

Preliminary Mapping of Regulatory Requirements Governing Food Innovation in Selected African Countries

Draft for review and validation by AFRAF Expert Working Group members

1. Introduction and positioning

The Expert Working Group on Regulatory Transformation to Support Food Innovation in Africa was launched under AFRAF to support the development of more innovation-ready food regulatory systems across the continent. The Working Group responds to a growing need to enable safe food innovation while maintaining public health protection, consumer trust, and fair practices in food trade.

The discussions held during the physical Working Group meeting in Cairo, Egypt, on 24–25 June 2026 focused on mapping the current regulatory landscape in selected African countries and identifying areas where regulatory requirements may either enable or impede innovation. The framing questions invited regulators to describe requirements governing novel foods and novel ingredients, foods derived from biotechnology, foods with limited history of use, novel processes, functional ingredients, foods for special dietary uses, novel food additive applications, and health claims, especially non-nutrient claims.

This note reflects an initial synthesis of information reported by participating members. It should be treated as draft information requiring further verification by the members themselves. It will also need to be complemented by a more fulsome AFRAF member survey to document regulatory requirements, decision-making practices, reliance mechanisms, and priority areas for regional guidance.

2. Scope of the preliminary mapping

The mapping covers regulatory regimes and adjacent frameworks relevant to food innovation, including:

- Novel foods and novel ingredients, including ingredients with limited history of safe use such as algae-derived ingredients, camelina oil, precision-fermentation-derived ingredients, and other emerging food sources.
- Foods derived from biotechnology and biosafety-related frameworks.
- Novel processes, including high-pressure processing, pulsed light, cold plasma, and related disruption technologies.
- Functional ingredients, including extracts, herbs, botanicals, and traditional ingredients used in new food contexts.
- Foods for special dietary uses, where these frameworks may act as a surrogate for managing innovative or functional products.
- Food additives, processing aids, technological agents, and incidental additive-type applications.
- Health claims, with particular emphasis on non-nutrient claims and claims associated with bioactive or functional ingredients.

3. Country-level preliminary observations

3.1 Ghana

Ghana reported that its regulatory approach relies substantially on Codex guidance as the primary reference point. Other reputable international sources, including decisions or guidance from the European Union and the United States, may also be considered when relevant. Food additive decisions may take into account the regulatory status of the additive in the country of origin of the food product.

For new or unclear cases, Ghana applies a case-by-case, evidence-based approach. Reliance on decisions from other jurisdictions may be possible where the evidence is considered compelling. Where there is no established history of safe use or no clear regulatory pathway, Ghana may refer the matter to a technical advisory committee to review available evidence and advise on a decision. Ghana also identified challenges in the classification of products at the interface between foods and therapeutics.

3.2 Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire reported a broadly similar situation, with Codex serving as a primary reference for food regulatory decision-making. The country also noted the potential value of regional or subregional cooperation to address novel food and innovation-related regulatory questions, particularly where national frameworks do not provide detailed provisions.

3.3 Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone indicated that it is in the process of reviewing its food safety regulatory framework, with reference to the FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool. Recommendations are being considered toward the creation of a new food safety authority. At this stage, there is no dedicated novel food framework. Decision-making relies primarily on Codex, with an emerging interest in comparison with approaches used in neighbouring countries, including Ghana and Nigeria.

3.4 Cabo Verde

Cabo Verde reported that food-related decisions are managed through the existing competent authority structure. There is no specific framework for novel foods per se. International guidance, primarily Codex, is used to inform decisions on novel ingredients and health claims, with other guidance potentially considered where relevant.

3.5 South Africa

South Africa reported a more differentiated approach depending on the category of product or process. Genetically modified organisms are managed under a dedicated GMO legislative framework, supported by biosafety requirements and science-based assessment. For foods or ingredients with no clear history of safe use, decisions are generally made on a case-by-case basis.

Current discussions include how to address ingredients such as hemp or cannabis-derived extracts intended for food use, particularly where they do not contain THC but may be positioned as high-protein or functional ingredients. South Africa also reported ongoing consideration of novel processes, such as pulsed light treatment for milk, where evidence must be assessed in relation to the intended food matrix and use conditions.

The country noted challenges at the food–therapeutic interface, including bodybuilding or body-maintenance products. A working group has been tasked with examining such classification issues. South Africa is also considering reforms to legacy regulations, including food additive regulations, with the aim of enabling the assessment of new additive applications even where no Codex or third-country precedent exists. This could help position South Africa as a jurisdiction able to support innovation rather than only follow decisions taken elsewhere.

South Africa is also considering a new health claims framework based on different claim categories and levels of substantiation, potentially managed through positive lists while allowing new claims to be submitted for assessment and inclusion.

3.6 Tanzania

Tanzania reported that it does not have standalone novel food regulations. Foods derived from biotechnology are managed through specific biosafety-related provisions. Other areas relevant to food innovation are addressed through food fortification provisions, case-by-case decisions, and expert review where Codex does not provide sufficient guidance.

