Appendix II

PROPOSED BLUEPRINT ON THE FUTURE OF CODEX

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.

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~~the statutory purpose (mandate) ~~.~~ of Codex is defined as Article 1 of the Statutes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission[x].

2.   Codex standards of the future – context and drivers

The system for Codex standards elaboration has served well in the 60 years that Codex has been in existence. The system is anchored in the process described in the Procedural Manual (PM)[xi] with the product being Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice, commonly referred to as Codex texts. They contain requirements for food aimed at ensuring for the consumer a safe, wholesome food product free from adulteration, correctly labelled and presented. The scientific basis that underpins Codex texts is fundamental to ensuring that Codex maintains its pre-eminence as the international reference for food safety and fair practices in food trade, as well as the primary source of science-based food standards for many countries and recognized by the WTO.

As we move into the future, Codex can~~, in line with its mandate for health protection and fair trade,~~ support the broader global goals around sustainability, one health, food security and environmental protection through the development of international food standards that address any potential issues for ~~food safety~~consumer health protection or fair trade practices ~~issues~~ arising from implementation of initiatives to advance sustainability interests.

Against this background, Codex standards need to be:

   i)   relevant, fit for purpose and useful for Members ;

   ii)   clear in their objectives;

iii)   responsive to the need for protecting the health of consumers protection and ensuring fair practices in food trade;

iv)   responsive to the relevant evolving global environmentchallenges; and

v)   founded on scientific evidence derived from an integrated foresight and food safety risk analysis framework that supports the production and provision of safe food.

This section considers the current global context and challenges and how this could affect the type of Codex standards that may be needed in the future to support safe food,protect the health of consumers and ensure consumer health, and fair food trade practices in the food trade.

2.1 Emerging issues in food and feed safety

FAO and WHO have asked how Codex will approach issues related to new food sources and production systems (NFPS)[xii] .

The Commission mandated work to CCEXEC, which was addressed by a subcommittee of CCEXEC and considered by CAC45[xiii]. Codex Members were encouraged to submit new work proposals related to NFPS using existing mechanisms, and to identify possible issues that the current structure and procedures could not address and options to address them, which may require us to think afresh about the way in which Codex work is structured and operationalized. CCEXEC83 also recognized the need for guidance to be prepared on how to apply existing procedures to ensure that Members do not perceive procedural obstacles to submitting new proposals for work in this and other areas of Codex. The Codex Secretariat has been requested to draft practical guidance on how to apply existing procedures when developing new work proposals.[xiv]

In the meantime, discussions have begun in some committees on potential new areas of work. For example a side event in the margins of CCCF16 on "Foresight: Looking into emerging issues in food and feed safety" provided a valuable opportunity for forward looking discussion and prompted the committee to establish an agenda item which would allow them to regularly consider emerging issues. The importance of having a space within Codex meetings to discuss these new and emerging issues before committing to the development of new standards was identified as an important step in contributing to the vision that Codex can be a place where the world comes together to discuss food safety and quality standards to protect everyone, everywhere.

2.2 Global political, environmental, economic and health issues

Pandemics, social unrest, environmental (e.g. changes in climate, availability of clean water, natural disasters) and economic issues present global challenges. These impact both the nature of the work of Codex and the working modalities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that Codex needs to adapt its working model to be flexible and adaptive to remain resilient and ready to take on the global challenges in an effective way. Even before the pandemic, situations of social unrest had impacted the implementation of Codex meetings and started to bring attention to the need for investigation of different working modalities.

2.2.1 High level global initiatives

The UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) articulated the need to urgently deliver progress on all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each of which relied on healthier, more sustainable and more equitable food systems, and further recognized the need to work together to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food. Codex standards related to food safetyconsumer health protection and ensuring fair practices in the food trade can facilitate the advancement of SDGs that are directly relevant to the work of Codex, in particular SDGs 2,3,12 and 17[xv].

