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## **South Africa - Republic of**

**Post:** Pretoria

### **Inconsistent Participation of Southern African Countries at Codex**

**Report Categories:**

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Trade Policy Monitoring

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**Report Highlights:**

While Southern African countries generally adopt Codex standards, there are concerns that many are missing the opportunity to shape or influence these standards due to their poor attendance of meetings. Their presence is critical especially given the growing efforts by some countries (mainly the European Union) to introduce non-scientific factors into Codex's decision-making and standards setting process. Notably, the European Union is the largest trading partner for Southern Africa and has a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho. Many agriculture industries benefit from the structure and predictability of Codex's science-based framework. Hence, Southern Africa has an important stake in their own self-interest in ensuring that the credibility of Codex as a science-based international standard-setting organization is maintained to enhance trade.

## Background

For this report, Southern Africa refers to the countries that are covered by the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) office in Pretoria; South Africa, Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mauritius and Madagascar. All these countries are members of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC).

Southern African countries acknowledge the role and importance of the CAC in protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in trade through the setting and harmonizing of food standards globally. The attendance of many Southern African countries in Codex Committee meetings is poor, but the influence of Codex on food regulations in Southern African countries is evident. Codex standards generally tend to supercede national standards, and in the event that the country does not have the respective regulations codified, Codex standards are accepted as the default regulations. While Southern African countries adopt Codex standards, there are concerns that many are missing the opportunity to shape or influence Codex standards due to their poor participation. Their presence is critical, especially given the growing efforts by some countries (mainly the European Union) to introduce non-scientific factors into Codex's decision-making and standards setting process. Notably, the European Union is the largest trading partner for Southern Africa and has a FTA with South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho. Many agriculture industries benefit from the structure and predictability of Codex's science-based framework. Hence, Southern Africa has an important stake in their own self-interest in ensuring that the credibility of Codex as a science-based international standard-setting organization is maintained to enhance trade.

## Structure of Codex in Southern Africa

The Codex Points of Contact in most countries in Southern Africa fall within the ambit of the Ministry of Health, as they are generally responsible for food safety as shown in **Table 1**. The Codex Points of Contact in Angola, Mauritius and Namibia are under the Ministry of Agriculture. Lesotho is the only country in the region where the Codex Point of Contact is under the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Marketing.

**Table 1: Ministries Responsible for the Codex Point of Contacts**

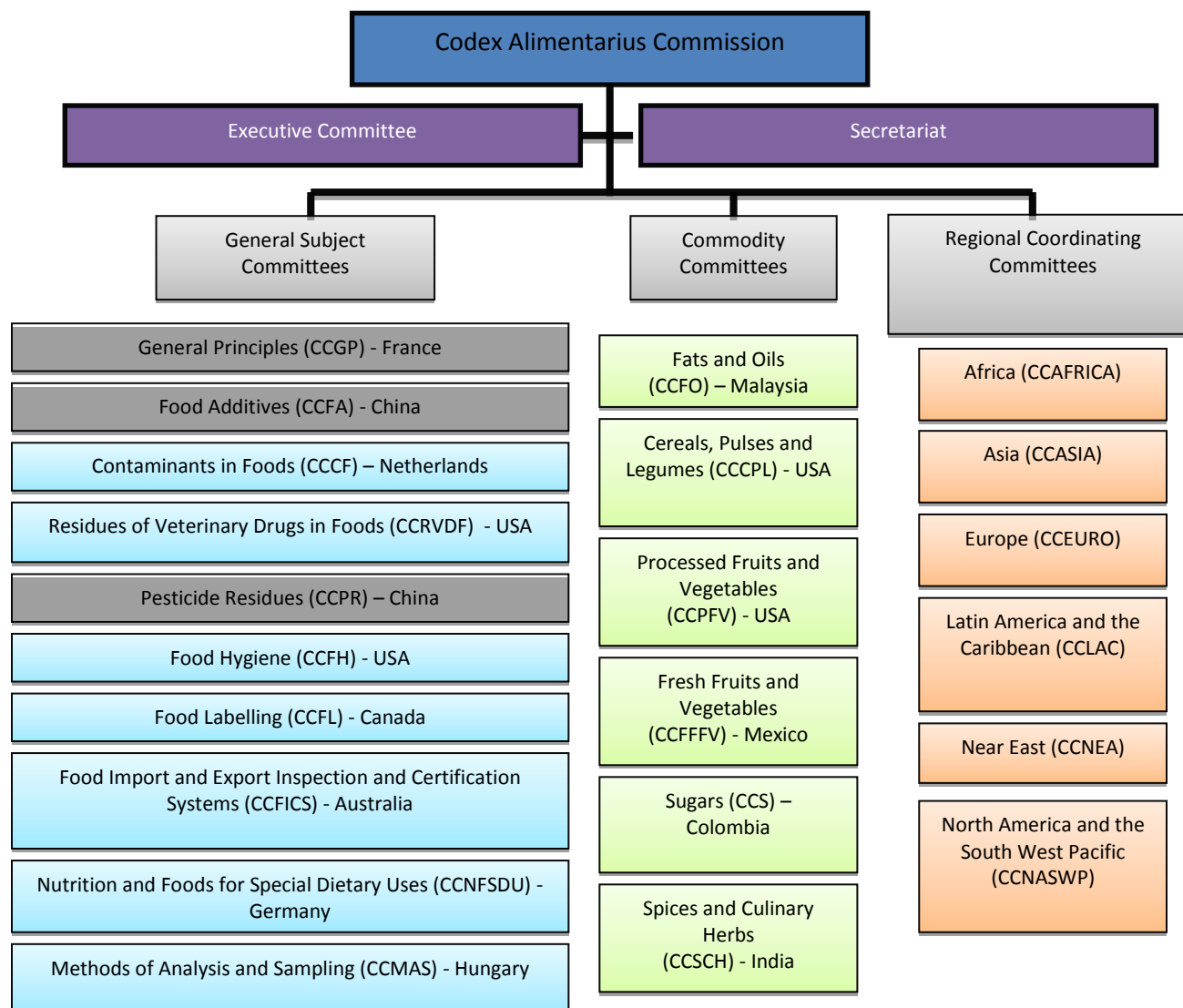
Country	Ministry
Angola	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Botswana	Ministry of Health
Lesotho	Ministry of Industry, Trade and Marketing
Madagascar	Ministry of Commerce
Mauritius	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Natural Resources
Mozambique	Ministry of Health
Namibia	Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development
South Africa	Ministry of Health
Swaziland	Ministry of Health
Zambia	Ministry of Health
Zimbabwe	Ministry of Health

