

Inputs to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2024

Inputs from functional commissions of ECOSOC, other intergovernmental bodies and forums to the 2024 HLPF

1. Entity/ Intergovernmental body or forum

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) is an intergovernmental body that develops and adopts international food standards, which are World Trade Organization benchmark standards, to protect consumer health and promote fair practices in the food trade. Codex is a joint FAO/World Health Organization programme. The Secretariat is hosted by FAO. The work of CAC directly helps countries work towards SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 12, and 17, while contributing in a more indirect way to other SDGs, such as SDG 13 and others. Codex work is developed in line with four core principles, which are consensus-building, transparency, collaboration and inclusivity.

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3. Impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body.

The global challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine and in the Middle East, and climate change are all impacting food safety and the food trade in multiple and complex ways. Codex is responding to these impacts in the way it works and in the substance of the work it addresses, so as to provide Members with tools that will contribute to national efforts towards achievements of the SDGs.

- (i) The current Codex strategic plan specifically calls on the body to address “current, emerging and critical issues”, which includes the multiple crises the world is currently facing. The work of Codex is Member driven, which means that Members propose areas of work most relevant to their needs, and in response to specific crises in terms of safe, good quality food and working towards achieving the SDGs.
- (ii) The more effectively a country can participate in Codex, the more it will reap the SDG-related benefits Codex texts can have. Codex’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent move to a virtual mode of meeting has benefitted poorer countries that are unable to afford a physical or significant physical attendance at meetings. Recognition of this benefit has led to a review on how to maximize it for the future. (SDG 1b, 17)
- (iii) The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted Members’ resources when it came to food inspection and certification, particularly for trade purposes, and highlighted the need for more digital and non-contact approaches. It thus precipitated the completion of guidance on paperless use of electronic certificates. The revised *Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certificates* text was adopted by CAC in December 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic also served as a catalyst for the completion of work on remote audit and inspection to support the continuity of the food supply chain. The text was adopted by CAC in December 2023. (SDG 2b, 2c)
- (iv) Due to climate change, known food safety hazards are emerging in areas where governments and producers are not familiar with the challenges these pose. In these instances, existing Codex texts have

been a source of information and guidance to governments and producers in their attempts to mitigate the impacts of climate change on food safety and trade. (SDGs 1, 2, 13 & 17). Examples of such texts include the *Code of Practice for the Reduction of Hydrocyanic Acid (HCN) in Cassava and Cassava Products* (CXC 73-2013), which provides valuable guidance for the reduction of this toxin in cassava-based food. Heat and water are both key factors in determining the concentration of hydrocyanic acid in cassava and other commodities, which can cause severe illness when processors and consumers are unaware of the impacts of, for example, dryer growing conditions. This is particularly relevant to food production in Africa and specifically to the poor and those who eat a low-protein diet. Additionally, for example, Codex's *Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Arsenic Contamination in Rice* (CXC 77-2017) points to the susceptibility of rice to take up arsenic in flooded conditions and thus provides valuable insights for growers who are experiencing changes in rainfall.

In addition, climate change has been the driver behind recently adopted Codex texts such as:

- *Codex Guidelines for the Safe Use and Reuse of Water in Food Production and Processing* (adopted in December 2023). Safe water is critical to the production of safe food, and essential for food security. These guidelines provide Members with practical guidance and tools to overcome challenges with accessing sufficient safe water to ensure that the safety of food is not compromised.
- *Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Mycotoxins Contamination in Cassava and Cassava-based Products* (adopted in December 2023). The nature and occurrence of mycotoxins in food are shifting in tandem with changes in climate. Countries rely on Codex texts to address this challenge, which is of particular concern across Africa. This new Code of practice is an example of a Codex text that will support developing countries in particular to implement measures that will reduce mycotoxin contamination and therefore improve the safety of these foods.

Climate change is also the key motivating factor behind the agreement by Codex Members to start new work on:

- a code of practice/guidelines for the prevention or reduction of ciguatera poisoning, an issue which is increasingly emerging in previously unaffected areas, and where risk management approaches traditionally used, particularly in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), are no longer as effective. This new work aims to provide guidance to support Members, also in SIDS, in managing the risks posed by ciguatera and maintaining market access for fish.
 - revisions to the *Guidelines on the Application of General Principles of Food Hygiene to the Control of Pathogenic Vibrio Species in Seafood* (CXG73-2010). A changing climate is blamed for the emergence of highly pathogenic strains of *Vibrio* spp. and for the predicted expansion of at-risk areas and at-risk populations in the coming decades. This revision will provide updated guidance on how to manage this evolving risk.
 - (SDGs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 13.1, 13.2, 13.3)
- (v) Multiple crises are slowly reshaping the agenda within Codex, with Members looking for solutions to these issues and highlighting the need to prioritize them. It is also leading to discussions on a broader range of topics in response to crises, such as the relevance of sustainability to the work of Codex, and if and how guidance on sustainability claims might be approached. The food safety relevance of environmental inhibitors which may be one of the solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the food agriculture sector, is another example. In developing its strategic plan for 2026 to 2031, Codex Members are now considering what else they can do to ensure that the standards being developed are relevant to an evolving global situation and ensuring food remains safe in an environment of diminishing resources.

