



DISCUSSION PAPER

The Future of the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF)

Strengthening Cooperation, Supporting Regulatory Integration and Positioning AFRAF as an Independent, Regulator-Governed Network

Contents

1.	Introduction and Purpose of the Paper	2
2.	Origin and Foundational Purpose of AFRAF	2
3.	AFRAF's Value Addition to Food Safety Governance in Africa	2
3.1	Facilitating Dialogue and Collaboration Among Regulators	2
3.2	Supporting Regulatory Convergence Under AfCFTA.....	3
3.3	Complementing Mechanisms Established by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Continental Mechanisms	3
3.4	Supporting Codex Participation and CCAFRICA Work.....	3
4.	Evolution of AFSA and Implications for AFRAF	3
4.1	Implication: AFRAF Must Naturally Evolve into an Independent Forum	4
5.	The Case for a Reformed, Independent AFRAF	4
5.1	Need for Agility and Regulator-Led Cooperation.....	4
5.2	Increasing Role of Science and Data in Regulation.....	4
5.3	Convergence with AfCFTA Regulatory Frameworks	4
5.4	Supporting AFSA Without Being Governed by AFSA	4
5.5	Supporting Africa's Influence in Codex.....	5
6.	Proposed Future Governance Structure for AFRAF	5
6.1	A Steering Committee.....	5
6.2	A Rotating Chairmanship	5
6.3	Voluntary Thematic Working Groups	5
6.4	A Revised Charter	6
7.	Way Forward and Questions for Discussion	6
8.	Conclusion.....	6

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Paper

This discussion paper explores the future orientation of the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF), reviewing its inception, objectives, and evolving role within Africa's food safety and regulatory landscape. It examines AFRAF's potential to support food safety governance and regulatory integration across the continent, particularly in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Codex work in Africa, and the development of the African Food Safety Agency (AFSA).

With AFSA's statutes now adopted, and AFRAF no longer designated as the General Assembly of the Agency, there is a timely opportunity to reshape AFRAF as an independent, voluntary, regulator-led network, supported by strengthened governance mechanisms, enhanced collaboration functions, and clearer alignment with continental priorities.

This paper aims to support reflection among AFRAF members ahead of discussions on its future structure, governance model, and work program.

2. Origin and Foundational Purpose of AFRAF

AFRAF was created during the High-Level Senior Food Regulators Meeting held in Cairo from 11–13 October 2023. Through the Cairo Declaration, African regulators recognized the need for a coordinated mechanism to address an increasingly complex and interconnected food safety environment, driven by expanded agri-food production, rising intra-African trade opportunities, and public health priorities.

The Declaration formalized AFRAF's purpose to:

- Serve as a forum for information exchange, experience sharing, and collaboration among African food regulatory authorities.
- Shape a collective agenda for regulatory harmonization, supporting AfCFTA objectives.
- Contribute to implementing the Food Safety Strategy for Africa (FSSA 2022–2036).
- Act initially as the General Assembly of the forthcoming AFSA, a role envisioned in 2023 that has since evolved.

The proposed AFRAF Charter (2023) further elaborated these objectives and outlined a governance structure including broad membership, biennial physical meetings, voluntary working groups, and a Steering Committee representing Africa's five regions.

3. AFRAF's Value Addition to Food Safety Governance in Africa

Since its inception, AFRAF has been envisioned as a mechanism that could add meaningful value to the continent's food safety governance architecture. While the Forum remains at an early stage of development, its design, intent, and engagement to date suggest several areas where AFRAF could make a constructive contribution.

3.1 Facilitating Dialogue and Collaboration Among Regulators

AFRAF was designed as a continental platform where heads and senior officials of national food authorities could exchange experiences on institutional reforms, risk-based approaches, inspection modernization,

and food monitoring systems. Discussions held during virtual meetings in 2025 indicated that members consider these domains among the priority areas for future collaboration, underscoring AFRAF's potential role as a convening space for technical and strategic dialogue.

3.2 Supporting Regulatory Convergence Under AfCFTA

Harmonized food regulatory approaches can reduce barriers to intra-African trade. AFRAF is well positioned to contribute to AfCFTA aspirations by:

- Highlighting priority areas where greater alignment may be beneficial, such as pesticide MRLs, food monitoring methodologies, and labelling norms;
- Promoting evidence-based approaches consistent with Codex and WTO SPS principles;
- Offering a space where regulators may compare frameworks and explore feasible pathways toward convergence.

These anticipated contributions reflect AFRAF's intended role as a facilitator of technical dialogue.

3.3 Complementing Mechanisms Established by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Continental Mechanisms

At inception, AFRAF was not intended to replace existing SPS harmonization efforts within RECs such as ECOWAS, EAC, or SADC. Rather, the Forum was conceived as a cross-regional platform through which regulators could share lessons, identify best practices, and promote coherence between regional approaches.

Conversations among AFRAF members have highlighted common interests in strengthening food monitoring systems, risk assessment capacity, and regulatory science competence. These areas, if developed collaboratively, could reinforce the implementation of the Food Safety Strategy for Africa (FSSA) and contribute to a broader culture of risk-based decision-making.

3.4 Supporting Codex Participation and CCAFRICA Work

AFRAF also holds potential to enhance Africa's engagement in Codex by:

- Enabling informal exchanges that support better coordination of African positions.
- Providing a space where regulators can reflect collectively on regional priorities in support of CCAFRICA's leadership and work.
- Facilitating dialogue that could help strengthen participation in Codex committees and coherence with ARSO and other standardization bodies.