Source: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/Y2200E/y2200e01.htm>

## Low Level of Attendance

The CAC meets annually and is responsible for all matters regarding the implementation of the Codex work program. The Executive Committee is attended by the regional representatives based on geographical locations and not individual member countries. **Figure 1** below shows all the structures and committees that member countries are required to participate and attend. There are 6 Commodity, 10 General Subject Committees, and about 46 active electronic working groups (e.g. dealing with aflatoxin or mycotoxins).

**Figure 1: Codex Committees as at August 2018**



With the exception of South Africa, other countries in Southern Africa generally attend less than four of the 14 – 16 Committee meetings per year as shown in **Tables 2 - 5**. The Southern African countries attending the lowest number of meetings are Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia. Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola seem to place priority on certain meetings such as the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses, and Codex Committee

on Food Hygiene. South Africa attends the highest number (at least 75%) of meetings, and is usually represented by government officials and private sector representatives. The lack of financial, human and technical resources, and consequently absence of scientific data to support country positions is cited as some of the reasons for the low participation at Codex meetings. With the exception of South Africa, contributions of scientific experts from the region have also been minimal.

### **Support for Southern Africa to Participate in CODEX Activities**

There are various initiatives aimed at supporting the attendance and effective participation of African countries at the CAC. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in partnership with the African Union – InterAfrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), hosts the Codex Alimentarius Colloquium annually in different African countries. The Codex Alimentarius Colloquium is attended by members of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa (CCAFRICA) and U.S Delegates to enhance their participation in the work of the CAC. The overall objective of the meeting is to exchange views and provide an opportunity for the countries to harmonize their positions on draft Codex standards to be discussed by the upcoming Codex Committees for that particular year. There is potential to expand this platform to ensure that it prepares member countries for all the annual Codex meetings in that particular year, instead of focusing on a few upcoming meetings.

The FAO/WHO Codex Trust Fund also provides support by assisting member countries through developing their capacities and strengthening their national Codex structures ([Codex Trust Fund Website](#)). Notably, the new Trust Fund rules no longer support physical participation in Codex meetings, which has contributed to the low level of attendance. The CAC currently does not provide an option for virtual attendance.

At times, the African Union, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and Southern African Development Community (SADC) attend and advance the positions of African countries at Codex meetings whenever there are areas of mutual interest. The most significant limitation for these regional organizations is that they are not allowed to participate in the final decision making, per the Codex rules.