Claims are also managed on a case-by-case basis. Tanzania reported continuing grey areas at the interface between foods and therapeutic products. Submissions may be reviewed by an expert or technical working group. Tanzania also highlighted the importance of harmonization within the East African Community, with active technical engagement at expert level.

3.7 Kenya

Kenya reported that there is no dedicated framework for novel foods or novel ingredients. New applications may be handled on a case-by-case basis through the relevant food safety authority or competent authority mechanism, using scientific assessment. The food legislation provides powers to review situations where there is no codified position, particularly where Codex does not provide a direct answer. Functional ingredients may therefore be assessed through existing food control and product classification mechanisms.

3.8 Nigeria

Nigeria, through NAFDAC and in collaboration with the standards authority, reported a mixed pre-market and post-market approach. There is no dedicated novel food regulation per se. Nigeria relies primarily on Codex, while also considering decisions from other jurisdictions where Codex does not provide a position.

Where new situations arise without clear regulatory provisions, applicants are expected to provide information sufficient to support regulatory assessment. Nigeria may conduct a comprehensive safety assessment based on the evidence provided. Foods derived from biotechnology are also supported by the biosafety agency and related biosafety framework.

3.9 Egypt

Egypt reported that many situations involving novelty are managed through NFSA Regulation No. 1 of 2018, originally designed for foods for special dietary uses. There is no dedicated novel food regulation per se, but this framework is often used to assess innovative products, functional ingredients, and products bearing claims.

Egypt considers scientific evidence as well as other requirements, including consumer acceptance and halal-related considerations. Food additives are managed through an existing technical regulation, with updates generally made through batch amendments rather than individual case-by-case approvals. Health claims are closely linked to the foods for special dietary uses framework; the presence of a claim may lead to

classification of a product as a food for special dietary use. Supplements are generally managed under the food framework, while classification questions remain at the interface between drugs, supplements, and foods.

4. Cross-cutting observations

Several common features emerge from the preliminary mapping.

First, most participating countries do not appear to have dedicated novel food or novel ingredient regulations. Instead, they rely on existing food control laws, Codex standards and guidelines, foods for special dietary uses frameworks, additive regulations, biosafety frameworks, or case-by-case scientific assessment.

Second, Codex is consistently identified as the primary international reference point. Where Codex does not provide a specific position, countries may consider reputable third-country decisions, particularly from jurisdictions such as the European Union, United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Third, case-by-case decision-making is widely used. While this provides flexibility, it may also reduce predictability where there is no clear guidance on the type, format, and level of evidence applicants should submit.

Fourth, several countries rely on expert committees, technical advisory groups, or internal scientific review processes to address cases where the regulatory framework is silent. This supports science-based decision-making but may benefit from clearer regional guidance and shared assessment practices.

Fifth, classification at the interface between foods, supplements, functional products, and therapeutics is a recurring challenge. This issue affects botanicals, extracts, high-protein ingredients, bodybuilding products, supplements in food vehicles, and products bearing health-related claims.

Sixth, health claims, especially non-nutrient claims, remain an area requiring greater clarity. Some countries manage claims through foods for special dietary uses frameworks, while others rely on case-by-case assessment or positive lists.

Seventh, food additives and processing aids represent an important adjacent area for innovation. Legacy additive frameworks may not be sufficiently agile to consider new technological applications, especially where there is no Codex listing or third-country precedent.

5. Implications for AFRAF future work

The preliminary mapping suggests that AFRAF could add value by supporting convergence in four priority areas:

- A. Establishing common principles for the substantiation and management of health claims, particularly non-nutrient claims.
- B. Supporting regulatory reliance and information exchange, including the use of third-country assessments and shared expert reviews.

- C. Clarifying classification principles for products at the food–supplement–therapeutic interface and even
- D. Developing non-binding regional guidance on the assessment of novel foods, novel ingredients, and ingredients with limited history of safe use.

A structured AFRAF survey should be developed as a next step to validate country information, identify legal instruments and competent authorities, document evidence requirements, and map existing decision-making practices. This would help transform the current preliminary mapping into a more complete regional evidence base for regulatory modernization.

6. Conclusion

The discussions suggest that African food regulatory systems are generally grounded in science-based decision-making and reliance on Codex. However, the absence of dedicated frameworks for novel foods, novel ingredients, novel processes, and non-nutrient claims creates uncertainty for regulators and applicants alike.

The current reliance on case-by-case review provides flexibility but may also create variability, duplication, and limited predictability. This is particularly relevant for innovative ingredients derived from traditional African foods, botanicals, extracts, biotechnology, precision fermentation, or novel processing technologies.

The Working Group is therefore well positioned to support a pragmatic regional pathway: one that does not necessarily require immediate development of binding regulations, but that can begin with shared mapping, common principles, reliance mechanisms, and practical guidance to help competent authorities manage innovation in a proportionate, transparent, predictable, and science-based manner.