiveness of food safety inspection programmes and adoption of temporary measures to prevent serious disruption to national food safety programmes. Practical solutions included the maintenance of proper food safety management systems based on the hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP) principles to manage food safety risks and prevent food contamination. In addition, all the FBOs have been encouraged to adopt general principles of worker protection such as physical distancing, personal hygiene, and provision of protective equipment.

### 3.2 The Conflict in Ukraine

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began in February 2022, has sparked concerns about the risks spreading beyond the region<sup>3</sup>. The two countries play a substantial role in global food production and supply. Supply chain and logistical disruptions on Ukrainian and Russian grain and oilseed production and restrictions on Russia's exports might have significant food security repercussions. This is especially true for several African countries that depend on Russia and Ukraine for 30% or more of their wheat supply.

High and volatile energy prices due to the ongoing conflict have led to higher costs to produce food and feed globally. Food and energy import bills are already at record levels and expected to rise further. This will have additional upward pressure on international food commodity prices for low-income food-deficit countries (LIFDCs).

Many African countries are heavily reliant on staple food imports from Ukraine and/or the Russian Federation. Therefore, disruption of the food supplies could result in shortages of staple foods, not only affecting food security and food prices but also having a negative effect on the quality and safety of foods, especially if control mechanisms along food value chains and within countries become less urgent than accessing food. Rising food prices may also result in the flow of safer/quality foods to more affluent members of society, leaving the poorest with lesser quality/less-safe foods.

Food security and food safety are interconnected and part of sustainable food systems. When one of the two components is threatened, the other one is quickly at risk too. Therefore, addressing emerging issues that affect food safety and quality is expected to become more challenging in the African region. Despite the need to diversify sourcing of food and agricultural products the importance of maintaining food safety practices and controls needs to be ensured to enable an equal access to safe and healthy food by all.

### 3.3 Global and continental food safety strategy

#### • **FAO**

The FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG) emphasized at its 27th Session<sup>4</sup> the connection between food safety and food security, as well as the role food safety plays in FAO's support in achieving more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems. COAG 27 requested that FAO develop a new Food Safety Strategy to contribute to the 2030 Agenda. Further to the World Health Assembly (WHA) resolution 73.5 to strengthen efforts on food safety,<sup>[1]</sup> COAG 27 requested that FAO collaborate with the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure that their respective food safety strategies are aligned and mutually supportive.

Following the Committee's request, and considering the global strategic context, FAO developed a set of Strategic Priorities for its work on food safety, while maintaining its vision to provide "Safe food for all people at all times" and the mission "To support Members in continuing to improve food safety at all levels by providing scientific advice and strengthening their food safety capacities for efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems." These Strategic Priorities are articulated around four Strategic Outcomes that result from an iterative consultative process led by FAO with its Members and international partner organizations, including WHO.

FAO expects the *Strategic Priorities for Food Safety* to act as an instrument that will spur investments and secure adequate human and financial resources for FAO to successfully implement its food safety programme and to provide international guidance, policy, and advocacy for policymakers. These Strategic Priorities encourage a more consistent integration of food safety in the development of sustainable and inclusive agri-

<sup>2</sup> COVID-19: Guidance for preventing transmission of COVID-19 within food businesses - <https://www.fao.org/3/cb6030en/cb6030en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.fao.org/3/cc0471en/online/state-of-agricultural-commodity-markets/2022/food-agricultural-trade-resilience.html>

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2020. *Report of the 27th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (28 September - 2 October 2020)* <https://www.fao.org/3/ne021en/ne021en.pdf>

<sup>[1]</sup> World Health Organization (WHO). 2020. *Seventy-Third World Health Assembly: Geneva, 18-19 May ((de minimis and 9-14 November ((resumed.resolutions and decisions, annexes :2020* <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/345951>

food systems, food security and nutrition policies, and agriculture development strategies. The CAOG will review and discuss these strategic priorities at its 28<sup>th</sup> session scheduled in July 2022, with a view to submit the *Strategic Priorities for Food Safety* at the FAO council in December 2022.

#### • WHO

In May 2022, the seventy-fifth World Health Assembly adopted a WHO Global strategy for food safety. The strategy was developed by the WHO in cooperation with the FAO and WAOH (formerly OIE) on request from the World Health Assembly in 2020 to address current and emerging food safety challenges and include innovative approaches for strengthening national food safety systems. The strategy aims to serve as a blueprint and guidance for the Member States in their efforts to strengthen their national food safety systems and promote regional and global cooperation. The strategy was developed through a consultative process with input from a technical advisory group on food safety, two high-level international food safety conferences, and Member States consultations.

The strategy consists of five interlinked and mutually supportive strategic priorities to accelerate global efforts in food safety. Implementation of the strategy would rely on the commitment and efforts of Member States, WHO, and the international community. WHO will, together with other international and regional partners, support Member States by providing global leadership and fostering policy dialogues among stakeholders; synthesizing evidence and generating normative guidance in food safety; enhancing technical cooperation and building stronger capacities for countries; and strengthening partnerships and fostering global collaboration.

