

African
Union



NFSA
الهيئة القومية لسلامة الغذاء

African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum - AFRAF -



High Level Senior Food Regulators Meeting of
African Food Competent Authorities

11-13 October 2023
Cairo, Egypt

*Towards Collaborative African Food Regulatory Frameworks,
Supporting the Implementation of the Africa Food Safety Strategy (AFSS)*

Background and Proposed Annotated Agenda

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1. Background and Rationale for the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF)

Food safety and nutrition are key determinants of health and human development. Food regulatory decisions have far-reaching implications on the health, agriculture and trade agendas for any given country, both domestically and at the international level.

Africa's contribution to the global food and agrifood supply is increasingly important, considering the important water and land resources afforded by the continent. African countries are demonstrating increasing commitment to modernizing and further enhancing their agricultural output and their food and agrifood production, with opportunities of development that can have important positive impacts on the economies of African countries and the continent.

Producing safe and nutritious food for Africa's population and increasing intra-regional trade of food and agrifood products within the African continent were also identified as some of the objectives pursued by the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) launched in 2021.

In recent years, African leaders have prioritized actions in relation to food safety and SPS matters in an effort to address some of the public health and economic challenges. Several discussions have taken place on the possibility of establishing a unified food safety agency for the continent, sharing a common SPS policy framework and with the dual objectives of harmonizing SPS measures and supporting a common approach to food safety capacity building across the African continent (AUC, 2019; WTO, 2019).

Many changes are being witnessed in the African food safety regulatory context, with the development of new food competent authorities and agencies entrusted with the overall food safety regulatory mandate, such as the creation of the Food Safety and Quality Authority of the Gambia, the National Food Safety Agency of the Arab Republic of Egypt (NFSA) and similar agencies established in Nigeria, Ghana, and Mauritania.

These changes, along with efforts of coordination and food regulatory convergence led by African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), such as ECOWAS and EAC, would benefit from the creation of a favorable collaborative environment between African food regulators, through the development of an **African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF)**, under the leadership of the African Union Commission, its specialized departments and in partnership with the RECs.

This direction is further supported by the outputs of **36th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government**, held on 18-19 February 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia identifying the priority of the year as being **"Accelerating the Implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area"** and highlighting the importance of the food and agrifood sector in the intra-continental trade.

The potential for growth of this segment of intra-continental trade is estimated to be exponential and needs to be further driven by **enhanced alignment of African food regulatory frameworks, which requires the development of the relevant forum for Dialogue and collaboration between African Food Regulators.**

2. Meeting Objectives

Recognizing that collaboration between food competent authorities is imperative to address an increasingly complex and interdependent health, food production and food trade environment, the National Food Safety Agency of Egypt (NFSA) has taken the initiative, in partnership with the African Union Commission, with various food competent authorities in Africa and with international partners, to convene a meeting of African food competent authorities **at the heads of authority level**, with the aim to facilitate **engagement and discussions amongst leaders of African food regulatory authorities and to create an “African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum”**.

This forum aims to:

- ❖ Shape an agenda of collaborative initiatives to contribute to the development of a path forward for **African food regulatory harmonization** and integration as part of the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and to address common challenges faced by African food competent authorities and the food and agri-food production sector.
- ❖ Deliver on some of **the commitments of the recently adopted Africa Food Safety Strategy (AFSS)**, through supporting the operation of a science-based and efficient food regulatory environment in Africa leading to delivering *“safer agrifood value chains across the continent, reduced foodborne disease burden in Africa, improved competitiveness of Africa’s food commodities for increased intra-African and global trade.”*
- ❖ Develop a **foundation for the governance structure** of the soon to be established African Food Safety Agency.

Beyond exchanging information and ideas about current challenges and priorities of food safety and nutrition regulatory development in the African continent, **a first meeting of African Food Regulatory Authorities** as part of the proposed Forum could offer opportunities to discuss the following themes:

- ❖ Collaborative efforts to build **capacity in food risk analysis and food regulatory science**, in alignment with the directions set by the AFSS.
- ❖ Implementing **changes in African food safety frameworks**, towards the integration of preventive measures and the adoption of decisions based on risk analysis.

- ❖ Supporting **the sustainable development of the food and agrifood production** sector in Africa, through the availability of a favorable and integrated food regulatory environment, supported by convergent food regulatory decisions across the continent.
- ❖ Stakeholder engagement, providing a **continental platform where food regulators will discuss with other stakeholders** including the private sector to improve food safety management.

