CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

INFORMAL REGIONAL MEETINGS ON THE REVISED DRAFT CODEX STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025

14th March 2019, Hôtel Pullman, Bordeaux, France

Reflections and key points[1]

In line with the report of CCEXEC76 which indicated that "Regional coordinators are encouraged to seek regional input to inform regional positions through electronic means or face-to-face discussions (e.g. in the margins of CCGP)", informal discussions were organized on 14th March 2019 in the margins of the 31st session of the Codex Committees on General Principles.

The meetings were facilitated by the Regional Coordinators, or their alternates, with the support of the Chairperson and vice-Chairpersons of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and the Codex Secretariat. The meetings served to provide an overview of the revisions to the Strategic Plan 2020-2025 based on the comments received in response to the Circular Letter (CL 2018/67-OCS-CAC), issued in August 2018 (52 sets of comments were received) and a meeting of the sub-committee of the CCEXEC on the Strategic Plan 2020-2025 in December 2018 (Chairpersons' summary of the meeting is available here).

The meetings enabled countries to request clarifications on the changes made, proposed next steps and to share their general comments on the revised draft Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

The following summary of reflections and key points provides an overview of the key themes that emerged from those meetings.

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[1] This summary was prepared by the Regional Coordinators, or their alternates, and the Codex Secretariat. It is intended as an information document only to contribute to transparency in the process of development of the Strategic Plan 2020-2025. It should not be considered the position of any Codex Member or Observer at this point in time. Official comments of countries and observers should be submitted via the Codex online commenting system in response to CL 019/21-OCS-CAC. Deadline for comments is 30th April 2019.

1. AFRICA[2]

Overall observations

The document was found to be generally acceptable, although some minor issues were identified for further consideration by the drafting team. Some issues were identified with regard to the French translation and comments were provided to the Codex Secretariat for further consideration/revision.

Drivers of change

- Appreciated the inclusion of the recognition of Codex standards in supporting Members efforts towards achievement of the SDGs that directly affect food safety and fair trade.
- Agreed that the SDGs 2, 3, 12 and 17 were directly related to the work of Codex.
- Suggested that there was a need for the Strategic Plan to reflect the way in which Codex would contribute to the SGDs. The suggestion was for the Codex Secretariat and the Vice-Chair of the CAC to provide guidance on how member countries could use Codex Standards to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

Codex mission statement

- Expressed concern that reference to 'global' standards in the mission statement excluded the fact that Codex also developed regional standards
- Suggested this could be addressed by including reference to the 'Regional' standards directly in the mission statement or by reference to **'International"** science-based food standards, which would be inclusive of both regional and global standards.

Goals and objectives

GOAL 1: Address current, emerging and critical issues

- Highlighted some difficulties with regard to the determination of "critical issues", which may be different for Regions and Member States and proposed development of an explanatory note, which could provide guidance on how to determine/identify critical issues.
- Noted that the terms **current and critical issues** were not captured in the objectives, even though they were highlighted in the title of Goal 1.
- Expressed some concern that neither food safety or Codex were mentioned in the title of 'Goal 1', and that this could be misleading, although did note that the Strategic Plan (SP) is for Codex, which in a way implied food safety as it is the mandate of Codex.

GOAL 3: Deliver impact through the recognition and use of Codex Standards

- Noted that this is a new goal and will reflect how standards are used by members including stakeholders, which implement Codex Standards. (e.g. Third Party Certification Schemes).

Concluding reflections

- Generally happy with the structure or the draft SP, but noted that some edits to reflect the above comments would improve the draft document.
- Noted the need to submit their written in response to the Circular Letter by **30 April 2019**.
- Noted the request to look forward and review the Goals and objectives from the perspective of developing the implementation plan and how that would relate to the work of the Regional coordinating Committee e.g. could the greater focus on Emerging issues in Goal 1, impact on how the region selects, develops and reports on Regional Standards.

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[2] Angola, Ghana, Cameroon, Senegal, South Africa, Morocco, Kenya, Uganda, Africa Union, Tanzania

2. **ASIA AND NEAR EAST**[3]

General views:
* Strategic Plan (SP) broadly reads well
* Structure of the Goals, Objective and Indicators clear.