#### 3.4 Food Safety Strategy for Africa

The Food Safety Strategy for Africa (FSSA) was officially launched in June 2022 during the celebration of the World Food Safety Day (WFSD) by the African Union Commission. The strategy is developed in the context of the entry into force of the exciting era of the African Continental Free Trade (AfCFTA) Area Agreement and recognizes the importance of food safety in the broader context of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures.

The FSSA is expected to provide a harmonized framework to implement activities that mitigate various food safety threats that negatively impact consumers' health and to help reduce non-tariff barriers, particularly those related to Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures. The strategic objectives of the document are: a) Strengthen food policy, legal and institutional frameworks, b) Strengthen the human and infrastructure capacity of food control systems, c) Promote food safety culture, evidence-based advocacy, communication, information sharing to raise consumer awareness and empowerment, d) Improve trade and market access at national, regional, continental and global levels, e) Strengthen research, innovation, technology development and transfer, and f) Establish and strengthen coordination mechanisms and enhance cooperation at national, regional, continental and global levels.

FAO and WHO have actively participated in the consultation process for the development of the FSSA. Both organizations are committed to continue to support AUC and the implementation of the FSSA.

#### 3.5 African Continental Free Trade Area

The African Continental Free Trade Area has become a reality. AfCFTA is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063 of Africa's development framework referring to key programmes and initiatives to accelerate economic growth of the continent. The Trading under the AfCFTA regime commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 after the entry in force and launch of the operational instruments governing the trade.

The agreement is expected to bring together 55 member states of the AU covering a market of around 1.2 billion people. This an important opportunity given the current low level of intra-regional trade of agri-food products and the fact that Africa remain a net importer, of agricultural products.

FAO is supporting the implementation of the AfCFTA through different activities articulated under the programme priority area "transparent market and trade". This year a series of e-learning conferences were organized on *Trade, Food Security and Nutrition* in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

### 4. Status on the national food control system

#### 4.1 FAO/WHO Food control system assessment Tool

Since the launch of the FAO/WHO Food control system assessment Tool efforts have been deployed by FAO and WHO to sensitize member countries in the use of the tool, through regional events, facilitated assessments worldwide, and publication of communication materials. An introductory video<sup>5</sup> and a new interactive booklet<sup>6</sup> are available to provide the public with a better understanding of the tool. The booklet offers a general overview

<sup>5</sup> Introductory video available in three languages at the following link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_zdTup2yKY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_zdTup2yKY)

<sup>6</sup> The booklet can be downloaded in three languages here: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb4964en/>

of the tool structure, the assessment process, and the benefits of its implementation. It also includes an interactive outline of the tool that facilitates the browsing across the different dimensions and criteria.

Since the last CCAFRICA, FAO has provided support to AUC to undertake the assessment of national food safety and food control situation in the continent and development of strategic plans in food safety for sustainable prioritization and implementation of food safety policies and interventions. FAO further signed an agreement with the EU to facilitate the assessment of the national food control system of eight different countries within the COMESA region.

In November 2021, a regional webinar was jointly organized by FAO and WHO to enhance the understanding of the assessment tool and to increase the awareness on the benefits of assessing a national food control system.

#### 4.2 Codex Trust Fund

Since the launch of the FAO/WHO Codex Trust Fund 2 in 2016, 26<sup>7</sup> countries in the African Region have become beneficiaries and are implementing or preparing for implementation of projects with the support of the WHO and FAO. Several activities were carried out since implementation of the projects started and include advocacy and sensitization on the importance of Codex of high-level policy and decision makers, industry and public interest groups, regulatory authorities in line ministries, financial and technical partners, and the scientific community.

Procedural manuals have been drafted to guide the effective management of codex at the national level (Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, and Senegal); national policy on consistency and succession planning for participation in priority Codex Committees (Nigeria); redefinition of priority committees (Madagascar); formulation of national positions and preparation for sessions as well as the use of online Codex tools (Benin, Ghana, Madagascar, and Senegal); Codex strategic plan developed (Benin) and the inventory and gap analysis of national food standards and identification of challenges to effective use of standards (Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Senegal). In addition, work proposals or national food standards based on codex standards have been developed (Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Senegal).

To increase the use of Codex standards in countries, stakeholders have been trained on the use of specific standards and/or guidelines, codes of practice (Burkina Faso and Senegal). National Codex Committee members have been additionally trained on Codex procedures and practical aspects of the work (Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Madagascar, Senegal) and experts trained in contributing to the scientific base of Codex standard's development (Ghana, Senegal).

#### 4.3 INFOSAN

The FAO/WHO International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) continues to play an important role in facilitating rapid exchange of information during food safety emergencies in the region and strengthening national capacities for food safety emergency management. Through capacity building efforts of the INFOSAN Secretariat in collaboration with the FAO and WHO regional offices, there is a marked increase in INFOSAN membership in the region.

