

Contribution to the 2016 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) by the Codex Alimentarius Commission

The following contribution is sent in response to the invitation by the President of ECOCSOC, His Excellency Oh Joon, for the Codex Alimentarius Commission to offer substantive inputs to the 2016 HLPF showcasing the contribution of Codex towards the 2030 Agenda in general, and particularly for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and respective targets that are substantial to the mandate of Codex.

Brief presentation of the Codex Alimentarius Commission

Founded in 1963, the Codex Alimentarius Commission is a joint intergovernmental body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Codex Alimentarius itself is a collection of over 200 standards, and over 100 codes of practices and guidelines as well as other recommendations that have been adopted by the Commission with the purpose of protecting consumer health across the globe while simultaneously reducing unnecessary trade barriers in the area of food.

International Codex standards are recommendations for voluntary application by members, but serve, in many cases, as a basis for national legislation. The reference made to Codex food safety standards in the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures (SPS Agreement) means that Codex has far reaching implications for resolving trade disputes. WTO members that wish to apply stricter food safety measures than those set by Codex may be required to justify these measures scientifically.

Links between the Codex Alimentarius and the SDGs

Food safety is a cornerstone of food security that only exists “*when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life*” (World Food Summit, 1996). Through its work as a food safety standard setter the Codex Alimentarius Commission contributes to Goal 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture and more specifically Target 2.1 2 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.

Food safety is also central to ensuring healthy lives. It is estimated that 600 million foodborne illnesses and 420,000 deaths derived from 31 major food safety hazards only in 2010 (WHO, 2015). The Codex mandate thus also speaks directly to Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. As Codex provisions concern the hygienic and nutritional quality of food, including microbiological norms, food additives, pesticide and veterinary drug residues, contaminants, labelling and presentation, and methods of sampling and risk analysis, they contribute in particular to Target 3.9 By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination.

Lastly, Codex food safety provisions, in particular in the area of nutrition and labelling, also relate to Goal 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. For instance certain Codex guidelines and codes of practices on food hygiene address the issue of product date labelling which can contribute to SDG Target 12.3 By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.

To summarize: better food safety means better nutrition, less waste and can potentially lead to more food security. In turn, better nutrition and more efficient food systems pay strong, lifelong dividends for health, productivity, and economic growth.

1. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level:

The burden of diseases deriving from unsafe food is borne particularly by children under five years of age and by persons living in low-income sub-regions of the world (WHO, 2015). However, all individuals irrespective of their age or location, can be affected. From a Codex perspective one key indicator for assessing to what extent the relevant targets under SDG2 and SDG3 are met for all nations and all segments of society is the level of membership. Currently the Codex Alimentarius Commission has 188 Members (187 countries and the EU as a member organization), which means that only about 1 percent of nations and approximately 50 million people are not yet members. In addition, Codex currently has 234 observers (covering the following types of stakeholders: 54 intergovernmental organizations, 164 non-governmental organizations and 16 UN organizations).

Next to formal membership and the number of observers, the actual level of participation, the balance of representation between developed and developing nations and overall transparency in the standard setting processes can provide a detailed indication of “who is left behind”.

2. The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:

1.1. *Gaps and areas requiring urgent attention*

Although nearly all countries are members of Codex, active participation both in Codex work and in the development of national food control systems is “patchy”. Looking for instance at the level of participation of developing countries in Codex technical committees during the past 5 years, these countries have on average constituted around 30 percent of the total number of delegations. This issue is addressed in the Strategic Plan of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the Secretariat’s Communication Strategy and in the design of capacity building activities of the Codex parent organizations FAO and WHO.

2.2 *Challenges and risks*

A remaining challenge is to ensure sufficient financial support: on the one hand for developing and transition economy countries to help build their capacity to engage fully and effectively in Codex activities, and the other hand for scientific advice to ensure that Codex continues to be rooted in rigorous scientific methodology. There is also a need for communication with a broader range of observer organisations and other stakeholders who can ensure Codex work is effective and its outputs widely implemented.

A key risk deriving from low participation of countries in Codex standard setting activities, on the one hand, and low engagement with relevant stakeholders (e.g. food industry, NGOs, trade unions, private standard setters) on the other hand, is an ultimate lack of ownership and uptake of Codex standards which are internationally recognized as a benchmark for food safety and quality.

3. Valuable lessons learned on ensuring that no one is left behind:

Setting standards or demanding testing or methods of analysis which go beyond the reach of developing countries means that a large part of the targeted standard users risk eventually being left behind and the goal of ensuring safe food for all and fair trade in food will be undermined.

While physical participation of developing countries in Codex committees is one important element in ensuring awareness and ownership of standards, there is a recognition that participation in the Codex process (physical or non-physical) can only be effective when key elements at national level are in

existence and functional. Implementing tailored capacity building programmes at the national, sub-regional and regional level has been shown to lead to more effective and more harmonized norm setting both on an international and national level.

4. Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle:

From a Codex perspective, a number of emerging issues are likely to affect whether or not all concerned actors in future will be able to benefit from international food safety standards which in turn has an impact on the global level of food security, public health and access to international markets. Some of the issues that will have to be considered in an integrated manner to avoid that anyone is left behind are:

- **Food waste** and its effects on malnutrition and food safety: By 2050, the world will have 9 billion people to feed requiring a 60 percent increase in food production on land and in oceans that are already strained. Loss occurs because of poor storage, transportation, pests, lack of available markets and general waste. In developing countries, poorer communities, especially smallholder farmers, often lack access to the technology and energy that is essential to keep food safe. This results in potentially un-safe food being consumed out of necessity.
- **Technological developments** in the area of food safety: Food inspection, control and certification systems are likely to become more technological in developed countries which risks then creating an un-level playing field for trade and competitiveness.
- **Competition for attention and resources:** In the light of an increasing number of global challenges such as climate change, the protection of ecosystems, sustainable consumption and production it will be more and more difficult to ensure sufficient resources for standardization in food safety.

5. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required:

Codex would welcome a discussion on the nexus between food safety, food security, nutrition, health and trade that takes stock of existing coordinated processes in these areas and provides guidance on how the relevant actors could work together to advance the integrated implementation of SDGs.

6. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind:

Food safety (and international standards in this area) need to be seen as part of a holistic approach to address food insecurity, malnutrition, health and well-being as well as patterns of food consumption and production (including food waste). Codex standards have a potentially high impact on the global level of food security, public health and fair practices in food trade. However, what is most needed in developing countries - to ensure that Codex standards are developed in an inclusive manner and eventually implemented - is strengthened national capacity in food safety related matters. An investment in capacity building in food safety matters will lead to better informed policy and decision makers who will, in turn be better able to ensure increased ownership and inclusiveness in international food safety standard setting.