Vision and Mission Statement:
* Appreciated "better" (shorter, clearer, easier to remember) Vision Statement
* Expressed some concern about the difference between "Vision" and "Mission"
* Highlighted concern about the missing term/word "international" in the "Vision" and "Mission" statement

Core Values

* Considered that Core Values should not be part of the SP since latter is time bound (limited tenure) and the Core Values are intended to be permanent (timeless)
* Suggested that if core values are included in the SP, then these should be put in the "*Introduction*" section or as a section with higher hierarchy in the SP

Goal 1: Address current, emerging and critical issues:
* More elaboration is required; Do emerging issues go beyond food safety and include 'other legitimate factors'?

Goal 2 (Develop standards based on science and risk-analysis principles):
* Section should talk about robustness / quality of data since data generated / furnished by developing countries at times is not taken into consideration on account of lack of quality
* Capacity of developing countries to generate data…..need some support framework to put it right
* Some concern on the definition/ understanding of "science-based"

Goal 3 (Deliver impact through the recognition and use of Codex standards):
* Importance of this Goal generally acknowledged, but several questions on what kind of activities should be undertaken by Codex to achieve this Goal. Some other thoughts included:
    * Standards development process is resource intensive. How do we ensure universal use of Codex standards which are developed with great efforts?
    * Mechanism/tool to measure achievement of this Goal and who is responsible / needs to be clarified?
    * It is better to refer to 'adaptation' of Codex standards rather than 'adoption'

Objectives
* Objective 1.1: How can the revision/amendments of Codex texts be covered under this objective?
* Objective 2.3- What do we expect from members? Push from different countries have different impact
* Objective 3.1: What kind of events are envisaged in the indicators?
* Objective 4.2: How do we measure active participation?

Indicators
* Presentation of indicators, directly after "Objective and Outcome", is very good and avoids confusion
* Some indicators are still not very clear (explanation on better SMART indicator is needed)
* Given indicators are either objective or subjective; need more objectivity
* There is no target value for some indicators (what will be considered a successful indicator at the end of 5 years)? Any criteria to judge if the indicators are right? Take the best ones (indicators) from the current Strategic Plan (2014-2019)

Text related to the SDGs
* SDG 12: Use of the text 'DURABILITY MARKING' needs to be better clarified.

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[3] Participants: Asian region: China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand; Near East Region: Algeria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia

3. **EURO**[4]

Key points

The CCEURO group discussion centred on several key themes. These were: Whether the plan was ready for adoption at CAC42; finding the right balance to describe and qualify the important role science plays in Codex work; referencing properly Codex as a risk manager; support for "consensus" as a core value; and the challenge of implementing and monitoring the delivery of the Strategic Plan (SP).

Summary of reflections

- Generally acknowledged that the new draft was more concise, readable and therefore more accessible.

- General support for having both a vision and mission statement, acknowledging that the mission describes what we do and the vision where we want to be.

- Support for separating the delivery plan, or "activities" as they were described in the previous draft as this helped provide a more focussed and slimmed down plan.

- One of the main challenges identified was how to be strategic and ambitious whilst being realistic in the ability to monitor implementation of the plan.

- Agreement on the importance of science to Codex but also a feeling that there needed to be more clarity around the role of science to help qualify what was meant by the frequent inclusion of the phrase "science based" throughout the text.

- Many felt the SP needed a better balance in order to reflect the role of Codex in the development of standards, guidelines and principles that cover food safety and quality issues. CCEURO member countries acknowledged the important role of science in the risk analysis framework in the standard development process and the need for sustainable funding. However, not all standard development is based on scientific advice. If the plan is too focused on risk assessment it runs the risk of missing part of the role as risk manager. Questions were raised regarding how to use science as an indicator, as many standards do not require a risk assessment [from e.g. JECFA, JEMRU, or JMPR].

- Deletion of the text about Codex being a risk manager was questioned and stimulated a lengthy discussion. The prevailing view was that CAC has a role in risk management and that this should continue to be reflected in the SP. The discussion touched on the different aspects of risk management in the context of national frameworks and at the level of CAC. CAC provides general guidance to Governments in the form of risk management recommendations and each country takes account of these through their national risk management framework.