It should be noted that while developing and or reviewing standards, there are issues other than food safety, quality, or nutrition that may be relevant and that may also be taken into account. There are procedures which allow these to be proposed by Members on a case-by-case basis to help decide if such issues can be considered as Other Legitimate Factors (OLFs) to be taken into account in Codex risk- management decision-making, using the criteria provided for in the procedural manual, such as whether these issues are within the mandate of Codex and acceptable on a worldwide basis. Nevertheless, when developing or revising standards the current procedures enable consideration of Other Legitimate Factors (OLFs) proposed by Members on a case by case basis where these are relevant to the protection of consumer health and the promotion ofensuring fair practices in the food trade

FAO Council recently (December 2022) endorsed a set of Strategic Priorities for its work on food safety, which aims to maintain its vision to provide "*Safe food for all people at all times*" in the context of its 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 encourage a more consistent integration of food safety in the development of

sustainable and inclusive agri-food systems, food security and nutrition policies, and agriculture development strategies.

The seventy-fifth World Health Assembly (WHA) (May 2022) adopted a WHO Global strategy for food safety to serve as a blueprint and guidance for Member States in their efforts to strengthen their national food safety systems and promote regional and global cooperation. With five interlinked and mutually supportive strategic priorities, the strategy aims to build forward-looking, evidence-based, people-centred, and cost-effective food safety systems with coordinated governance and adequate infrastructures. Implementation of the strategy relies on the commitment and efforts of Member States, WHO, and the international community.

Both the FAO and WHO strategic directions on food safety acknowledge the importance of food safety systems, based on evidence and scientific advice, in achieving the SDGs. They also recognize its importance in responding to major global drivers ranging from environmental changes and digital advances to emerging hazards in the food chain and the approaches to mitigating these challenges, such as food system transformation and promotion of the One Health approach. The One Health joint plan of action plan(2022-2026)[xvi] of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as OIE) quadripartite (spell out) on One Health also highlights the importance of a One Health approach to food safety.

The WTO, at the 12th Ministerial Conference, also acknowledged the centrality of Codex standard setting in the multilateral system in the context of emerging global challenges. The SPS declaration in paragraph 8 sets out an exploratory work programme to identify challenges in the implementation of the SPS Agreement and the mechanisms available to address them; and the impacts of emerging challenges on the application of the SPS Agreement. One theme for exploration is *"how to facilitate global food security and more sustainable food systems, including through sustainable growth and innovation in agricultural production and international trade, and through the use of international standards, guidelines, and recommendations developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the International Plant Protection Convention as the basis of harmonized SPS measures to protect human, animal or plant life or health*."

The commitment to finding global or regional approaches and solutions to global challenges have been reiterated on several levels. For example, the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture Ministerial Conference on Food Systems Transformation; A Worldwide Response to Multiple Crises, in its final communique from the agriculture Ministers of 64 countries reiterated the importance of the multilateral tools in addressing global challenges. The Ministers committed *"to strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration in the transformation of food systems in line with the One Health approach. In this regard, we highlight the critical role of science-based international standard-setting organisations, such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)."* Regional initiatives have also reiterated the role and value of Codex. For example, the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area referenced the Codex standards as the basis of harmonization across the region.

All of these initiatives recognize the importance of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

All these initiatives point to the long-term need for Codex, reaffirm its value, [and recognize its importance in considering mandate as one that is sufficient to already consider the food safety and quality implications of emerging issues and systems transformation, and contribute to addressing the changing needs of the world.]

All of these initiatives point to the long-term need for Codex, reaffirm its value and recognize its contribution to addressing food safety and quality implication of emerging issues, systems transformation and changing needs of the world.

(check with relevant documents and discussions to confirm accuracy and amend text accordingly)

All these initiatives highlight the importance of food safety for public health, food security and trade and the need to integrate foresight and preparedness to be prepared for the emerging issues to come. They further highlight the unique importance of food safety to successfully transform the agrifood system in order to meet the needs of the world. Codex is uniquely positioned as an enabler for all these initiatives by answering to the global needs to protect the health of consumers and the enabling of fair practices in trade, directly contributing to SDG goals 2 and 3.

