

# Domestication of Codex Standards in Zambia in View of African Continental Free Trade Area

## Executive Summary

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is an initiative under the African Union's Agenda2063, aimed at creating a single market for goods, services, and investment across all African Union Member States.<sup>1</sup> The AfCFTA Agreement presents an opportunity for Zambia to increase its exports and enhance economic competitiveness.<sup>2</sup> To leverage this opportunity, Zambia must domesticate Codex standards to ensure compliance with international food safety and quality norms.<sup>3</sup>

In order to understand the importance, it is essential to understand Codex standards and their role in trade facilitation and public health. The Codex Alimentarius or the Food Code is a globally recognized collection of standards, codes of practice, guidelines, and recommendations for food safety and quality. The texts are developed



by experts in specialised committees and adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a joint WHO/FAO food standards Body.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, operational since 1963, aims to protect public health and promote fair food trade. Zambia became a member in 1971 and has since participated in the development of Codex standards. While these standards are voluntary, countries are encouraged to domesticate them as they serve as a benchmark for international trade, recognised by the World Trade Organisation's Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Trade Agreement.

Codex standards are developed through a transparent, multi-stage process based on the best available scientific evidence, and guided by rigorous risk assessments conducted by WHO and FAO scientific expert bodies. Zambia's integration into the AfCFTA thus presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen its food safety systems by aligning them with international standards. The domestication of Codex Alimentarius standards is critical for ensuring food safety, facilitating trade, and protecting public health.

Furthermore, adopting and implementing Codex texts will enhance Zambia's export market access for agro-commodities through compliance with internationally acceptable benchmarks.

This Policy Brief outlines the current landscape, highlights key challenges, and proposes recommendations to support the effective domestication of Codex standards in Zambia.

## Key Messages

- a. Increase Zambia's participation in the development of Codex standards;
- b. Domesticating Codex standards through the Zambia Bureau of Standards is crucial for Zambia to enhance food safety, boost competitiveness, and facilitate trade under AfCFTA;
- c. Once standards are domesticated, they must be incorporated into national legislation for effective enforcement;

- d. Advocacy for Codex standards among policymakers to ensure sustained support and implementation;
- e. Formulate a national strategy for domestication of Codex standards, ensuring alignment with AfCFTA requirements;
- f. Strengthen human capacity and infrastructure to enable effective implementation of the standards;
- g. Raise awareness among food business operators on the importance of Codex standards for improving market access.

## **Problem Statement**

Zambia has a growing agro-industry, and expanding internal market access for its commodities is vital to supporting economic development.<sup>4</sup> However, the country faces export challenges due to inadequate compliance with international standards, such as Codex standards.

Although Zambia is a party to the AfCFTA, intra-African trade requires compliance with internationally-benchmarked standards, with Codex serving as a key referencing point.<sup>5</sup> Currently, Zambia has domesticated only a limited number of Codex standards, compared to the range of commodities in trade.

Furthermore, the regulatory framework is inadequate to support the effective domestication of these standards. The lack of sufficient alignment of Codex standards within Zambia's national legislation and regulatory frameworks remains a major barrier to enhance export market access for agro-commodities. Strengthening the regulatory framework is therefore essential to accelerate the domestication of Codex standards and unlock Zambia's trade potential.

## **Situation Analysis**

- a. Zambia's national food control systems are not fully aligned with international standards, limiting the country's ability to promote export to other AfCFTA member states.

- b. The food industry faces challenges in meeting international standards, resulting in reduced competitiveness and fewer export opportunities.
- c. Zambia's participation in international trade, particularly under AfCFTA, requires compliance with Codex standards to ensure food safety and quality.
- d. Zambia's engagement in Codex standard-setting is inadequate and needs strengthening to facilitate effective domestication of these standards.
- e. There is limited awareness within industry on the importance and use of Codex Standards by industry.
- f. Investment in the food safety ecosystem remains insufficient from both public and private stakeholders.

## Policy Options

- a. Finalise the Food Safety Regulations and National Food Safety Policy to accelerate the domestication of Codex standards;
- b. Develop a sustainable financing mechanism for food safety to enhance enforcement and compliance;
- c. Strengthen the National Codex Committee to ensure effective participation in Codex standard-setting process;
- d. Enhance Zambia's engagement in the development of Codex standards;
- e. Formulate a comprehensive national strategy for domestication of Codex standards, aligned with AfCFTA requirements;
- f. Invest in capacity building, including training personnel and establishing infrastructure to effectively implement and enforce Codex standards;
- g. Harmonise national standards with Codex standards to ensure consistency and alignment with international requirements; and
- h. Strengthen collaboration with stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, and regional organisations, to support effective implementation of Codex standards.

## Recommendations

Based on the analysis, we recommend that:

- a. Finance the regulatory framework (Food safety policy and regulations);
- b. A national Codex Committee is formed and a national strategy for domesticating Codex standards is developed, aligned with AfCFTA requirements;
- c. Allocate resources to build capacity for implementing and enforcing Codex standards;
- d. Harmonise national standards with Codex standards to ensure consistency and compatibility; and
- e. Develop a food safety technical working group that will ensure technical resources are mobilised for effective addressing of food safety issues

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement
- <sup>2</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) standards
- <sup>3</sup> The African Continental Free Trade Area: a TRALAC Guide (12th edition, May 2024)
- <sup>4</sup> Making the most of the AfCFTA, World Bank, 2022
- <sup>5</sup> The African Continental Free Trade Area: Economic and Distributional Effects, World Bank, 2020