



– SUMMARY REPORT –

AFRAF Expert Working Group on Regulatory Transformation to Support Food Innovation in Africa



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Executive Summary

The inaugural meeting of the **AFRAF Expert Working Group on Regulatory Transformation to Support Food Innovation in Africa** was held in Cairo, Egypt, on **24–25 June 2026**, under the leadership of the **African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF)**. The meeting was hosted by the **National Food Safety Authority (NFSA) of Egypt**, in collaboration with the **Chamber of Food Industries (CFI) of the Federation of Egyptian Industries** and the **Egyptian Organization for Standardization and Quality (EOS)**, with the participation of regional and international organizations, academia, scientific institutions and industry stakeholders.

The meeting brought together representatives from **10 African countries**, together with experts from **two Asian countries: Thailand and Indonesia**, reflecting the objective of promoting South-South cooperation and facilitating the exchange of regulatory experience between regions that are actively modernizing their food regulatory systems to support responsible food innovation. The event was organized in a **hybrid format**, enabling both in-person and virtual participation, significantly broadening engagement across Africa.

The Working Group reviewed current regulatory approaches governing innovative foods, traditional ingredients, botanicals and associated health claims across participating African countries. Discussions identified common regulatory impediments limiting innovation and market access while highlighting important opportunities for greater regional cooperation, scientific collaboration, regulatory reliance and regulatory convergence.

The mapping exercise undertaken during this inaugural meeting represents an important first step towards documenting the regulatory landscape governing food innovation in Africa. Participants agreed that this preliminary assessment should now be expanded through a broader consultation of AFRAF Member States in order to establish a comprehensive understanding of existing regulatory frameworks, regulatory gaps and opportunities for harmonization across the continent.

The meeting concluded with consensus on a series of recommendations and a phased roadmap focusing on the development of regional technical guidance, strengthened scientific cooperation, capacity building, regulatory reliance, information sharing and greater harmonization of food regulatory approaches across Africa. Participants further agreed that the findings should be presented to the broader AFRAF membership for validation and discussion during the next AFRAF face-to-face meeting, with the objective of establishing a continent-wide programme of work supporting innovation-ready food regulatory systems.

1. Background

Africa possesses an exceptional diversity of traditional foods, indigenous ingredients, botanicals and food production systems that offer considerable opportunities for improving food security, nutrition, public health, sustainability, economic development and intra-African trade. However, regulatory approaches governing innovative foods, novel ingredients, functional foods and associated nutrition and health claims remain highly diverse across African jurisdictions, creating uncertainty for innovators, limiting investment and slowing market access.

Recognizing these challenges, the **African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF)** established the **Expert Working Group on Regulatory Transformation to Support Food Innovation** to initiate a structured continental dialogue aimed at strengthening food regulatory systems capable of enabling responsible innovation while maintaining high levels of consumer protection through science-based decision-making.

The inaugural meeting was **hosted by the National Food Safety Authority (NFSA) of Egypt**, in collaboration with the **Chamber of Food Industries (CFI) of the Federation of Egyptian Industries** and the **Egyptian Organization for Standardization and Quality (EOS)**. The meeting also benefited from the participation of universities, research institutions, scientific experts and representatives of the food industry, reflecting the multi-stakeholder nature of innovation-ready regulatory systems.

Organized in a **hybrid format**, the meeting combined physical participation in Cairo with virtual participation from across Africa and beyond, allowing a broader engagement of regulators and technical experts.

The meeting served as the official launch of the Expert Working Group and pursued four principal objectives:

- ❖ To map existing regulatory approaches governing innovative foods and traditional ingredients across participating African countries.
- ❖ To identify regulatory gaps, market access impediments and opportunities for modernization.
- ❖ To review international experiences, particularly from Asia, and assess their applicability within the African context.
- ❖ To define initial priorities for future regional collaboration under AFRAF.

The two-day programme combined technical training on innovation-ready food regulatory systems with country presentations, comparative discussions, review of international best practices and structured deliberations on future regional cooperation. Particular emphasis was placed on science-based regulation, food risk analysis, regulatory predictability, transparency, regulatory reliance and collaboration among regulators, academia and industry. These objectives formed the basis of the meeting agenda and expected outputs, including the development of an initial roadmap for innovation-ready food regulatory systems and the proposal to establish an African Food Innovation Regulatory Network.

2. Participation

The inaugural meeting gathered representatives from **10 African countries**, together with experts from **two Asian countries: Thailand and Indonesia**, reflecting the importance of South-South cooperation and cross-regional exchange of regulatory experience.

African participants represented food competent authorities from across the continent, while the Asian delegation shared experiences from jurisdictions that have made significant progress in developing innovation-ready food regulatory systems for novel foods, functional ingredients and associated health claims.