4. **Three key areas where sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the SDGs are being effectively delivered, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2024, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.**
- (i) Codex is harnessing digital tools to improve accessibility to Codex texts and the science that underpins them (thus also reducing the environmental footprint of Codex work). (SDGs 1, 2, 13, 17)
 - Ensuring that Codex texts are freely available to all Codex Members at no cost and the provision of e-learning tools to support understanding of Codex and its standards, help ensure that all Members have equal access to a set of internationally agreed resources as the basis for national actions to improve food safety and quality. Subsidiary bodies are exploring innovative approaches to strengthening access to their work, an example of which is the development of an app and e-book to support the updated Codex *General Guidelines on Sampling* (CXG50-2004).
 - (ii) Recognizing social responsibilities, Codex is responding to consumer demand for a more sustainable food sector while ensuring food safety and quality, and the consumer need for access to safe, nutritious food. (SDG 2.1, 13.3)
 - Food consumption patterns are shifting and consumers are increasingly showing a preference for food that is produced within a sustainable production system that considers the impacts of food production on climate change, the environment, animal welfare, and labour rights. Food products are labelled to attract these changing demands but, without guidelines to ensure those claims are legitimate, consumers can be misled and the sustainability requirements that would underpin the claims could be bypassed. While Codex Members remain conscious that they should not step outside of their mandate to protect consumer health and facilitate fair practices in the food trade, the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) is discussing the potential role Codex may have in terms of ensuring the credibility of such sustainability claims.
 - CAC has agreed to develop guidelines for food hygiene control measures in traditional food markets, recognizing their importance in terms of access to food, livelihood and subsistence, particularly for vulnerable populations and women. Such hygiene measures are one of the pillars that can support enhanced food safety in these key food outlets. It is important that Codex texts are developed not only to benefit international trades, but also to support domestic markets. In the case of this work, resulting texts will particularly benefit demographics that are typically more vulnerable to foodborne disease. This is an example of how Codex texts address “everyone everywhere”, leaving no one behind.
 - (iii) Codex, FAO and WHO in partnership with individual donor countries, works to ensure equal and effective participation in its work. (SDG 17.6, 17.9, 17.10, 17.11, and 1, 2, 13, 17 indirectly)
 - When all Member Countries can participate effectively in Codex, Codex texts offer a greater possibility of achieving those elements of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 12 & 17 that relate to food safety and the food trade. This also relates to other SDGs, including SDG 13. The FAO/WHO Codex Trust Fund was established with the specific aim of encouraging more effective participation in Codex by low- and middle-income countries and has demonstrated the success of the initiative.
5. **Three examples of specific actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving the SDGs.**
- (i) The dynamic and equitable trade in safe food benefits producers (SDG 1) and consumers (SDG 2), particularly in relation to developing economy countries. The FAO/WHO Project and Fund for

Enhanced Participation in Codex, the Codex Trust Fund (CTF), supports developing and transition economy countries to participate more effectively in Codex. Through more active participation in Codex, beneficiary countries increase their capacity to participate in Codex meetings, to contribute to data gathering, to make the case for new work and for considerations that benefit their national positions and to play an active role in the development of Codex texts. This improved activity helps to open up markets for food industry stakeholders, including small producers, in the relevant countries. Continued, expanded and reinforced support to the CTF and other initiatives that support the participation of developing economy countries in Codex will deliver the sustained strengthening and inclusiveness of Codex as a whole, and promote increased development of standards relevant to such economies. We have seen that countries with CTF projects participate more actively in Codex and other food safety work, and even present new work proposals to Codex.

- (ii) The development and implementation of technologies that will harness the benefits of combined virtual and physical participation in Codex will ensure optimum participation in Codex meetings by all, including countries that cannot attend meetings physically due to resource constraints. This includes ensuring equal capacities to host such meetings.

