

FIFTY - SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

WHO Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland, 6-9 December 2005

REPORT OF THE DELEGATION OF INDIA

The Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius held its Fifty-seventh Session at WHO Headquarters, Geneva, from 6 to 9 December 2005, under the chairmanship of Dr. Claude Moshá, (United Republic of Tanzania), Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. India by virtue of being elected as member of Executive Committee to represent Asia region was amongst the Executive Committee members from eight different regions who attended the meeting.

The delegation comprised of:

1. Smt. Rita Teotia, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Representative of Asia Zone.
2. Dr. D. Chattopadhyá , ADG (PFA) , Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Advisor
3. Dr. Fukushima Kazuko, Chief Policy Planning and Communication Division, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare Japan, Advisor to India

The Session was opened by Mr. Denis Aitken, Assistant Director General and Director of the office of the Director-General of WHO, who welcomed the participants on behalf of FAO and WHO. Mr. Aitken emphasized the importance of inter-agency cooperation at the international level to address the food safety issues in general, Codex in particular. He noted that Codex is now playing a much more Strategic role globally and that the draft Strategic Plan to be discussed by the Executive Committee was therefore of significance. He also noted that the function of critical review of Codex work would be exercised for the first time by the Executive Committee. Mr. Ezzedine Boutrif, Chief, Food Safety and Quality Service, FAO also welcomed the participants. Mr. Boutrif stressed the collaboration between WHO & FAO in Codex and in newer areas such as Asian Flu.

REPORT ON MAJOR ISSUES DISCUSSED IN THE AGENDA

Strategic Planning Of the Commission (2008-2013)

The major agenda before the meeting was the Discussion on the Draft Strategic Plan 2008-2013 of Codex. Since some of the comments received were substantive, the Chairperson invited members to express views and comments on the preliminary draft. The Committee agreed to establish an in-session working group (i.e. a sub-committee of the Executive Committee) to be chaired by Vice-Chairperson Dr. Karen Hulebak, consisting of three Vice-Chairpersons and the Members elected on a geographic basis along with the representatives from FAO and WHO in order to redraft the document taking into accounts the comments offered by member countries. India served as a member of the Working Group. It was agreed that the draft plan should be updated in the light of current status of all activities at the time of adoption by the commission in 2007 taking into consideration the issues like elaboration of guidelines for risk analysis and envisaged split of Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants (CCFAC) into two separate Committees. The representatives of WHO recalled that the World Health Assembly (WHA) had requested Codex to give full consideration to its resolutions while developing Codex standards.

The coordinator for Latin America and Carribean, supported by some members, expressed the view that Codex standards development should take into consideration the technical and economic implications for all members as well as the concerns of developing countries.

The Committee agreed that decision making and priority setting criteria should be completed by the Committees by 2008 while the review of the criteria should continue thereafter. The Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean expressed the view that cooperation with Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs) should be limited to those included under SPS agreement (i.e. IPCC and OIE) only.

The Committee agreed to circulate the draft strategic plan as revised by the Committee for comments from members and observers and also agreed that the Chairperson and the three Vice-Chairpersons would meet in Rome by the end of May 2006 to review comments and forward recommendations for discussion in the next session that is i.e. 58th Session of the Executive Committee. The Committee also agreed that the revised draft as agreed by the 58th session of the Executive Committee would be circulated to all coordinating committees for comments before the final adoption by the Commission in 2007.

Financial and Budgetary Matters

The secretariat and the representative of FAO and WHO informed the Committee on current status regarding budget for the 2006 /2007 biennium .The secretariat reported that FAO conference had only approved a nominal increase of US\$ 16.6 million compared to

2004/2005 biennium. This would result in a deficit of approximately US\$38 million in the planned budget. The various options for cost saving were discussed. Argentina, Morocco and some other countries opposed any reduction in the number of meetings. It was however agreed that all countries would urge their respective delegations to WHO & FAO to ensure adequate budgetary provision for Codex.