In addition to government representatives, the meeting included participants from universities, research institutions, industry associations and development partners, creating a multidisciplinary platform for advancing science-based regulatory modernization in Africa.

3. Mapping of the Food Regulatory Landscape Governing Food Innovation in Africa

Participating countries presented an initial overview of their regulatory frameworks governing innovative foods, traditional ingredients, functional ingredients, botanicals and associated nutrition and health claims.

The discussions demonstrated that Africa possesses considerable scientific and commercial opportunities associated with traditional ingredients and indigenous biodiversity. At the same time, the regulatory landscape remains fragmented and characterized by varying levels of regulatory maturity, differing legal definitions and inconsistent regulatory pathways.

The preliminary mapping identified five principal themes.

3.1 Fragmented Regulatory Frameworks

Participants observed considerable variation in:

- Recognition of innovative food technologies.
- Regulatory definitions and classifications.
- Approval procedures for novel foods and ingredients.
- Authorization of additives and formulations.
- Labelling requirements.
- Alignment with international standards.

These differences frequently require manufacturers to develop country-specific dossiers and product formulations, increasing costs and delaying market access.

3.2 Limited Regulatory Predictability

Many jurisdictions continue to experience:

- Absence of clearly defined regulatory pathways.
- Uncertainty regarding approval timelines.
- Inconsistent approaches to health claims.
- Duplication of regulatory submissions.
- Administrative burdens affecting innovation.

3.3 Limited Regional Cooperation and Regulatory Reliance

Participants highlighted the absence of structured mechanisms supporting:

- Exchange of scientific assessments.
- Sharing of regulatory decisions.
- Regulatory reliance.

- Mutual recognition approaches.
- Routine scientific collaboration among African regulators.

3.4 Scientific Capacity and Evidence Generation

The meeting emphasized the need to strengthen African scientific evidence through:

- Increased reliance on locally generated scientific data.
- Generation of evidence supporting traditional African ingredients.
- Stronger collaboration between universities and regulators.
- Expansion of regulatory science expertise throughout Africa.

3.5 Consumer Acceptance and Market Challenges

Participants also identified challenges associated with:

- Consumer understanding of innovative foods.
- Cultural perceptions affecting acceptance.
- Communication of innovation.
- Regulatory decisions influenced by perception rather than scientific evidence.
- Balancing innovation with consumer confidence.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that while African countries face many common regulatory challenges, they also possess significant opportunities for collaboration and convergence. The Working Group agreed that the current mapping should be regarded as an initial assessment requiring broader validation across the AFRAF membership before continent-wide conclusions are drawn.

4. Need for Continued Mapping Across Africa

Members unanimously agreed that the current mapping exercise represents only a first step towards documenting the regulatory landscape governing food innovation in Africa.

AFRAF should therefore undertake a structured survey encompassing the broader membership in order to document:

- Legal frameworks governing innovative foods.
- Definitions of novel foods and traditional ingredients.
- Regulatory pathways for authorization.
- Approaches to nutrition and health claims.
- Safety assessment methodologies.
- Scientific advisory mechanisms.

- Regulatory reliance practices.
- Applicable standards and guidance.
- Institutional capacities.
- Priority regulatory challenges.

The resulting information will establish a comprehensive continental baseline that will guide future harmonization initiatives, technical guidance, scientific collaboration and capacity-building activities.

5. Launch of the AFRAF Academy

An important milestone highlighted during the meeting was the continued development and launch of the **AFRAF Academy**, which is expected to become the Forum's principal platform for strengthening competencies across African food regulatory systems.

The Academy will support AFRAF's broader strategic objectives by delivering competency-based education and professional development programmes covering food control systems, food risk analysis, inspection, laboratory systems, regulatory science and regulatory policy.

Within the context of the Expert Working Group on Food Innovation, the Academy will constitute one of the principal implementation mechanisms supporting the recommendations emerging from this inaugural meeting.

Particular emphasis will be placed on developing competencies related to:

- Safety assessment methodologies for novel foods and novel ingredients.
- Scientific evaluation of functional ingredients.
- Assessment and substantiation of nutrition and health claims, particularly non-nutrient function claims.
- Application of food risk analysis principles to innovative foods.
- Regulatory reliance and use of third-party scientific assessments.
- International best practices for innovation-ready food regulatory systems.

Participants recognized that sustained competency development will be fundamental for enabling African regulators to evaluate emerging food technologies consistently, efficiently and according to internationally recognized scientific principles. The AFRAF Academy was therefore identified as one of the principal delivery mechanisms supporting implementation of the Working Group's future programme of work.

6. Recommendations

The Working Group agreed on seven priority recommendations.

6.1 Develop Regional Technical Guidance

Develop practical regional guidance covering:

- Food classification.
- Scientific substantiation of health claims.

- Labelling principles.
- Transparent regulatory pathways for innovative foods.
- Science-based regulatory approaches aligned with Codex principles.