- (iii) The development of new and existing partnerships to pursue a One Health approach to food safety within a sustainable food system. In 2021, Codex adopted the revised *Code of Practice to Minimize and Contain Foodborne Antimicrobial Resistance* (CXC61-2005) and new *Guidelines on Integrated Monitoring and Surveillance of Foodborne Antimicrobial Resistance* (CXG 94-2021). By promoting the reinforcement of cross sectoral work by government, these texts support countries' efforts in tackling antimicrobial resistance with a One Health approach. This is critical to ensuring sustainable food production. Codex is increasingly applying a holistic whole food chain approach in development of its texts, including in the provision of scientific advice, with the participation of other international organizations as relevant to ensure a One health approach. In addition, the current Action to support implementation of Codex AMR Texts (ACT) project is further encouraging ways to forge new partnerships within countries across production, veterinary services, governmental departments and others, to underscore a holistic approach to food production. AMR is considered to be a "silent pandemic" and these approaches must urgently be built upon to combat the potential dangers to food security, health and the environment this threat represents.

6. Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by your intergovernmental body or forum to support implementation of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit.

- The Codex Alimentarius has at the heart of its agenda a commitment to actions that will facilitate access for all to safe and nutritious foods as well as safe, nutritious and healthy diets. In the Codex context, its work is "continuous, fundamental, transformative and urgent," in line with the calls to action described in the Political Declaration. (SDG 1.5, 1a, 1b, 2.1, 2.4, 2b, 2c, 13.1)
- Work on commodity standards that have a very regional specificity and cultural value can help open markets for developing economy countries, including their food businesses and entrepreneurs, that otherwise struggle to participate in and benefit from international trade. Examples of these products include kava products for use as a beverage (CXS336R-2020) and noni fruit juice (CXS356R-2023), which are important trade products for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the South West Pacific and for which Regional Codex standards have been adopted over the last few years. Spices are a valuable commodity for a number of developing countries and work on three new spices standards has just been completed with proposals for four more pending approval this year. Most of these standards are being developed at the request of developing countries and play an important role in Codex's impact on poverty alleviation.

- SDG 2's goal to reduce hunger and malnutrition is addressed in multiple ways by Codex work in addition to the above-mentioned points. Apart from developing the standards necessary to facilitate access to safe, good quality food, Codex also provides a forum for discussion and consideration on how to support global efforts to address specific issues of nutritional/health importance. Last year's regional Codex meeting for the Near East, saw a debate on the importance of healthy diets and a need to acknowledge linkages between food safety and nutrition. These discussions can inform progression to relevant standards setting work. A specific and current example of discussions around nutrition includes acknowledging and acting upon the World Health Organization's call to eliminate industrial trans fatty acids (TFAs) and partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs) from food by 2023. The role Codex can play in achieving these targets will be discussed in two Codex committees this year.
- Last year Codex published a new guideline on Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) which can serve as a tool for regulation of these products that are used in the treatment of severe malnutrition. The guidelines will serve as a reference for the quality and safety of the products, which save the lives of children with severe acute malnutrition daily and are also a high value product which can be key for economic development in low- and middle-income countries. This was the first time Codex addressed this type of product.
- Codex's long-standing work on safe levels of residues of agricultural inputs in food and feed are based on good agricultural practices. These recommended maximum residue limits help drive good practices in agriculture systems and support the aims both of SDG 2 and SDG 13. A recent development has been the completion of the revision of the classification of food and feed for which pesticide MRLs are established to better reflect the global array of food and feed commodities in particular in the area of minor crops.
- Codex is an exemplar of partnership, as enshrined in the aims of SDG 17. It is a membership driven body administered by an FAO and WHO partnership that seeks to develop and maintain relationships across public, private, academic and consumer-based sectors, globally. The World Trade Organization uses Codex standards as reference standards. Codex's strength, relevance and knowledge are derived from these very partnerships.

7. Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF.

- **Engagement with all, equally, is crucial.** Codex's agenda is constantly updated and adjusted to ensure it aligns with the needs of Member Countries, which evolve in relation to the challenges addressed by the Global Agenda. For this reason, engagement in the above-mentioned international partnerships for a body such as Codex is vitally important.
- **We all benefit by leaving no-one behind.** The Codex Trust Fund exemplifies the benefits to all, of assisting low- and middle-income countries to participate in international partnerships. Supporting greater and more equitable participation in the Codex Alimentarius Commission helps ensure it is a better and stronger body equipped to support countries to achieve the SDGs, as they contribute to both the approval and prioritization of work in line with their needs.
- **Greater interaction is desirable.** Promoting more interaction among intergovernmental bodies so that they can meet at the boundaries of each other's mandates and promote development of more comprehensive and coherent tools for Members would improve the capacities of all to deliver on their remits.
- **Supporting local production is critical.** Safe food not only sustains life and wellbeing, it also sustains cultures. Codex's collaborative, consensus-driven, transparent and inclusive approach to standards setting helps peoples, countries and regions protect, uphold and share the integrity of their culturally determined foods for benefits that include poverty and hunger alleviation as well as community cohesion.