

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda Item 4.2

CX/NASWP 25/17/5

January 2025

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

Seventeenth Session

Nadi, Fiji

3 - 7 February 2025

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SITUATION IN THE REGION - UPDATES:

FAO/WHO WORK IN THE REGION

(Prepared by FAO and WHO)

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY IN THE REGION

Introduction and background

1. The 16th session of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific (CCNASWP16) took place in Nadi, Fiji from 30 January to 3 February 2023, and recommended continued capacity building efforts aiming to better structure and coordinate participation from countries in the region in Codex committees. This paper provides a brief overview of the food safety and quality situation in the region since the last CCNASWP meeting.

Strengthening national capacities on Codex standards and food safety

2. A regional FAO Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) project "Strengthening national capacities on Codex standards and food safety" (TCP/SAP/3907) FAO is aimed at providing technical, including capacity building on food safety, to participating countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu from 2023 - 2025.

3. Two missions to provide training and technical assistance were conducted from April 8-12, April 15-12024, and November 9-23 in Samoa, Tonga and Marshall Islands, respectively.

(i) The following lessons were learned at the end of workshop training in Samoa:

- Samoa currently does not have a Food Safety Emergency Response (FSER) plan in place and needs to take steps to have one in place. This was confirmed during a presentation by the Acting Chief Executive Officer (ACEO) of Ministry of Health (MOH). The ACEO reported the results of a Joint External Evaluation by WHO assessment which was conducted in October - November 2023. The evaluation reported that "There is no plan, protocol nor mechanism for emergency response dedicated to food safety" in Samoa.
- The Samoa National Codex Committee (SNCC) and other existing legislations in Samoa, however, provide an enabling environment for the development and management of food safety emergencies.
- The analytical services provided by Scientific Research Organization of Samoa (SROS) are not widely known or utilized by industry or the general public in Samoa. This was confirmed by representatives of the media at the workshop who urged SROS to use the media to improve communication and visibility about their activities. An important information about SROS is that it is accredited and analytical results by the organization are internationally recognized thereby removing barriers to trade for exports from Samoa.
- Increased collaboration was emphasized between MOH and SROS to ensure that foods imported into the country and foods produced and sold locally in the country are safe, nutritious and healthy.

(ii) The following are key takeaways and contributions from participants at the end of workshop training in Tonga:

- The challenges of achieving healthy eating are influenced by the availability and easy access to unhealthy imported foods. The poor quality of unhealthy imported foods is exacerbated by the lack of

laboratories to analyse and assess food safety.

- These uncontrollable upstream factors and their effect on unhealthy eating habits are contributing to an increase in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Tonga.
- There is an urgent need to have food legislation approved and in place by the government in order to support enforcement and mitigation of unsafe food practices and eating habits.
- The Tonga National Codex Committee (TNCC) needs to be approved by cabinet and its position under the organizational structure of Food Act and Regulations validated.

(iii) The following are key takeaways from School food Vendors training in Majuro (capital city) and Ebeye (outer island) in Marshall Islands:

- There is the need for more frequent food safety trainings for food vendors. An important observation that would require urgent change was the length of time cooked food was left at room temperature before serving in schools or restaurants. Bacterial growth occurs aggressively in foods at the 'danger zone' between 5°C - 60°C and vendors were advised to serve food above 60°C or within 2 hours after cooking.
- Future training workshops must include speakers from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Ministry of Health and Human Services (MOHHS) to help emphasize the government regulatory requirements and to share examples of non-compliance observed in the schools and community as a whole. This will help emphasize the importance that government places on food safety training.

Codex Trust Fund activities in the Pacific region

A. Samoa:

4. A three-year Codex Trust Fund project was successfully completed in Samoa through the strong partnership between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labour (MCIL) and FAO. A final Project end ceremony was held at the Lava Hotel in Apia, Samoa, on September 13, 2024. Samoa became the first Pacific country to complete a Codex Trust Fund Project aimed at strengthening the national food safety system in the country. The project which commenced in 2021 was impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic resulting in delays in implementation of project activities, however, through virtual training workshops and meetings and subsequent expedited in-person activities from 2022 to 2024, the risk management proposals were proven effective.

5. Key results of the project include:

- The publication of the Samoa National Codex Committee Procedural manual.
- The launch of the new Codex webpage on the MCIL website.
- Increased Codex awareness and understanding of Codex work capacity of and collaboration between Samoa National Codex Committee (SNCC) members, donor agencies, youth, and media.
- Enhanced participation in international Codex meetings where Samoa contributed important scientific information for the development of Codex food standards for noni and kava products.
- Increased recognition and support of Codex work in Samoa by high level national policy makers including the Cabinet

6. In his Keynote address, Mr. Pulotu Lyndon Chu-Ling, Chief Executive Officer of the MCIL, addressed the stakeholders present, "Dear Leaders, thank you for investing time into this project over the past three years. Thank you to all the SNCC members who prepared presentations for our workshops, hosted site visits, and contributed technical advice during international meetings. We would especially like to thank FAO for the technical support and partnership in allowing us to access the Codex Trust Fund."