### **Post Comment**

While the above initiatives have contributed to the appreciation of Codex in the region, they are deemed inadequate to ensure the full attendance and effective participation of African countries at all Codex activities. The involvement and contribution of the private sector, associations or NGO is widely viewed as part of the solution to enhance Codex activities in Africa. However, with the exception of South Africa, their involvement is still minimal. In the near future, Post will consider ways to use the Cochran Fellowship Program and Country Strategy Statement Funds (CSSF) to enhance the participation of Southern African countries at Codex Committees on issues of mutual interest with the United States, and to promote the credibility of Codex as a science-based international standard-setting organization. In addition, Post will endeavor to utilize every opportunity to engage and encourage Southern African governments to increase their support of Codex activities and participation in various Committee meetings.

### **Table 2: Attendance of Southern African Countries in Codex Meetings in 2018**

Codex Committee Meeting		Date	Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Madagascar	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	South Africa	Swaziland	Zambia	Zimbabwe
1	Contaminants in Foods	12-Mar-18											
2	Food Additives	26-Mar-18											
3	Pesticide Residues	9-Apr-18											
4	Residues of Vet. Drugs in Foods	23-Apr-18											
5	Methods of Analysis and Sampling	7-May-18											
6	Processed Fruits and Vegetables	Online											
7	Executive Committee of the CAC	26-Jun-18											
8	Codex Alimentarius Commission	2-Jul-18											
<b>Total No. of Attendance</b>			<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>

**Key**

	Did not attend
	Attended

**Table 3: Attendance of Southern African Countries in Codex Meetings in 2017**

Codex Committee Meeting		Date	Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Madagascar	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	South Africa	Swaziland	Zambia	Zimbabwe
1	FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa	16-Jan-17											
2	Spices and Culinary Herbs	6-Feb-17											
3	Fats and Oils	20-Feb-17											
4	Food Additives	20-Mar-17											
5	Contaminants in Foods	3-Apr-17											
6	Pesticide Residues	24-Apr-17											

7	Food Import & Export Inspection & Certification Systems	1-May-17											
8	Methods of Analysis and Sampling	8-May-17											
9	Executive Committee of the CAC	10-Jul-17											
10	Codex Alimentarius Commission	17-Jul-17											
11	Executive Committee of the CAC	26-Sep-17											
12	Fresh Fruits and Vegetables	2-Oct-17											
13	Food Labelling	16-Oct-17											
14	Food Hygiene	13-Nov-17											
15	Ad hoc Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Antimicrobial Resistance	27-Nov-17											
16	Nutrition & Foods for Special Dietary Uses	4-Dec-17											
<b>Total No. of Attendance</b>			<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>

**Table 4: Attendance of Southern African Countries in Codex Meetings in 2016**

Codex Committee Meeting		Date	Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Madagascar	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	South Africa	Swaziland	Zambia	Zimbabwe
1	Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems	6-Feb-16											
2	Methods of Analysis and Sampling	22-Feb-16											
3	Food Additives	14-Mar-16											
4	Contaminants in Foods	4-Apr-16											
5	General Principles	11-Apr-16											
6	Pesticide Residues	25-Apr-											

		16											
7	Food Labelling	9-May-16											
8	Executive Committee of the CAC	20-Jun-16											
9	Codex Alimentarius Commission	27-Jun-16											
10	Executive Committee of the CAC	30-Aug-16											
11	Processed Fruits and Vegetables	12-Sep-16											
12	Residues of Vet. Drugs in Foods	16-Oct-16											
13	Food Hygiene	5-Nov-16											
14	Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses	5-Dec-16											
	<b>Total No. of Attendance</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>

**Table 5: Attendance of Southern African Countries in Codex Meetings in 2015**

Codex Committee Meeting		Date	Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Madagascar	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	South Africa	Swaziland	Zambia	Zimbabwe
1	FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa	27-Jan-15											
2	Fats and Oils	9-Feb-15											
3	Methods of Analysis and Sampling	23-Feb-15											
4	General Principles	9-Mar-15											
5	Contaminants in Foods	16-Mar-15											
6	Food Additives	23-Mar-15											
7	Pesticide Residues	13-Apr-15											
8	Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods	27-Apr-											

		15											
9	Executive Committee of the CAC	30-Jun-15											
10	Codex Alimentarius Commission	6-Jul-15											
11	Spices and Culinary Herbs	14-Sep-15											
12	Fresh Fruits and Vegetables	5-Oct-15											
13	Fish and Fishery Products	19-Oct-15											
14	Food Hygiene	9-Nov-15											
15	Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses	23-Nov-15											
	<b>Total No. of Attendance</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>

Source: <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings/archives/en/>