

## AID-FOR-TRADE CASE STORY

INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE (IICA)

**SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE  
COUNTRIES OF THE AMERICAS TO CONSOLIDATE ACTIVE  
PARTICIPATION IN THE SPS COMMITTEE AND MOVE FORWARD  
WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WTO/SPS AGREEMENT**

## **SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE AMERICAS TO CONSOLIDATE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE SPS COMMITTEE AND MOVE FORWARD WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WTO/SPS AGREEMENT**

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### **Executive Summary**

The IICA-STDF-108 project was part of a long-standing effort by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) to support the development of institutional capabilities to fully comply with the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) by its member countries (28 out of 34 IICA member countries were beneficiaries of the project).

The project took place in two stages:

- a. Application of the IICA tool *Performance, Vision and Strategy for National Sanitary and Phytosanitary Systems (PVS-SPS)*, preparation of 26 national agendas for sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), and preparation and implementation of four regional sub-projects based on the national agendas.
- b. The implementation of specific actions in the regional sub-projects.

Each of the above stages was time consuming because of the complexities involved in harmonizing SPS priorities and schedules in 28 countries. Through the application of IICA's PVS tool, national SPS agendas were developed in 26 of the 28 direct beneficiary countries.

The National SPS Agendas outlined a number of actions that the countries themselves requested, and provided guidelines for them to set their institutional priorities and for international organizations and donor countries to plan their technical cooperation activities.

The 26 national agendas derived from Stage I of the project also provided inputs to develop a regional agenda for each of the regions: Caribbean, Central, Andean and South. These Regional SPS Agendas—like the national ones—served as guides to orient technical cooperation and also provided the basis to prepare the profiles of four regional sub-projects that were implemented during Stage II of the project.

The needs that appeared most frequently in the national SPS agendas were:

- a) **Development of institutional capabilities in SPS:** the STDF 108 project focused on generating the national agenda; putting together a manual on institutional management for national Codex Alimentarius committees; designing courses and manuals on good practices for participating in international SPS forums; conducting a technical forum on private standards; documenting cases illustrating successful application of SPS; the preparation of national information systems for managing Codex Alimentarius and SPS documents; and the preparation of and training on audits of national SPS notification procedures.
- b) **Risk analysis:** the project also emphasized the preparation of and training on this subject. Thus, a new methodology: the phytosanitary hazard profile—for use by plant health inspectors at border posts and points of entry in the absence of a thorough risk assessment— was developed. In addition, the project included training on risk communication and on risk assessment of microbiological and chemical hazards in food.
- c) **Awareness-raising on the importance of SPS:** the project addressed this specific demand from the Caribbean by holding four workshops for high-level decision makers in key entities of the ministries of agriculture and health of seven countries in the region.

## **1. Issues Addressed**

The project first addressed the status of institutional capacities to develop, adopt and implement science-based sanitary and phytosanitary measures in 28 countries of the Americas, and their capabilities to comply with the commitments made under the SPS Agreement. Secondly, the project proceeded to address the identified common needs of countries in the Central, Caribbean, Andean and South regions.

## **2. Objectives of the Project:**

- a) To foster a common vision within the countries (public and private sectors), to monitor and consolidate their institutional capacity building in the area of sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

- b) To continue providing support for the development of real and potential capacities in the countries of the Americas, to enable them to participate more actively and effectively in the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Committee) of the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- c) To consolidate technical cooperation between countries in the Americas as a means for promoting exchanges in the area of technical assistance and support for special and differential treatment.

