

AID-FOR-TRADE: CASE STORY

STANDARDS AND TRADE DEVELOPMENT FACILITY (STDF)

Measuring the Performance of National Sanitary and Phytosanitary Systems

Region: Global
Type: Approach / process
Author: Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF)

Executive Summary

1. In 2009 the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) initiated work, in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to identify indicators to measure the performance of national sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) systems. This work emerged, in part, from the recommendations of STDF/OECD research on good practice in SPS-related technical cooperation which recognized that monitoring and evaluating the impact of SPS-related technical cooperation at a systems level would facilitate a focus on overall performance over-time, rather than trying to attach specific impacts to individual projects.
2. This ongoing work aims to support the identification and application of a provisional, representative set of indicators to measure the performance of a national SPS system, as opposed to particular SPS projects or programmes. A draft working paper setting out the scope of this work and proposing some initial indicators (based on the logical framework approach) was prepared and discussed at an STDF/OECD technical working meeting (Geneva, 1 July 2010).¹ Consultations with SPS experts in developing countries and development partners are in progress, and pilot testing activities in selected countries are planned to ensure that the outputs generated are relevant and feasible for application in developing countries.
3. Identifying indicators to measure the performance of national SPS systems is challenging for various reasons (e.g. issues related to attribution, time required to observe results, data availability and reliability, relationship with other non-SPS interventions, etc.). However, the outputs generated through this work are expected to enable SPS experts in developing countries to create results-based management frameworks, in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). In addition, this will support efforts to monitor the impact of Aid for Trade by focusing on monitoring and evaluation at an operational, issue-specific level.

Issues Addressed

4. This case story focuses on ongoing work by the STDF, in collaboration with the OECD, to identify and apply indicators to measure the performance of national SPS systems. It addresses issues related to sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) capacity building and technical cooperation, results-based management, indicators, monitoring and evaluation.
5. The STDF/OECD work on indicators focuses on the identification of a set of provisional indicators to track and measure performance of a national SPS system as a whole over a period of time. As such, the indicators under consideration here reflect the broad outcomes and results of relevant projects

¹ For more information, see: <http://www.standardsfacility.org/TASPSindicators.htm>

or programmes, as well as complementary initiatives and actions by both public and private sector and other concerned stakeholders in the country. This work does not focus on the identification of indicators to measure performance of individual SPS projects or programmes, which will obviously depend on the specific objectives of the intervention in question.

Objectives Pursued

6. The STDF/OECD work on SPS indicators is designed to support the identification and application of indicators to measure the performance of national SPS systems. The particular objectives are: (i) to sensitize the SPS community about the importance of managing for results and, more specifically, about the value and role of indicators; (ii) to identify, pilot test and refine a representative set of indicators to measure the performance of a national SPS system; and (iii) to develop guidance materials to promote the use of indicators within results-based management frameworks for national SPS systems.
7. In addition, this work aims to support other STDF work (including on the development of SPS action plans and the use of multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) to inform SPS decision-making). In addition, it is intended to contribute to activities to enhance the use of results-based management within SPS-related projects and programmes, as well as efforts to monitor the impact of Aid for Trade by focusing on monitoring and evaluation of assistance at an operational, issue-specific level.

Problems Encountered

8. A number of challenges were encountered during this work to date. Several of these concern issues which are challenges for results-based management in general and, as such, are likely to persist as this work advances, including during the planned pilot testing activities.
9. Results-based management is designed to improve programme delivery and strengthen management effectiveness, efficiency and accountability through a focus on the achievement of defined and measurable results and impact (e.g. on poverty reduction, economic growth or other higher-level objectives). However, quantifying long-term impacts is complex for a number of reasons. These include: (i) the number of interventions (with and without donor support), as well as the linkages and interdependencies between them and resulting problems of attribution; (ii) the time required to observe results; (iii) the importance of other factors outside the scope of SPS (e.g. transportation or financial infrastructure); and (iv) availability and reliability of data, including data fragmentation and a lack of baseline data. Inadequate financial resources for monitoring and evaluation, combined with difficulties in establishing the counterfactual (i.e. testing the opposite hypothesis), compound these challenges.
10. In addition to challenges related to the quantification of long-term impacts, difficulties were also faced regarding the level at which particular indicators should be assigned within the logical framework. In particular, reaching consensus on distinctions between immediate (output) and medium-term (outcome) indicators was sometimes challenging. The tendency for different international organizations and donors to use results-based management terminology in different ways was another key challenge.