2.2.2 Health, Fairness, and Sustainability

Recent discussions in CAC and elsewhere have drawn attention to the broad meaning of terms such as 'health' and 'fairness'. The meaning of these are well understood as related to food safety and quality in the context of Codex standard setting to 'protect the health of consumers and promote ensure fair practices in the food trade'. In broader contexts the terms 'health' and 'fairness' will naturally incorporate different aspects depending on the nature of the global initiative or the focus of the multilateral institution, for example, Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice, should be implemented together with standards for other areas so as to have

a holistic approach and address the synergistic impact of hazards from the diet, water, air and all sources when setting risk management measures.

In the context of sustainability, at the national or regional level risk management allows for informed decisions to be made to ensure that food is safe for consumption, nutritional requirements are met, food loss and waste is reduced and food is available for all. Different risk management approaches may be justified depending on how food is used and the extent and period of time for which it makes up part of the diet. It is recognized that Members may employ different approaches to achieve more sustainable food systems, each appropriately based for example on local or regional agricultural practices, climate, and culture, and that a singular methodology to achieving more sustainable food systems would not be applicable to all Members. Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice can provide the an enabling environment which facilitates the uptake and implementation of policies and programs to address the broader imperatives around climate change, environment and sustainability.

Codex standards, while put in place for food safety, quality, and nutrition, may contribute to other areas. For example:

- Codex has set higher mycotoxin MLs for foods for short term use to help ensure food availability in emergency situations and while practices to reduce mycotoxin contamination are still being implemented. Such approaches, with the commitment to review these after a clearly defined period, in addition to ensuring food delivery in emergency situations, also help reduce food waste.

- The *Codex General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods* (CXS 1-1985) includes provisions for date marking. The clear distinction between "Use-by-date" (expiration date) and "Best-before-date" (Best Quality Before Date) may contribute to reduction of food waste.

- Codex has developed guidance to facilitate the use of electronic or paperless certification for food trade and guidance on the use of remote audit and verification in regulatory frameworks, which exemplifies how Codex is responding to new challenges in a rapidly evolving world.

- Adoption of the landmark texts on countering antimicrobial resistance and the guidelines that the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene has developed on safe use and reuse of water in food production and processing to help counter the impacts of water scarcity are other examples of how Codex is addressing emerging issues.

3.   **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 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[xvii] 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 ~~Assessment~~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, ~~virtual meetings have challenged the achievement o~~more work was needed to ensure virtual meetings were also in line with the~~f~~ other core values of cons~~e~~ensus-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" (eg 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 much more careful planning is necessary on the part of the chairperson, secretari~~aa~~t or working group chair. ~~such as the established consensus building process in Codex Committee meetings, which previously took advantage of opportunities available when meeting physically. Virtual meetings, may lack some flexibilities afforded by physical meetings such as quickly forming ad hoc working groups, inter-session working groups to address specific issues, and connectivity issues can present challenges during the conduct of meetings.~~

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. 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 are 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	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 transparency for those not present (meeting report)
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	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

In-person with webcast	As for in-person with some increase in transparency and some increase in inclusivity (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
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.

- 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 form 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.

  - information from Codex Members concerning their inability 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 equity of participation

  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). However, resources and feasibility are also a critical part of the equation. Table 2 was developed as a means of providing a quick overview on how one meeting format compares to another in terms of achieving the core values of Codex. The intent is that it provides 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 if this assessment was undertaken It is noted that if these were assessed from the perspective of one country or group of countries, an individual delegate or one host country secretarait a different picture may emerge as more definitive datae could be used when applying the assessment to a limited population. Nevertheless Tthis but it 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 specificindividual 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	Resource*
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.
*The symbols aim to express an approximate relative cost between the different meeting formats as a means to highlight that resource implications must be considered together with contribution to core values

However,R 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 this from a global perspective would be very challenging but it 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			

*The symbols aim to express an approximate relative cost between the different meeting formats as a means to highlight that resource implications must be considered together with contribution to core values

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 (currently numbered 34), 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.

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[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 Procedural Manual, 28th edition
xi Procedural Manual, 28th edition
xii CX/CAC 21/44/15 Add.1
xiii Ref to CAC545 discussions on NFPS
xiv REP22/EXEC2 para 118iii
xv Codex and the SDGs and Codex Strategic Plan 2020 -2025
xvi Available at https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240059139
xvii CX/EXEC 21/80/3