In November 2021, the WHO and FAO regional offices together with the INFOSAN Secretariat organized the first regional meeting of INFOSAN members and national food safety and public health officers for Africa. The meeting identified challenges and regional level actions to further enhance INFOSAN in Africa, including actions to improve the African network of members. As a follow up to the meeting, INFOSAN members in the region have shared their country action plans for 2022-2023 to strengthen INFOSAN and related activities on food safety emergency response.

INFOSAN members' knowledge and capabilities to participate actively in the network and respond effectively to food safety emergencies was further developed through the delivery of regional webinars. Online emergency simulation exercises to test national and international coordination mechanisms and bolster preparedness for food safety emergency response have been conducted for countries targeting INFOSAN Emergency Contact Points and National IHR Focal Points.

To strengthen national capacities and networks, the WHO and FAO regional offices in collaboration with the INFOSAN Secretariat have supported efforts in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone by facilitating national, multi-sectoral workshops that focused on building functional links between national agencies involved in food safety to better address food safety emergency response. The workshops have resulted to among others, the elaboration of roadmaps for strengthening food safety emergency response,

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<sup>7</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, The Gambia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and group project (Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda),

elaboration of national food safety emergency response plans, and protocols to enhance information sharing during food safety emergencies.

#### 4.4 Trade facilitation/Harmonization

The international forum for food safety and trade held in Geneva in April 2019 highlighted the importance of the coordinated advancement of the 'food safety' and the 'trade facilitation' agendas, and the fundamental role Codex food standards play in facilitating the harmonization of food safety regulatory frameworks as food systems evolve.

Since CCAFRICA23, FAO has continued to support the AUC and RCEs efforts for trade facilitation and harmonization of food controls in the region. FAO is currently supporting the COMESA trade facilitation programme through capacity development on food safety risk assessment and facilitation of stakeholder consultation on priority food commodities (most traded) and the associated food controls in the region.

#### 4.5 Antimicrobial resistance

At its 23<sup>rd</sup> session, CCAFRICA identified AMR as one of the highest priority in the region. A number of initiatives continue to be undertaken by FAO and WHO to address the issue of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in the region, including the improvement of collaboration and coordination among relevant stakeholders. For example, the two organizations are working with WAOH (formally OIE) to strengthen integrated surveillance of extended spectrum beta-lactamase (ESBL) producing *Escherichia coli* in humans, food and the environment in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

FAO approved the Action Plan on AMR 2021 – 2025 which provides five specific objectives for further work in the food and agriculture sector. Projects on AMR, such as the Fleming Fund<sup>8</sup>, Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF)<sup>9</sup>, and ACT project<sup>10</sup> are supporting countries to implement national actions plans (NAPs) on AMR, specifically the components applicable to the food and agriculture sectors. In the continued support to improving food production and promoting the improvement of practices in specific sectors, the FAO has been piloting the Farmer Filed School approach in Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, applying a bottom-up approach. In addition, other social science approaches have been piloted in Tanzania, among the Maasai agro pastoralists, to test models that can work in these local setting, for promoting better practices, prudent use of antimicrobials, and thereby increase the chances of reducing AMR transmission. Through this interventions, AMR and antimicrobial use (AMU) data collection, processing and analysis methods and tools are being piloted, to promote knowledge sharing and informed decision making.

FAO has been conducting a situational analysis/mapping exercise in Mozambique, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Egypt. With it, it is possible to get an overview of the main AMR and AMU activities going on in each country, under four main areas: awareness, governance, practices, and evidence. Pilot studies on the prevalence of substandard and falsified veterinary products (in Rwanda), and on Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) in dairy (in Egypt) are being developed.

The World Antimicrobial Awareness Week was jointly celebrated, from 18 to 24 November 2021, at a continental level with FAO, WHO, WAOH (former OIE) and Africa CDC and a joint communiqué released by Directors of the regional institutions. They provided guidance and advocacy materials to the Member States in support of awareness raising activities at country level.

### 5. Conclusion

CCAFRICA24 is requested to:

- (i) Note of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the FBOs and the need for continuous support from FAO and WHO to build capacity on food safety and quality in the region.
- (ii) Note the significant repercussions of the conflict in Ukraine on food security in the region due to the important reliance of many African countries on staple food imports from Ukraine and/or the Russian Federation.
- (iii) Note the information on the establishment of the food safety strategies globally and on the Africa region and on the progress in the implementation of the AfCFTA.
- (iv) Recognize the effort deployed by FAO and WHO in the region through joint efforts on AMR, Codex Alimentarius activities through the CTF, and strengthening national food control systems.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.flemingfund.org/grants/food-and-agriculture-organization/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.fao.org/antimicrobial-resistance/quadrupartite/multi-partner-trust-fund/en/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.fao.org/antimicrobial-resistance/projects/ongoing/project-10/en/>