



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN**

**19th Session
San José, Costa Rica, 10 - 14 November 2014**

**DISCUSSION PAPER ON ELECTRONIC WORKING GROUPS
AND PHYSICAL WORKING GROUPS**

(Prepared by the Dominican Republic)

Background:

1. The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) was established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1963. It now has over 180 members and more than 200 intergovernmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations accredited as observers. The Commission's principal activity is to develop international food standards¹, guidelines and codes of practice in order to protect consumer health and to ensure fair practices in the food trade. The Commission also promotes the coordination of all work on food standards conducted by international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

2. For food safety and nutrition related matters, the Commission, as the body responsible for risk management, establishes its standards according to the principles of risk analysis and on the basis of scientific advice provided by WHO and FAO expert bodies and other consultations. Codex standards also address issues relating to food quality in order to ensure that fair practices are applied in the food trade. With increasing globalization, the Commission is also expected to respond in a timely manner to new problems of food safety and other factors² that could impact on food safety and on fair practices in the food trade, such as the effects of changes in populations, climate change and relevant consumer concerns. The food standards, guidelines and recommendations established by the Commission are recognized as benchmarks for foods in the relevant WTO agreements.

THE PROCEDURAL MANUAL OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION RELATING TO ELECTRONIC WORKING GROUPS AND PHYSICAL WORKING GROUPS:

ASPECTS IN THE PROCEDURAL MANUAL

3. THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION state in Rule XI.1(a):

- Rule XI. Subsidiary Bodies: 1. The Commission may establish the following types of subsidiary bodies: (a) subsidiary bodies which it deems necessary for the accomplishment of its work in the finalization of draft standards;

4. THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION state in Rule XIV Languages (XIV.1):

- Rule XIV Languages:
 1. The languages of the Commission and of its subsidiary bodies set up under Rule XI.1 (a) shall be not less than three of the working languages, as shall be determined by the Commission, which are working languages both of FAO and of the Health Assembly of WHO.

PROCEDURAL MANUAL, SECTION III: GUIDELINES FOR SUBSIDIARY BODIES

5. Procedural Manual, Section III: Guidelines for subsidiary bodies, provides guidelines for the proper functioning of Codex Committees, task forces and working groups, whether physical or electronic.

6. The Guidelines on Physical Working Groups determine as follows:

7. Duties and Terms of Reference

- The terms of reference of the working group shall be established by the Committee during its plenary session, shall be limited to the immediate task at hand and normally shall not be subsequently modified.
- The terms of reference shall clearly state the objective(s) to be achieved by the establishment of the working group and the language(s) to be used. Interpretation and translation services should be provided in all the languages of the Committee, unless decided otherwise by the Committee.

8. The Guidelines on Electronic Working groups determine as follows:

9. In the Introduction:

- The search for worldwide consensus and for greater acceptability of Codex Standards requires the involvement of all the Members of Codex and the active participation of developing countries. Special efforts are needed to enhance the participation of developing countries in Codex Committees, by increased use of written communications, especially through remote participation via email, internet and other modern technologies, in the work done between sessions of committees.

10. Duties and Terms of Reference:

- The terms of reference shall clearly state the objective(s) to be achieved by the establishment of the electronic working group and the language(s) to be used. Interpretation and translation services should be provided in all languages of the Committee, unless decided otherwise by the Committee.

ASPECTS INCLUDED IN THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2014 – 2019 OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

11. The Strategic Plan 2014 - 2019 of the Codex Alimentarius Commission sets out the following goals, objectives and activities:

- **Strategic goal 2: Ensure the application of risk analysis principles in the development of Codex standards.**
- **Objective 2.3: Increase scientific input from developing countries.**

Activity

2.3.3 Encourage sustained and continuous participation of technical and scientific experts from developing countries in the work of Codex.

- **Strategic goal 3: Facilitate the effective participation of all Codex Members.**

Activity

3.1.5 To the extent possible, promote the use of the official languages of the Commission in committees and working groups.

- **Objective 3.2: Promote capacity development programs to assist countries in creating sustainable national Codex structures.**

Activity

3.2.2 Encourage developing countries to identify and prioritize Codex committees and task forces of significance to them.

- **Strategic goal 4: Implement effective and efficient work management systems and practices.**
- **Objective 4.1: Strive for an effective, efficient, transparent, and consensus based standard setting process.**

Activity

4.1.4 Ensure timely distribution of all Codex working documents in the working languages of the Committee/Commission.

4.1.5 Increase the scheduling of Work Group meetings in conjunction with Committee meetings.

12. In recent years, Codex Committees have increasingly set up electronic working groups that are expected to function only in English.

13. At the Codex Colloquium held in San José, Costa Rica, it came to light in the panel discussion on contaminants that various working documents for the 8th CCCF had not been circulated or were only available in English, thus benefiting delegates who had participated in the electronic working group and knew its conclusions and recommendations.

14. The problem facing developing countries is that many of their technical staff and experts are not necessarily proficient in English, so when invited to participate in the work of a given electronic working group, are reluctant to do so unless they can be provided with translated documents.

15. This has been unfair to developing countries that do not have English as their official language, as we have been excluded from the normative work of specific documents or topics, only because the technical experts in the related fields are not proficient in English.

16. This problem has also arisen in meetings of physical working groups convened prior to sessions of individual committees and not provided with simultaneous translation.

CONCLUSION:

17. The Dominican Republic requests that the Codex Alimentarius Commission ensures that all the work of the Committee, the electronic working groups and the physical working groups is in the official languages.