Factors for Success/Failure

11. While this work is still ongoing, the following factors have influenced achievements to date and are expected to be important for the pilot testing stage.
 - Applying results-based management in the SPS area, including the identification and application of SPS indicators, should be based on a participatory and transparent process. In many countries, SPS systems encompass different agencies responsible for food safety, animal and plant health, etc. In addition to the public sector, the private sector (including business associations, firms, etc.), universities, research institutes are also involved in ensuring SPS compliance, and produce or have access to relevant information and data. Facilitating their participation in national processes to set

- up RBM systems and identify and apply SPS indicators, contributes to the success of these initiatives.
- Involving experts with experience in both SPS and results-based management enriches the process and enhances the quality of the results.
- Identification of indicators requires clarity and consensus on goals, objectives and outcomes. The logical framework approach offers a useful tool to support the identification of goals, objectives and outcomes, which facilitates the identification of appropriate indicators. Developing an SPS policy and strategy, in consultation with the key public, private and other stakeholders concerned, is a useful step to achieve clarity and consensus on SPS goals and objectives, and options to achieve them.
- Taking account of the availability and quality of data during the identification of SPS indicators is important to ensure that can indicators selected are measurable.
- Given fundamental differences in national circumstances, including the SPS capacities required and resources available, it is essential to take account of country-specificity in work to identify and apply SPS indicators. It is not feasible to identify an "exhaustive" set of SPS indicators applicable to all countries. The STDF/OECD work aims to provide a framework to help countries to set their own indicators and measure their SPS performance against them. The set of provisional indicators to be identified through this work is intended to be flexible, i.e. taking the indicators in the logical framework matrix as a starting point, countries should add or remove indicators based on experiences with their use.

Conclusions

12. The identification and use of indicators for a national SPS system is an innovative approach to measure SPS performance, which is of particular relevance given the number of initiatives to enhance SPS capacity (with and without donor support), as well as the linkages and interdependencies between them and the resulting problems of attribution.
13. Putting the focus on indicators to measure the performance of a national SPS system is expected to generate three main benefits. Firstly, indicators for a national SPS system will be able to aggregate the estimated impacts of multiple projects and interventions, overcoming the challenges related to attribution. Secondly, in an environment where joint programmes and inter-organizational collaboration are encouraged, the development and tracking of key macro-level indicators will provide a means to achieve synergies and enhance effectiveness in reporting, monitoring and evaluation. Thirdly, these indicators will have considerable potential as policy tools to support SPS policy and decision-making in a systematic way, particularly given the number of stakeholders involved and the often fragmented state of SPS-related information at the national level. This is of particular relevance given efforts in some countries to develop and/or apply SPS actions plans to provide a framework for SPS capacity building and the mobilization of resources.
14. While it is too early to identify the results and lessons learned from this work, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn, which may be relevant to the Aid for Trade Initiative more broadly.
 - The identification and use of SPS indicators requires significant time and resources.
 - Building in piloting activities is very useful to "test" the relevance and feasibility of selected indicators in different country settings so that they can be refined and improved.
 - The collection, reporting and management of SPS data is often weak in developing countries. Given the importance of data quality, reliability and availability for RBM, attention needs to be given to strengthening systems for data collection and management.
 - Paying attention to the following widely-recognized principles will improve the quality of indicators developed: relevance, limited number, clarity in design, feasibility, identification of causal links, data quality and reliability, scale.
 - Technical experts responsible for SPS and trade in developing countries often have limited knowledge and experience with the application of results-based management approaches. Provision of training on RBM – including the logical framework approach and methodology – would be useful.