- Many members of the region expressed a preference for "consensus" to be the core value, as consensus was viewed as critical to the harmonization of global standards. Consensus building was considered to be a process rather than a value.

- Highlighted that there had been no formal evaluation of the existing strategy. This led to questions, inter alia, about what will be different and why the SP needed to be 5 years in length? It was noted that an evaluation should be included this time around. The main thrust of the discussion was that the field of food safety is not stable, new challenges constantly appear and that the SP needed to be able to react to such changes.

- General support for the SP to be adopted at CAC42 in July, in order for the Regional Coordinating committees to discuss implementation plans.

- Regarding implementation of the SP it was noted that:
    - It was difficult to make a strategy into a practical tool
    - The idea of an active role of RCCs was welcomed
    - There needed to be flexibility for regions in designing implementation activities and its evaluation
    - There were some concerns that approaches to work plans may vary across regions and that this might influence finding consensus on standards development.

- It was recognised that there isn't currently a way to measure the impact of Codex standards, and there was a broad acknowledgement that there is more work to be done on this.

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[4] Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom

4. **LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**[5]

General views:
- International Trade has not the relevance/visibility that it should have
- Consideration of consumer concerns is too broad and goes beyond the mandate of Codex
- Need for clarity on the development of the implementation plan, the role of the RCC and how coherence will be ensured (e.g. role of CCEXEC) and timeline for this
- Need for clarity on the which parts of the SDG table can be changed

Vision and Mission Statement:
- The vision statement reference to protecting everyone, everywhere is very expansive and going beyond the Codex mandate

Goals

Goal 2 (Develop standards based on science and risk-analysis principles):
- Appreciate objective 2.2 but concerned that this is not currently happening and there needs to be clear activities to address this and ensure that data from all geographic areas is equally considered in standard setting work
- If countries are to go to the effort of submitting data for scientific advice, it is important that that scientific is used in standards development and that these science based standards are adopted

Goal 5 (Manage work through systems and practices that support the achievement of all strategic plan goals)

- Need to also consider CCPs who also play an important function in the efficiency of Codex structures

Views on indicators
- Relationship between indicators and outcomes is not always clear

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[5] Participants: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Panamá, Paraguay, Uruguay, IICA

5. NORTH AMERICA AND SOUTH WEST PACIFIC[6]

General views:
- Appreciation of the way the document is developing and the effort to be shorter and more focussed
- Some of the text is expansive and goes beyond the Codex mandate

Vision and Mission Statement:
- Mission statement in SP is different from Chairperson's summary – check which was agreed by sub-committee – editing appears to have lost important nuances

Codex Core Values

- Would like to see inclusion of science-based – consider it to be a critical core value and a key reason for countries to use Codex standards
- Scientific basis of Codex standards also a valuable tool in creating awareness of Codex standards and gaining political support
- Noted however, that 'science-based' is captured in the mission statement and throughout the document

Goals

Goal 3 (Deliver impact through the recognition and use of Codex standards):

- Recognized the value of understanding how Codex standards are used but noted that Codex standards are voluntary in nature and that measuring use is complex and challenging and could give the impression that they are required to be implemented.
- Expressed concerns about the indicators and how they might reflect the range of uses that are made of Codex standards.
  - Considering adoption into legislation only is a very limited view that will not capture the actual benefit and use made of Codex standards
  - Too much focus on the end point (legislation) and not enough on the processes that may be influenced by Codex standards
  - Myriad of ways in which Codex standards are used and influence national policy/regulation/trade agreements/etc. – big picture needs to be considered
  - Measuring impact, including determining and collecting relevant information and data on the use of Codex standards, presents a huge challenge, even for countries with resources
  - The right questions need to be asked in order to get valuable, meaningful information
  - Need the indicators to be realistic

Goal 5 (Manage work through systems and practices that support the achievement of all strategic plan goals)

- If satisfaction surveys are to be used as a data source for the indicators then they need to be revised to be more fit for purpose

Views on indicators
- Need more clarity on what these mean for those responsible for providing the data and how will it impact what they currently do (e.g. Committee Chair persons).

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[6] Participants: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States of America