

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda Item 2

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

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

HARMONIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY STANDARDS IN AFRICA: OPPORTUNITIES FOR HARNESSING COLLABORATION BETWEEN CODEX AND ARSO

INTRODUCTION

1. The evolving food safety landscape requires regulatory systems that can constantly adapt to existing and novel challenges brought on, amongst others, by changes in food systems and climate, by emerging hazards as well as new technologies. While adapting to change, it is important to promote harmonization of regulation across sectors and borders to protect consumer health and facilitate fair practices in food trade.
2. Regional and international standards developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission are based on the best scientific and technical knowledge and are used worldwide to support the harmonization of food safety regulations. Regional standard organizations such as the African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) on the other hand also play an important role in development of harmonized continental food safety and quality standards that are key in the expansion of intra-African trade and integration of the economies of African countries. With the ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement, harmonization and regulatory cooperation within the continent cannot be overstated.
3. The harmonization of standards across the continent is extremely crucial to support realization of the trade potential of the AfCFTA and ultimately protection of the health and safety of the 1.4 billion people in the continent. Annex 6 of the AfCFTA Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade provides for cooperation in Standardization in the continent and ARSO has been given the mandate to develop the required standards to facilitate trade between State Parties. Additionally, Annex 7 of the AfCFTA Agreement on Sanitary and PhytoSanitary Measures engenders African countries to fully participate in the activities for the Codex Alimentarius Commission to promote the development and periodic review of standards, guidelines and recommendations with respect to all aspects of food safety. The recently adopted Codex Strategic Plan for 2026-2031 has placed significant focus on strengthening relationships with relevant international organizations, promoting a coordinated approach to address global challenges. This new strategic direction by Codex resonates with the spirit of the keynote address.
4. The keynote address will highlight the importance, opportunities and areas for collaboration between Codex and ARSO to promote regional harmonization of food standards to boost intra-African food trade and achieve the food safety, quality and SPS-related goals of the AfCFTA. The speech will also focus on how CCAFRICA member countries can take advantage of the showcased opportunities to enhance their contribution in the standard setting activities. This will increase the uptake of the regional standards at country level for the overall benefit of the continent.

KEY MESSAGES

- Highlight the importance of harmonization of food standards in the continent to ensure fair practices in food trade among countries and to provide the same degree of protection to the entire population in the region.

- The importance of cooperation and collaboration between Codex and ARSO towards the elaboration of harmonized regional standards, highlighting the critical areas for collaboration.
- The importance of having a well-informed prioritization strategy to maximize the impact of standards harmonization in the continent.
- Critical role of Member countries to participate actively and effectively in the standard setting activities as well as the opportunities to leverage data, expertise, and regulatory collaboration in this regard.
- The impact of the harmonized standards relies on the level of implementation by member countries. Harmonized standards are of little value if they are not implemented. There is need to enhance capacity particularly of MSMEs to use the standards in their national food control systems.
- Highlight efforts and approaches in the continent to foster effective promotion of harmonized standards among the member states in order to enhance the uptake and eventual application.
- Underscore the relevance and impact of harmonized standards on the enhancement of intra-Africa trade as well as to the economies of the region.
- Highlight potential joint collaborative capacity development initiatives and activities in the region to strengthen the Food Safety and Codex infrastructure of members which directly contributes to improving the quality of life in the region.
- Propose three key follow up actions to be taken forward by CCAFRICA Members that would facilitate the effective implementation of the AfCFTA through the use and application of harmonized food safety and quality standards as well as regulatory measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Codex Members in the CCAFRICA region are encouraged to share relevant information and identify mechanisms that would promote harmonization of food safety and quality standards/texts and regulations that could further contribute to protecting consumer health and facilitating fair practices in the food trade.