### 3. Project Design and Implementation:

The project was implemented in two phases. The first phase consisted of preparing national and regional SPS agendas. This included gathering information, analyzing the relative progress of SPS capabilities and establishing a common vision among the various stakeholders on how to achieve national progress regarding SPS issues. The process began with an invitation to all stakeholders involved in SPS to complete IICA's PVS-SPS tool in each participating country. The resulting information was used as the starting point for discussing and preparing a national SPS agenda. Regional SPS agendas were subsequently developed that addressed common issues in national agendas. Thus, the project started by characterizing the status of the SPS system in 28 beneficiary countries:

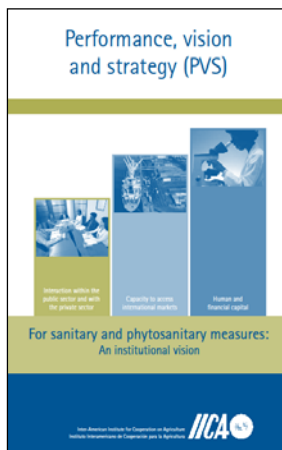
**Andean Region:** Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela

**Caribbean Region:** Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago

**Central Region:** Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama

**South Region:** Paraguay, Uruguay

Because countries in Latin America and the Caribbean reported very different levels of institutional development regarding SPS, the decision was made to implement a strategy for horizontal cooperation between the 28 beneficiary countries and six other countries that constituted a Steering Group (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico and the United States of America). Implementation of the project proceeded as follows:



***Four regional sub-project profiles based on demands and needs identified by the national SPS agendas from each region were subsequently prepared and implemented during the second phase of the project, as follows:***

***Four Workshops for the Caribbean Region to Raise Awareness on SPS and International Standard-Setting Processes*** - Workshops were held in the Caribbean to promote awareness of the importance of investing in SPS, generate knowledge on the impact and importance of relevant international bodies, and describe successful experiences with SPS and with institutional structures, emphasizing

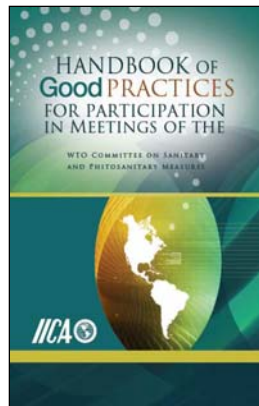
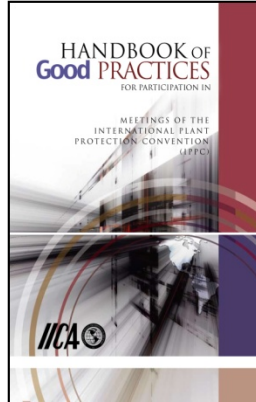
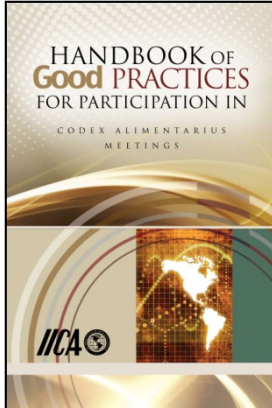
the value of a region-wide strategy for institutional strengthening. The workshops were attended by 192 representatives of the public and private sectors from seven Caribbean countries, and high-level authorities with decision-making power played a key role.

The workshops helped place all beneficiary countries (7) on an equal level in terms of their knowledge of the SPS Agreement and its implementation, and also helped the countries understand the interactions between international commitments and the day-to-day work of national authorities. Because the activities were well attended by numerous specialists from participating countries, official authorities should be able to retain at least a significant level of knowledge of the SPS Agreement among their technical teams.

***Information Systems on SPS and Codex Alimentarius*** - One of the most significant weaknesses detected in the sessions for building a common vision in the countries was the lack of communication between national authorities and with the private sector. Communication—which tends to occur only in situations of national or international emergency—is reactive rather than active and preventive in most Latin American and Caribbean countries. IICA had developed information management systems in Ecuador for the SPS Committee and the National Codex Alimentarius Committee, which were readily adapted to the needs of El Salvador. Other interested countries are Colombia, Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras and.

***Developing Handbooks and Workshops on Good Practices for Participation in International SPS For a*** - Another priority identified by the countries in their SPS agendas was training in Good Practices for Participation in the international SPS arena. The countries wanted to have a tool that would allow an inexperienced staff member to learn techniques and strategies that would help him/her perform effectively as the country's delegate to international SPS meetings (Codex, International Plant Protection Convention-IPPC, and WTO-SPS Committee).