7. In a statement from FAO, Mr. Joseph Nyemah, Officer-in-Charge for the Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands at the time, remarked, "It has been a pleasure to partner with the Ministry of Commerce Industry and Labour to deliver this project. Colleagues, you have been proactive and passionate about completing this work to a high degree. Codex Alimentarius helps to ensure that, as a global community, we have access to scientifically sound standards that give us the confidence that we can provide safe food. We are privileged to have assisted Samoa with strengthening their capacity to participate in Codex work."

8. The event concluded with the launching of the Samoa National Codex Committee Procedural manual, with the ribbon cut by Ms. Kolisi Viki Apelu, NPO – NCD Technical Officer, from the World Health Organization (WHO).

9. The CTF2 output repository has been set up on the CTF website to make available relevant products deriving from CTF projects. Samoa submitted its National Codex Procedural Manual and will be the first

country in the region to feature in the CTF repository. The repository can be accessed through this link: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/codex-trust-fund/repository-of-project-outputs>

B. Tonga:

10. A mission to provide training and technical assistance to the Codex Trust Fund project in Tonga was conducted from October 1-5, 2024. Training workshops were conducted under Project Activities 3.2 – “Conducting awareness seminars to experts on effective participation in Codex work” and 4.1 “Organize awareness workshops to experts on the roles of FAO/WHO expert committees”.

11. A key takeaway from the workshop was the need for a more collaborative effort in addressing food safety issues in Tonga. It was proposed to develop an online platform for sharing ideas and information from Codex meetings conducted nationally, regionally and internationally. This platform will increase awareness and promote engagement in Codex activities. An interactive survey was also conducted during the training sessions to evaluate participants’ knowledge of common Codex standards and related texts, the level of concern posed by non-compliance to these Codex standards and the extent to which national regulations or legislation in Tonga have adopted the standards. Results of the survey indicated a need for more awareness and improved knowledge on Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs), use of food additives, contaminants and toxins in food and feed, food labelling and packaging, Good Hygienic Practices (GHP), and Codex standards generally.

C. CTF2 Round 7 applications from CCNASWP update:

12. A message was circulated to successful applicants of the CTF2 Round 7 call for proposals which occurred in 2023 to provide an update on the Codex Trust Fund (CTF) project

13. The message indicated that the CTF has been facing a general decline in financial commitments from the donor community. With limited amounts of funding available and a resource mobilization outlook that remains challenging for 2025, the CTF decided to suspend the ninth CTF2 application round originally foreseen for 2024. As a further consequence, the CTF started prioritizing the implementation and completion of ongoing projects over the initiation of new projects, which remains in place until additional funding has been secured. Considering these difficult decisions, in effect, the start of the CTF2 project planned for the countries under the CTF2 Round 7 applications has been put on hold until further notice. Once the current funding shortage has been overcome, the countries from the South-West Pacific that successfully applied for Round 7 of support, will be first in line to start their CTF2 project. The countries were reassured that the CTF is working hard to overcome this challenge and will inform participating countries once a positive outcome has been achieved that will allow for the projects to commence.

SIDS Solutions Forum

14. The 2024 SIDS Solutions Forum on “Transforming agrifood systems for our Blue Pacific Continent through better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life” was held in Nadi, Fiji, from November 5-8, 2024. Discussions under the Better Nutrition sessions focused on the potential solutions to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and increasing obesity rates, the barriers to adopting healthy diets and the situation of food safety in the Pacific region.

15. Food Safety Solutions highlighted in the technical background paper under Better Nutrition included:

- a. Codex Standards for Safe, Nutritious, and Healthy Foods: [Link](#)
- b. Farm to Fork (F2F) Initiative – “Connecting Farmers to Chefs” in Fiji: [Link](#)
- c. Improving Local Value Chains (Samoa): [Link](#)
- d. Food Processing centres (Fiji): [Link](#)
- e. Hot Air Dryer (Solomon Islands): [Link](#)

World Food Safety Day observance

16. The Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO RAP), the World Health Organization Regional Office for South-East Asia (WHO SEARO) and Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WHO WPRO), hosted the webinar “[Food safety incident management – Experiences from the Asia-Pacific region](#)” (11 June, 2024) to celebrate WFSD 2024. National authorities participated as speakers to elaborate and share experiences on: responding to food safety emergencies; key messages to safeguard public health and trade; recall contaminated food; and preparedness actions for unexpected food safety incidents. The Solomon Islands Ministry of Health had a representative in the speakers panel and shared challenges and lessons learned in the webinar, representing the Pacific.