If agreed by African food competent authorities and partner organization, this Forum aims to be set as a **Biennial Event, convened to serve as a mechanism of collaboration and information exchange between food regulators in Africa and internationally.**

3. Partners in the Organization of the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF)

The set-up of AFRAF and the organization of its inaugural meeting in Cairo from 11-13 October 2023, is spearheaded by the **African Union Commission** and the **National Food Agency of Egypt**



In Partnership with various Domestic and International Partners¹



World Food Programme



4. Proposed Format and Agenda of the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum

The forum will gather **up to 2 Senior Officials** of Each African country. Where more than one government department or agency are sharing food safety and quality regulatory responsibilities, representation will be sought from the lead agency or the two most relevant departments and agencies, with a maximum of 2 representatives per country.

¹ The list of partners in the organisation of AFRAF is regularly updated upon confirmation

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY 11 OCTOBER 2023

Official Opening of the Forum

Taking Stock of African Food Regulatory Collaboration – Current Status and Future Perspectives

8:00-9:00	Registration and Coffee
9:00-10:30	Official Opening Ceremony
10:30-10:45	Media Briefing Senior Officials leave, re-arrangement of room / Media Briefing (as required)
10:30-11:00	Health Break Audio-visual displays will showcase food & agrifood business development in Africa
11:00-11:10	Introduction of the Forum, its Rationale and Goals
11:10-12:00	Technical Session 1a: Keynote Address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Priorities, Challenges and Opportunities of Food Regulatory Authorities in Africa ▪ Documentary: African Continental Free Trade Area and the Integrative Approach of the African Food Safety Strategy
12:00-13:00	Technical Session 1b: Scene Setting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentation 1: Stock Taking of Current Structure of Food Safety Collaboration in Africa and its Perspectives ▪ Presentation 2: Concept and mandate of the African Food Safety Agency (AFSA): Expected Role and Interaction with African Food Regulators ▪ Facilitated Plenary Discussions / Questions and <i>The discussion should identify initial foundational requirements for AFSA to be operationalized that may be facilitated by the creation of AFRAF</i>
13:00-14:00	Health / Prayer Break
14:00-16:00	Technical Session 2: Review of Current Collaborative Food Safety Regulatory Agenda at Continental and Regional Level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentation 3: Regional food regulatory and integration initiatives – ▪ Panel Discussion with REC representatives ▪ Facilitated Plenary Discussions /Questions and Answers <i>This discussion aims to review current status of food regulatory cooperation and integration of food regulatory frameworks being implemented by the various RECs. It should lead to identify needs and areas of support / investment that can be facilitated by the creation of the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum and the operationalization of AFSA.</i>
16:00-16:30	Wrap Up + Summary of the Day’s Discussions and Review of Day 2 Agenda
18:00-20:30	Official Dinner

DAY 2: THURSDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2023

Challenges and Opportunities Related to the Modernization and Integration of African Food Regulatory Frameworks

Reviewing the Outcomes of the Vienna Food Safety Forum – UNIDO

09:00-10:00 Technical Session 3: View from the Food and Agrifood Sector

This session will feature introductory remarks from representatives of the food and agri-food production sector in Africa as well as representatives of the World Food Program, to review the challenges and impediments to access African markets, resulting from regulatory / technical barriers, followed by a Panel discussion to discuss avenues to address such challenges.

- Presentation 4 / Introductory Remarks to discussions: Potential of Enhancing Intra-Continental Trade of Food and Agrifood Commodities
- Presentation 5 / Introductory Remarks to discussions: Challenges and opportunities to access African markets and the potential for growth of intra-regional trade
- Presentation 6 / Introductory Remarks 6 to discussions: View from the Industry - Egyptian Experience in Accessing African markets, Challenges and possible enablers
- Presentation 7 / Introductory Remarks to discussions: Experience of the West African Food and Agri-Business in growing intra-regional / continental trade,
- Presentation 8 / Introductory Remarks to discussions: Impediments faced by WFP in the movement of food and agri-food commodities to address food security challenges, resulting from regulatory barriers and limited access to quality infrastructure

10:00-11:00 Panel Discussion

“Potential for food regulatory integration in Africa and its impact to stimulate food and agrifood trade in the continent”

▪ **Plenary Discussion, Questions and Answers**

The discussion should consider the identification of priority of action for African regulators to streamline, simplify and harmonize regulations, such that the impediments identified above be addressed.

The discussion should also consider the role foreseen by the business sector for the AFSA to address these challenges.

11:00-11:30 Health Break

11:30-12:30 Technical Session 4: Promoting a Food Regulatory Collaborative Agenda of African Food Regulatory Authorities

▪ Overview, 5 min Presentations:

Experiences shared by food regulatory authorities to modernize the food regulatory landscape

This session will enable food regulators to share their experience in modernizing their food regulatory system, including adopting a particular model of governance and oversight with a single agency, multiple agencies, agency with multiple

mandates (e.g., food and drug). What works in countries with maturing food safety system in Africa?