These opportunities remain aspirational and dependent on the future direction and engagement of AFRAF members.

4. Evolution of AFSA and Implications for AFRAF

When AFRAF was established, one of its roles was envisioned as serving as the General Assembly of AFSA once the Agency became operational.

However, with the adoption of AFSA's Statutes, the Agency's governance structure has taken a different direction. AFRAF has not been designated as the General Assembly; instead, AFSA's governing body will be established through a separate AU-defined process.

4.1 Implication: AFRAF Must Naturally Evolve into an Independent Forum

This new governance reality creates both the space and the necessity for AFRAF to consolidate its identity as:

- An independent, voluntary, regulator-governed network.
- Free of formal institutional reporting obligations.
- Fully complementary to AFSA's mission.

AFRAF can therefore remain the primary platform for African food regulators, even as AFSA becomes the continent's dedicated technical and operational agency. This evolution supports AFRAF's original intent: enabling cooperation, peer engagement, and shared capacity development without the constraints associated with a formal AU institutional mandate.

5. The Case for a Reformed, Independent AFRAF

Several considerations support the need to reaffirm and strengthen AFRAF's role as an independent network.

5.1 Need for Agility and Regulator-Led Cooperation

Regulators require a space for rapid, peer-to-peer exchanges on emerging risks, innovations, and operational challenges, something more flexible than a formal agency might provide.

5.2 Increasing Role of Science and Data in Regulation

AFRAF can help promote collaborative approaches to:

- Food monitoring and data sharing.
- Pesticide residue surveillance.
- Risk assessment initiatives.
- Digital and modernized regulatory systems.

5.3 Convergence with AfCFTA Regulatory Frameworks

AFRAF may support AfCFTA implementation by providing a technical consultative space where regulators identify potential areas of convergence and practical steps toward regulatory alignment.

5.4 Supporting AFSA Without Being Governed by AFSA

AFRAF could:

- Provide feedback to AFSA.
- Engage in joint initiatives when mutually beneficial.

- Contribute to risk assessment or surveillance activities.
- Offer technical input to AU bodies when requested.

This type of complementary relationship is consistent with international models such as Heads of Agencies networks in the EU and Asia.

5.5 Supporting Africa's Influence in Codex

AFRAF can help strengthen Africa's presence and impact in Codex through:

- Informal coordination of regional positions.
- Reinforced collaboration with CCAFRICA.
- Enhanced technical input from Member States.
- Shared preparation for Codex committee sessions.

6. Proposed Future Governance Structure for AFRAF

To support this evolution, AFRAF may consider updating elements of its 2023 Charter. Possible governance enhancements are summarized below.

6.1 A Steering Committee

A small executive body composed of:

- Five elected or volunteering members.
- Optional representation from Regional Economic Communities.
- Optional representation from the African Union Commission.

The Steering Committee would serve a three-year term and guide AFRAF's workplan, coordinate meetings, and oversee working groups. This draws on the Charter's foundations but requires adjustment to reflect AFRAF's independence from AFSA.

6.2 A Rotating Chairmanship

Each term, one regulator would serve as Chair and host the Secretariat (virtual or physical), ensuring continuity and shared ownership.

6.3 Voluntary Thematic Working Groups

Working groups could be established on:

- Food monitoring and surveillance.
- Risk analysis capacity building.
- Innovation and regulatory modernization.
- Codex coordination and support to CCAFRICA.
- Regulatory convergence aligned with AfCFTA.

Participation would be voluntary and expertise-driven.

6.4 A Revised Charter

A revised AFRAF Charter would:

- Remove references to AFRAF as a governing arm of AFSA.
- Reinforce AFRAF's independence and regulator-led nature.
- Clarify its complementary engagement with AFSA, RECs, Codex, and ARSO.
- Strengthen commitment to transparency, inclusiveness, and scientific rigor.

7. Way Forward and Questions for Discussion

AFRAF members are invited to reflect on the following:

1. What specific value should AFRAF continue delivering as an independent network?

(e.g., peer learning, problem-solving, capacity building, crisis coordination)

2. How should AFRAF structure its leadership and Secretariat functions?

Should the Steering Committee be revised? Should leadership be elected or volunteer-based?

3. What collaborative priorities should define AFRAF's 2026–2028 workplan?

(e.g., MRL harmonization, risk assessment networks, innovation regulation)

4. How should AFRAF engage with AFSA, RECs, CCAFRICA, and ARSO?

As a partner? A consultative community? A technical platform supporting regulatory convergence?

8. Conclusion

AFRAF stands at a pivotal moment. With AFSA's formal structures now defined, AFRAF has the opportunity to embrace its identity as a voluntary, regulator-governed, collaborative platform, one that is agile, relevant, and well aligned with continental priorities.

By modernizing its governance, strengthening technical cooperation, and defining a clear long-term vision, AFRAF can continue to play a central role in Africa's regulatory integration, support AfCFTA implementation, and contribute to the broader ecosystem of food safety institutions, including Codex, CCAFRICA, and regional bodies.

AFRAF's future strength will depend on the commitment, collaboration, and shared vision of its members in building a safer, more harmonized, and more competitive African food system.