17. A Prelude to World Food Safety Day: Tonga’s Tale of Education and Preparedness (June 5-7, 2024)

18. On World Food Safety Day, the Kingdom of Tonga embraced the theme 'Food Safety - Prepare for the unexpected,' a call that resonates with our spirit of resilience.
19. In the lead-up to this significant day, 7th June 2024, our journey took us to the heart of Tonga's future - its students. Over 4000 bright young minds across five secondary schools welcomed us with open arms, eager to learn about the importance of food safety.
20. Engagement Beyond Expectations The students' attentiveness was obvious. Their questions were insightful, their discussions lively, and their commitment to understanding food safety was inspiring. It was clear that these students were not just passive listeners but active participants, ready to be the vanguards of Tonga's food safety.
21. Imparting Wisdom for the Unexpected Through interactive sessions, we shared the importance of the 5 keys to safer food and stories of unforeseen challenges - tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, cyclones, and pandemics - and how being prepared can make all the difference. We discussed various scenarios and procedures, thereby equipping these young minds with the knowledge required to directly address food safety issues.
22. As we share this story on the FAO platform, we do so with immense gratitude for the continued support and assistance from both FAO and WHO through the Codex Trust Fund project. Their unwavering commitment has been instrumental in bolstering our food safety initiatives and empowering our nation's youth.
23. The engagement of Tonga's youth is a beacon of promise for a safer and healthier future.

International Health Regulations (IHR) core capacities

Solomon Islands:

24. a workshop to prepare for the Joint External Evaluation (JEE) had the participation of 15 stakeholders from technical areas of Food Safety, Risk Communication and Community engagement, and Antimicrobial Resistance. A report has been prepared to be shared with the external team of the evaluators. As a result of the workshop, the priority areas identified were integration of the existing surveillance systems, strengthening laboratory surveillance and the need to develop a coordination mechanism and a multisectoral plan to respond to foodborne disease emergencies. Tonga, Samoa and Solomon Islands conducted their first IHR JEE – priorities and outcomes from the Food Safety indicator highlighted the need to strengthen preparedness and response capacities for food safety incidents.

Strengthening food safety systems

Solomon Islands:

25. two workshops were conducted with the objective to strengthen food safety systems, one at central level (Honiara) and another at provincial level (Noro Province) and gathered multiple sectors (Ministry of Health, Ministry of agriculture, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Fisheries, Ports Authorities, Local authorities) and stakeholders (food importers, food exporters and trade brokers) operating at key points of entry (Ports of both locations) to address food imports and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for food business operators. The Ministry of Health Standard Operational Procedures were updated with inputs from multiple sectors. The multisectoral coordination and communication among stakeholders was tested during a simulation exercise activity with the use of case scenarios based on priority imported foods in the Solomon Islands.

26. WHO supported the review of the Food Safety Legislation and Policy Framework in Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

Kiribati:

27. Revision of the National Food Safety legislation - the Food Safety Acts 2006 and Food Standards & Regulations 2014 in Kiribati (May 2024) and identified the provisions to be proposed for an amend of Export and Import regulations with the support of the National Codex Committee members.

Papua New Guinea:

28. the country took critical initiatives to strengthen its food safety systems to ensure compliance with international standards and addressing gaps in its national food control mechanisms. From 27 November to 18 December 2024, WHO supported the country in their food safety policy review, stakeholder consultations, and pre-assessment preparations for the upcoming 2025 National Food Safety System Assessment. This initiative using the WHO/IFC food safety roadmap development tool provide countries with a framework for evaluating and improving their food safety infrastructures. By addressing gaps in policy, infrastructure, and inter-agency coordination, this initiative underscores Papua New Guinea's commitment to safeguarding public health and fostering sustainable food trade practices.

Fiji:

29. Following the development of a guidance manual “Risk-based food inspection system: practical guidance for national authorities” – published in February 2024, With the support from WHO, Fiji started to adapt and update their training materials for food inspectors.

INFOSAN

30. WHO WPRO, WHO SEARO and FAORAP supported the organization of the INFOSAN Asia Pacific Meeting 2024 (Nov 2024) hosted in the Republic of Korea. During the meeting, a simulation exercise was conducted with a focus on the current emergency response mechanism at national level, as well as information exchange and coordination amongst sectors, with involvement of INFOSAN Emergency Contact Points (ECPs) and focal points. During the meeting priorities for the region were discussed. Identified priorities for CCNASWP were: policy and legislation review; development of a multisectoral food recall guideline, development and/or finalization of the food safety emergency response; capacity building for food safety incidents (including Simulation Exercise (SIMEX) and training of Rapid Response Teams (RRT), development of a roadmap/workplan for food safety actions and further work on One Health, follow up actions after IHR JEE.

Traditional food markets

31. WHO continues supporting Member States in the implementation of the Five keys for safer traditional food markets: risk mitigation in traditional food markets in the Asia-Pacific Region that was developed by WPRO/SEARO towards risk mitigation measures for public health risks at these facilities.¹

¹ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290619956>