Purpose of and procedures for the Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG)

1. **Background of the Initiative**
   In September 2006, WHO convened a Consultation to develop a strategy to estimate the global burden foodborne diseases. One of the Consultation’s main recommendations was to establish – under the leadership of WHO’s Department of Food Safety, Zoonoses and Foodborne Diseases (FOS) – a Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG) which will execute the recommendations made.

2. **Functions of FERG**
   1. To review epidemiologic data on foodborne disease burden;
   2. To identify technical gaps and priorities for research activities;
   3. To make recommendations to WHO on the establishment of FERG task forces and other means through which scientific and technical matters are addressed.

3. **Structure of FERG**
   FERG should be managed by a core (or steering) group comprising renown experts in the field of Foodborne Diseases and Burden of Disease assessment. It is to provide solid technical advice in planning, operationalization and execution of the strategy for FBD Burden assessment.

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2 As opposed to categorical attribution.
The FERG core group should include:
- a chair with extensive and internationally renowned experience in both Foodborne Diseases and Epidemiology of Burden of Disease
- Epidemiologists specializing in:
  - Microbiology/enteric diseases
  - Chemicals/Toxicology
  - Parasitic diseases
  - Zoonotic diseases
  - Source/cause attribution
- WHO Secretariat

External resource persons may be invited on an ad-hoc basis.

**FERG Thematic Task Forces**
Various subgroups dealing with individual cause categories will lead and advance the assessment of the burden of FBD in their field of expertise.

Four different task forces have been identified:
- Task Force 1 on infectious diseases
- Task Force 2 on chemicals and toxins
- Task Force 3 on source attribution
- Task Force 4 on country protocols

Depending on their mandate, the task forces should include experts in the areas of:
- Microbiology, toxicology, parasitology and virology,
- Burden of disease methodologies,
- Disease modeling, statistics and geographic information systems,
- Microbiological and Chemical Risk assessment, and source attribution,
- Clinical medicine and nutrition,
- Food protection policy and regulation,
- Advocacy,
- Communication and training,
- Other experts as appropriate (e.g. economics, information management, ethics, public health law).

**Partnerships with other experts**
The FERG will closely collaborate with:
• WHO in-house departments working in the area of foodborne diseases (through its Secretariat),
• UN partners,
• Governmental and non-governmental institutions, and
• Academia.

4. **Communication**

The **FERG core group** will meet twice a year. Additional meetings and/or teleconferences can be convened as required. The chairs of the task forces will be invited to the core group meetings if necessary.

The FERG core group meetings serve coordination as well as peer-review purposes. The task forces will be requested to regularly present their results to the core group.

Each **task force** will meet once, if necessary twice a year. Minutes of meetings will be circulated to all FERG members. Notes from teleconferences, essential background documents, core group meeting notes as well as draft papers of the task forces’ results will be posted on the FERG share point (accessed at http://sharepoint.who.int/sites/FERG).

In addition, other means of communication (e.g. electronic discussion groups, tele- and video-conferencing) will be used to facilitate the exchange of views between the different partners of the FBD initiative.

5. **Qualifications and skills required to serve on FERG**

FERG members will have the following skills and experience:

• Internationally recognized expertise in foodborne diseases of either microbiological, chemical, parasitic or zoonotic origin;
• Recognized expertise in epidemiological modelling and/or in burden of disease methodologies;
• Extensive experience in international public health;
• High standing as internationally recognized scientist, as evidenced by publication record.

Selected advisers need to commit to active and regular participation in FERG, amounting to approximately 2-3 weeks per year. All perceived or real conflicts of interest need to be declared.