

## Overview of the Codex Working Group

The standards and guidelines established at [Codex Alimentarius](#) are those upon which each country is expected to base its own standards and guidelines on food standards.

While enormous pressure is laid on developing countries in particular to use Codex as a benchmark for their national or regional standards, the richer countries and the food industry are over-represented in the Codex Alimentarius fora, which develop and set the standards.

Developing countries do not have the financial means nor a vast body of experts to send an equal number of delegates to all Codex meetings. Although this problem has been recognised at Codex, it has not been solved. Public interest NGOs and consumer organisations are also under-represented at these fora and have only observer status. This process leads to the setting of standards best suited to the needs of large developed countries and their corporations. As developing countries have neither the expertise nor funding to have sufficient influence in these standard-setting bodies, the standards arrived at are usually done so with little of their input.

Who can highlight cases which show that baby food products exported from rich, highly industrialised countries to developing countries, have a negative impact on an infants health and its chances of survival because of the way they are marketed? Who will argue for the protective measures in the Code to be upheld in the Codex standards?

Out of concern about these gaps in representation and input, an international Codex Working Group (co-ordinated by [Wemos](#)) was formed in 1996 drawn from the IBFAN network, consumers organisations and representatives from the academic world. From a consumer and health perspective, the working group fights to get some of the provisions of the [Code and subsequent WHA resolutions](#) incorporated into Codex standards. Progress has generally been slow, but the working group has been successful in building alliances with other consumer and like-minded groups and in increasing their influence and acceptance at Codex meetings. In terms of content, working group members have influenced the development of standards at national as well as international levels.

The working group has had substantial influence in the discussion on the age of introduction for complementary foods, a debate no longer dominated by industrialised countries. The continuity of this work is felt to be essential in order to define the Codex Alimentarius as a truly international body.