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High Level Political Forum 2022 from 5-7 and 11-15 July 2022

“Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

ANNEX 6

Inputs from the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex)

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, hereafter Codex, is an intergovernmental body that develops and adopts international food standards to protect consumer health and promote fair practices in food trade. Codex, with the Secretariat being hosted by FAO, is the central pillar of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme (the others being scientific advice and capacity building). Codex standards are adopted primarily by consensus by Codex’ 189 Members. They provide a framework for food safety and quality, creating a transparent rule-based trading environment reducing risks for those operating in the increasingly complex international trading system while ensuring the protection of consumers’ health. For the ongoing pandemic not to disrupt the vital international food supply chains, food must continue to adhere to food safety standards and measures to reduce possible transmission of the virus causing the pandemic must also be followed to keep workers safe. Applying general principles of food hygiene essentially contribute to both goals. Codex standards offer a framework and guidance to support the continuation of the production of safe food and open food trade amid the pandemic thereby supporting in particular. Codex contributes directly to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 12, and 17, while contributing in a more indirect way to others, such as SDG 5 and 8.

a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17

SDG5- Women and Codex

Women play a very important role in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, leading delegations, committees and working groups. Six Codex Committees are chaired by women and many of the working groups that develop Codex standards and the science that underpins Codex standards are led by women. However, just two of the chairpersons of the Codex Alimentarius Commission since it began in 1963 have also been women.

The Codex Secretariat is using the opportunity of international days such as International Women’s Day (<https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/news-and-events/news-details/en/c/1379304/>) and the International Day of Women and Girls in Science (<https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/news-and-events/news-details/en/c/1471809/>) to highlight the important role of women in the international standards setting work of the Codex Alimentarius. These efforts focus on the valuable contributions women make with the aim of



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inspiring other women to engage and also take a leading role. Engagement is not only critical for development of Codex standards but also to facilitate greater understanding of the work of Codex and how the standards can be adapted and used at country level.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way in which Codex undertook its work with all aspects moving to a virtual modality in 2021. While this required extensive investment in technology, training on use of the technology and outreach to members to facilitate their engagement, this also made Codex more accessible to all its members. We observed an increase in participation across all committees in terms of both delegates and delegations with a doubling of registrations from LMICs. The impact of virtual technology is leading us to review participation more closely and we are incorporating gender into our analysis of participation data from 2021 to better inform our efforts to engage women including at the highest levels.

SDG17 – Partnerships

Partnerships for Science

Codex standards are underpinned by sound science and risk assessment which is provided through the scientific advice programmes of FAO and WHO in collaboration with experts from around the world. This scientific partnership worked virtually during the pandemic to ensure the standards setting work could continue. The high quality was maintained but at the price of quantity due to the challenges of working simultaneously across different time zones to evaluate complex scientific data. Without this partnership, Codex could not develop standards and emerging from the pandemic work modalities will need to evolve again to facilitate productivity.

Partnership for standards development

The Codex Alimentarius is somewhat unique in its openness to participation of other intergovernmental as well as non-governmental organizations as observers to its work. This increases transparency of the work and facilitates expertise from the food industry, consumer groups and other stakeholders in standards development. Currently there are 243 observers to Codex and with virtual meetings in 2021 we saw two to three times more engagement of observers in Codex meetings.

Codex texts set the benchmark for food safety in global food trade. They provide a framework for the broad management principles of food safety in a transparent rules-based trading environment and reduce risks for those operating in the increasingly complex international trading system while ensuring the protection of consumer health.

Gaps were identified during the pandemic and observers worked closely with Members of Codex to complete key new standards such as on the assessment and use of voluntary Third-Party Assurance (vTPA) programmes and Guidance on paperless use of electronic certificates which provide frameworks and alternatives for dealing with assurance and certification that can facilitate trade even in challenging circumstances.



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Partnerships for enhancing capacity and engagement

The Codex Trust Fund (CTF) is a development partnership located at the heart of the global Codex system, comprising developing and transition economy countries, developed countries as well as FAO and WHO. It focuses on supporting more effective engagement of developing and transition economy countries in the Codex system through the enhancement of internal country capacities in developing sustainable and affective national Codex coordinating structures and contact points. The second phase of the CTF which began in 2015 has funded 35 projects in 44 countries and will undertake its mid-term evaluation this year which will consider a range of issues including the implementation challenges of the past two years.

b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

The movement to virtual working mechanism allowed the international standard setting work to continue in an inclusive and transparent manner. While very effective in the short-term there is a sense that it will not be possible to maintain the momentum of virtual work without also having an element of physical engagement. This presents real challenges in terms of “leaving no one behind” as members express concerns that a hybrid model could create a two-class membership while a return to physical meetings would also be limiting to those with the economic resources to engage. For many who have had resources diverted to pandemic response, and are facing pandemic-related economic challenges, physical meetings could be less well supported than pre-pandemic times when they were already a struggle for many LMICs.

Codex Alimentarius has tasked its Executive Committee to develop a paper on “The future of Codex” that addresses the aspects of inclusiveness as well as the need for flexibility to adapt to new emerging issues including the need for new standards to address new food sources and the cross cutting issues related to food safety and quality in the context of Food System transformation. This will be considered by the Codex Alimentarius commission in 2023 on the occasion of its 60th Birthday with the aim of providing a blueprint for moving forward in a manner that leaves no one behind and capable of addressing the food safety and quality issues most critical to implementation of the 2030 agenda.

c) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

For intergovernmental bodies such as Codex, transitioning from the pandemic to another working modality will be a significant challenge for its Members. Countries contribute to several SDGs simultaneously (but not necessarily to any unique SDG) when they engage in



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programmes like Codex. It may therefore prove challenging for countries to maintain their level of support and resources in this context. Commitment at a policy level to supporting cross-cutting areas such as the role food safety and quality play in achieving the SDGs is fundamental in the competition for precious resources.