Food regulators will be engaged ahead of the meeting to seek written updates on their food regulatory frameworks and any changes in governance/ structures / competent authorities and/or major legislative / regulatory reform or modernization.

A template will be developed and provided to support consistent reporting, with a focus on recent changes to the food regulatory system in African countries related to updated laws, regulations, changes in roles and responsibilities as well as changes in Governance of food safety decisions

- Single Agency
 - Multiple Agencies
 - Split Model: Single Agencies splitting to more entities
- Plenary Discussion

Lessons learnt from the creation of unified food safety authorities in the African continent,

This session should cover the lessons learnt from the operation of various model of oversight of food regulatory authorities.

It should lead to some recommendations as to what national regulators may require in term of support from Continental structures, such as AFRAF and AFSA to further enable their food regulatory functions.

12:30-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:20 **Technical Session 5: Modernizing African Food Regulatory Regimes – Mainstreaming Voluntary Third-Party Assurance (vTPA) Programs in African Food Regulatory Systems**

- Introductory Presentation 1: Reviewing the outcomes of the Vienna Food Safety Forum – A year in perspective and Future Direction
- Introductory Presentation 2: Overview of the Codex guideline on Voluntary Third-Party Assurance (vTPA)
- Panel discussion on the uptake of vTPA in Africa and beyond

*The Panel discussion will review experiences underway to mainstream the application of vTPA in African food regulatory regimes, including the development and uptake of the relevant food safety assurance schemes needed **by the African food production sector** that may contribute to facilitating intra-continental Trade.*

It should lead to some recommendations as to how such experiences can be leveraged to enable better integration of vTPA in African food regulatory regimes, supporting effective food safety conformity assessment.

Launch of the vTPA Assessment Tool

15:20-16:00 **Technical Session 5: Modernizing African Food Regulatory Regimes – Continued**

Introducing Remote audits and inspection in food conformity assessment

This session aims to review the progress of the development of the Codex text on remote audit and inspection and seek initial input from African food regulators to ensure its suitability to address the African Context.

This technical session will include a short presentation from the representative of Chair of the Codex Committee on Food Import Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS), followed by a period of questions and discussions.

16:00-16:10 Breakout Session Introduction

Introduction of themes of breakout discussions

The Breakout sessions are designed to identify possible areas of collaborative initiatives that can develop between African Food Regulators and that can be driven by / overseen by the AFRAF

16:10-17:00 Breakout Sessions

Participants to breakout sessions are

- Breakout session 1: African food regulatory harmonization and integration as part of AfCFTA
- Breakout session 2: Implementing changes in African food safety frameworks, Enhanced reliance on Preventive Approaches and on vTPA
- Breakout session 3: Collaborative efforts to build capacity in food risk analysis, food regulatory science and food authorities in Africa
- Breakout session 4: Development of the Multi-Stakeholder Continental Platform and other Governance Structures overseeing the future operations of AFRAF
- Breakout session 5: Supporting the sustainable development of the food and agrifood production sector in Africa
- Breakout Session 6: Enhancing Quality Infrastructure to underpin modernized food regulatory systems
- Breakout Session 7: Remote Audit and Inspection Used in African Food Conformity Assessment Programs

16:30-17:00 Adjournment

18:00 Gala Dinner – Invitation from the Egyptian Food and Agri-Food Industries

DAY 3: FRIDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2023

09:00-10:00 Report Back from Breakout Sessions

Presentations and Discussions from breakout discussions

This session will review the outputs of the Breakout sessions with the objective to develop an early set of commitments / objectives for activities that can be carried out under the AFARF to enhance food regulatory cooperation in Africa

10:00-10:30 Health Break

10:30-11:00 Collaboration between African and International Food Regulators Part 1

Food Regulators from Other Countries Join the Forum:

Introduction of Food Regulators from Other countries / regions

11:00-12:00 Collaboration between African and International Food Regulators Part 2

- Opportunities of Collaboration and Enhanced Capacity Building in Africa Food Regulatory Systems
- Interventions from other food regulatory agencies

12:00-12:45 Adopting the Path Forward for Future Collaborative Action in Africa and Globally

- Presentation 8: Possible Charter and Modus Operandi for an African Food Regulatory Agencies Forum
- Presentation 9: Review of the Cairo Declaration “Advancing Integration of Food Regulatory Systems in Africa with Enhanced Collaborative Mechanisms: AFRAF and AFSA”

12:45-13:45 Friday Prayer for Muslim Participants

14:00-15:00 Closing Ceremony

Official Closing Remarks

15:00 Forum Adjournment followed by Lunch