Critical Review of the Proposals for New Work and Monitoring Progress of Ongoing Activities Regarding Standards Development

The meeting noted that almost 30% of ongoing work of Codex had been in progress for over 5 years and some standards had been under development for 17-18 years.

A general discussion was held on the approach for critical review of the new ongoing proposals wherein it was agreed that the general criteria and working procedures should be defined before undertaking the monitoring of such proposals. The Committee noted that while requests for scientific advice from Codex Committees were increasing over the years, the resources of FAO and WHO remained limited. Some members proposed that when scientific advice was necessary but was likely to be delayed for some time, the work on the related subject should be suspended. Some members also proposed suspension or discontinuation of work when discussion on items did continue for several years without any progress due to lack of consensus.

Several other members pointed out that the Executive Committee should rather consider the obstacles towards the development of standards and discuss possible solutions instead of deciding in favor of suspension since some standards (although they might be controversial) may be of importance to the member governments.

After further discussion the Committee agreed that the criteria and approach to be applied in the critical review could be summarized as follows :

- When progress on a standard is delayed due to need of scientific advice, the Executive Committee should encourage FAO and WHO to schedule an Expert Consultation to provide such advice in a timely manner, and recommend suspension of work until such time as scientific advice is available.
- When scientific advice has been provided and a standard has been under consideration for more than 5 years, the Executive Committee should urge the committee concerned to take action within a specified time frame.
- When an item has been considered for several sessions without any progress and there is no prospect of reaching consensus, the Executive Committee could propose suspension or discontinuation of work on that subject.
- When no justification has been provided by a committee for delay in the elaboration of a standard, the Executive Committee could propose corrective action.

The Committee also agreed to propose that the commission recommend the following to the Codex Committees and Task Forces:

- To prioritize work when agenda of the committee includes many items of work.
- To invite all chairpersons or host countries for adjourned committees to provide their comments on the items of work that have been under consideration for more than 5 years.
- To inform the Executive Committee and Commission of the proposed time frame for completion of all items approved as new work prior to 2004.

Matters Arising From the Reports of the Codex Committees and Task Forces

The Committee noted that ad hoc task force on Food Derived from Bio-technology has agreed to initiate two new items of work that would be submitted for approval to the 29th session of the Commission and to initiate drafting work prior to critical review by the Executive Committee. The representatives of FAO and WHO and several members stressed the importance of the work of the Task Force for member government and supported the time bound approach taken by Task Force to complete its work within the specified time limit.

FAO/WHO Project and Trust Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex

The representative of WHO presented the updated status report of the Trust Fund. Several members expressed their appreciation to FAO and WHO and the donor countries for their support and highlighted the benefits of their participation towards development of awareness of Codex and food safety issues at the national level. The representatives from WHO indicated that the member countries could also apply to the Trust Fund to participate in the working groups of Codex committees and Task Forces.

The Committee recalled that it had been agreed earlier that the Trust Fund could be used for training purposes and such training courses could be planned in various regions.

Relation between the Codex Alimentarius Commission and Other Inter-Governmental Organizations

The Executive Committee noted that the 28th session of Commission had adopted the “Guidelines on the cooperation between Codex Alimentarius Commission and inter governmental organizations in the elaborations of standards and related texts” and had endorsed the recommendation aiming at enhancement of the collaboration between Codex and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

The Committee also noted that the Codex secretariat had been actively seeking contributions from the OIE in the areas of the work of the Commission where there was a scope for continued or improved cooperation with OIE.

The Executive Committee considered and approved the request for observer status from the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD).

The Executive Committee noted the information on the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) with reference to the publication of ISO 22000:2005 “Food safety management systems - Requirements for any organization in the food chain”.

The committee noted that the next session of the Executive Committee would be held in WHO headquarters from 28th June to 1st July 2006, subject to the approval of the Director-General of FAO and WHO.