6.2 Strengthen Regulatory Cooperation

Establish mechanisms supporting:

- Scientific information sharing.
- Exchange of safety assessments.
- Sharing of health claim evaluations.
- Regulatory reliance.
- Mutual recognition where appropriate.
- Collaboration among regulators, academia and industry.

6.3 Establish FIRN Africa

Establish an African chapter of the **Food Innovation Regulatory Network (FIRN Africa)** to facilitate:

- Scientific dialogue.
- Exchange of regulatory experience.
- Development of common technical resources.
- Collaboration with international initiatives.
- Promotion of innovation-ready food regulatory systems.

6.4 Prioritize African Innovative Ingredients

Identify priority traditional African ingredients suitable for collaborative scientific evaluation and support the generation of evidence demonstrating their safety and potential health benefits.

6.5 Strengthen Scientific Capacity

Develop stronger collaboration among African universities, research institutions and regulatory authorities through regional scientific networks capable of supporting regulatory evaluations and evidence generation.

6.6 Expand Capacity Building

Working closely with the AFRAF Academy, develop regional competency-building programmes covering:

- Novel food safety assessment.
- Health claims evaluation.
- Food risk analysis.

- Food regulatory science.
- International best practices.

6.7 Promote Harmonization and Science-Based Decision-Making

Support:

- Greater convergence of regulatory requirements.
- Stronger alignment between ARSO and Codex Alimentarius standards.
- Wider use of internationally recognized scientific principles.
- Improved consumer communication.
- Reduction of unnecessary regulatory duplication.

7. Agreed Next Steps

Participants agreed that implementation should proceed through a phased programme of work:

7.1 Short-term

- Validate the preliminary findings through consultation with the wider AFRAF membership.
- Expand the mapping exercise through a structured survey covering the broader AFRAF membership.
- Launch FIRN Africa.
- Develop priority technical guidance.
- Initiate capacity-building activities through the AFRAF Academy.
- Establish an African scientific information-sharing platform.
- Identify priority African innovative ingredients.

7.2 Medium-term

- Strengthen collaboration among regulators, academia and industry.
- Develop African scientific evidence supporting innovative ingredients.
- Develop regional guidance supporting regulatory reliance.
- Produce mature regional guidance capable of informing future international discussions, including, where appropriate, Codex Alimentarius.

7.3 Long-term

- Progressively implement regulatory reliance and mutual recognition approaches where appropriate.
- Promote greater regulatory convergence across Africa.
- Strengthen science-based decision-making throughout African food regulatory systems.

8. Presentation of the Findings to the AFRAF Membership

Recognizing that the conclusions of the inaugural Working Group represent preliminary findings developed by participating experts, members agreed that the outputs of the meeting should be presented to the broader AFRAF membership.

This consultation will provide Member States with the opportunity to validate the findings, contribute additional national experiences and refine the proposed roadmap for regulatory transformation.

Subject to the agreement of AFRAF Members, discussion of the report and its recommendations is expected to take place during the next **AFRAF face-to-face meeting**, with a view to adopting a continent-wide programme of work supporting innovation-ready food regulatory systems across Africa.

Participants further agreed that implementation of the recommendations should commence through the development of a detailed work plan combining technical guidance, regulatory mapping, scientific collaboration and competency development. The AFRAF Academy will constitute one of the principal delivery mechanisms for these activities, ensuring that technical guidance developed by the Working Group is accompanied by sustained capacity building across African food competent authorities.

9. Meeting Documentation

The inaugural meeting was organized in a hybrid format, and recordings of the opening session and technical discussions have been made publicly available through AFRAF communication platforms. The official event webpage provides access to the meeting agenda, presentations and supporting documentation.

- **Official AFRAF Event Page**
<https://afraforum.org/innovationwg-inaugural/>
- **Opening Session Recording**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CL9I9JyvNNY>
- **Day 2 Technical Session Recording**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlyT25rge9I>
- **Meeting Highlights Reel**
<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/dnR0VsbBdk8>

10. Conclusion

The inaugural meeting of the AFRAF Expert Working Group represents an important milestone in positioning food innovation as a strategic priority for African food regulatory authorities. Beyond identifying regulatory challenges, the meeting established a common vision for modern, science-based and innovation-ready regulatory systems capable of supporting economic development, facilitating trade, strengthening food security and maintaining high levels of consumer protection.

The recommendations and roadmap emerging from this meeting provide the foundation for a sustained programme of regional cooperation centred on regulatory convergence, scientific excellence, competency development and collaborative regulatory science. Through continued engagement of AFRAF members, implementation of the AFRAF Academy, establishment of FIRN Africa and expansion of the regulatory mapping exercise, Africa is well positioned to develop a coherent and internationally recognized framework supporting responsible food innovation while respecting national priorities and protecting public health.