



DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

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Continental Consultative Meeting held to develop an Africa Food Safety Strategy

A four day continental consultative meeting of major stakeholders from all the 55 African Union Members States to develop an Africa Food Safety Strategy (AFSS) was held from June 8-11, 2021 under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture Rural Development Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (DARBE) of the AU Commission (AUC). Some of the participants included Codex Contact Point Officers from all the Member States, national officials and experts responsible for food control, Representatives of Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Africa CDC, AfCFTA Secretariat and AUDA-NEPAD among others.

The need for AFSS has been occasioned because Africa's agri-food trade has been impacted by the occurrence of food safety hazards leading to documented episodes of foodborne diseases with fatalities.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) estimated in 2015 that 91 million people in Africa fall ill each year due to food-borne diseases and 137,000 die of the same cause, representing one third of the global death toll for foodborne diseases.

Economic impact studies by the World Bank in 2018 estimated that unsafe foods cost sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, about \$110 billion in lost productivity and medical expenses alone.

African countries have also witnessed costly trade rejections and in some cases loss of market share due to trade in unsafe food.

Added to that, these challenges are negatively impacting on two AUC Agriculture initiatives in the continent, namely;

- The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)
- The Sanitary and Phytosanitary Policy for Africa which was endorsed by the AU Assembly of Heads of States in February 2020.

Thus, despite the huge potential of Africa's agricultural sector, the presence of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) risks and hazards are major constraints to Africa's agricultural transformation agenda.

Trading in safe food, thus, will require significant investment by both the public and private sector to improve compliance with internationally accepted food safety

requirements.

Unfortunately, efforts by AU Member States to address food safety in their respective countries has not improved the overall situation in the continent because of different levels of capacities in terms of operating functional and efficient national food safety control systems.

Again, the capacity differential could undermine the integrity of the AfCFTA as some Member States may not have the requisite capacity to fully assert control and that could result in circulation of potentially unsafe or low quality food.

The development of the AFSS therefore would empower all AU Member States to attain an acceptable threshold of capacity to effectively address food safety challenges and that would go a long way in building consumer trust, facilitate intra-African trade in food and boost confidence in the AfCFTA

Additionally, the AFSS would ensure continental standardization of food safety control systems and the overall improvement in food safety status by coordinating Member States to collectively define, develop, domesticate and implement the strategy.

To ensure the adequacy of the proposed AFSS, the meeting undertook the following:

- Established through consensus the vision, mission and objectives of the AFSS;
- Identified the guiding principles, strategic thematic areas and expected outcomes;
- Ascertained the strategic actions needed to achieve the objectives of the strategy; and
- Discussed the coordination mechanism for implementation of AFSS

It is expected that the AFSS will contribute to the following:

- Operation of science-based and efficient food regulatory environment;
- Enhanced compliance leading to delivery of safer agri-food value chains across the continent;
- Reduced foodborne disease burden in Africa; and
- Improved competitiveness of Africa's food commodities for increased intra-African and global trade.

DR. Godfrey Bahiigwa, Director of DARBE in a closing remarks noted that the meeting was very successful due to the following:

- Information previously collected on the rationale for a Food Safety Strategy for Africa were reviewed, which justified the need for AFSS;
- Views of Member States, RECs and Partners on the different components of the strategy were solicited and gotten which would help develop a robust AFSS;
- The meeting brought to the fore some cross-cutting issues important for the strategy;
- The establishment of an Africa Food Safety Agency was discussed ; and
- Reflect on the concept of a Continental Food Safety Reference Laboratory

Dr Bahiigwa intimated that the rich output of the meeting will provide the much needed building blocks for developing a robust Continental Food Safety Strategy.

He announced that a technical meeting would be convened again once the draft was ready for validation and submission for adoption by the 4th Session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (STC-ARDWE) in October 2021.

Dr Bahiigwa was optimistic that a Food Safety strategy will put Africa on course of

reversing the negative narrative of its food safety rEND

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