The project addressed this problem by developing three Handbooks of Good Practices for Participation, whose primary purpose was to build skills in preparing for a meeting, participating in the meetings of Codex Alimentarius, IPPC and the WTO SPS Committees, and following up after a meeting. The manuals were published in Spanish and English, and include a training CD useful for self-study.



**Management Handbook for National Codex Committees** - This Handbook is an additional source of support for institutional building in SPS. The objective of the handbook is to equip national Codex Alimentarius committees and technical subcommittees with tools, strategies and advice for effective institutional management. The handbook addresses issues such as a description and importance of the Codex Alimentarius; structure of Codex at the national and international levels; requirements for effective operation of the National Codex Committee; developing national positions; participation strategies; management errors; recommendations for countries with limited resources; and case studies (Costa Rica, Chile, and Argentina).

**Handbook on Notification Audits** - Some of the topics most frequently requested by the countries when they drafted their national SPS agendas and listed their needs for training or capacity building included notification processes and the issue of transparency in general.



To help the countries assess their systems and potential for complying with and benefiting from provisions on transparency, a methodology was developed for them to audit their notification processes. The two-part document is available in Spanish and English. The first section provides a theoretical introduction, and the second contains the audit process itself.

**Risk Analysis** - Risk analysis was another issue of concern that arose repeatedly in the national SPS agendas following analysis of the Within the scope of risk analysis, the aspects of risk assessment of and food contaminants, as well as risk

The PVS-SPS application indicated need of methodology to provide at borders and other points of entry decision making when a previous, is not available for specific solution was a “*Methodology for Hazard Profiles,*” which leans heavily More than 150 inspectors and head on this methodology in the South, Andean and Central regions (12 countries).



PVS-SPS application. project covered some phytosanitary hazards communication.

that there was an urgent phytosanitary inspectors with the a tool for quick thorough risk assessment, merchandise. The *Creating Phytosanitary* toward trade facilitation. inspectors were trained

*Risk assessment of hazards related to food safety* was the second component in this project on risk analysis. The PVS-SPS application process revealed that most countries had limited capacity in this area, due in part to the fact that specialists in charge of assessing the risk of food safety hazards receive little specific training. Working with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (United States), two one-week long, high-level courses on risk assessment of chemical and microbiological hazards in foods was developed and delivered to 185 trainees in 18 countries.

The third component of Risk Analysis covered by project was risk communication. Although it is a cross-cutting topic, the project was able to cover it only in the area of animal health. It is clear that, in many countries of the Americas, risk communication—as presently handled—falls far short of meeting current needs. *Workshops were designed to allow participants to gain an understanding of how risk communication is utilized* in a variety of circumstances related to agriculture. More specifically, workshop materials addressed risk communication tools for three separate situations: when the audience needs to take precautions to help reduce a risk, when the audience is outraged about a risk that is in fact quite small, and in crisis situations.

**Technical Forum on Private Standards** - As part of the process of providing the countries with more current knowledge in areas of particular interest discussed by the WTO SPS Committee, a technical forum on private standards was held. The event took place on October 19, 2009 at IICA headquarters in San Jose, Costa Rica and reached 12 countries directly via videoconference. Thirty other persons in 11 countries tuned in to the forum via webcast. The objective of the 6-hour forum was to present the perspectives of buyers (retailers) in developed countries, producers and exporters in developing countries, and international standard-setting organizations.

**Successful SPS Case Studies** - Two success stories from the Central American region were written up for use in demonstrating to decision-makers the value of investing in SPS measures. The first one, from Panama, was on the control and eradication of brucellosis and bovine

tuberculosis in Boca del Toro province, and the second one dealt with control and eradication of fruit flies in Belize. These success stories are being used in training activities and awareness-raising exercises, as they are one of the most effective ways of demonstrating the value of investing in SPS measures.

#### **4. Conclusions**

1. Many Caribbean countries have very limited institutional SPS structure, lack resources for international participation, have established no regional coordination on SPS and have no personnel assigned to address these issues.
2. The ability of the smaller Caribbean countries to sustain at least a minimum level of knowledge and awareness on SPS issues will depend, in large part, on the frequency with which the countries are exposed to training events and are able to exchange experiences with other countries.
3. Training in good practices for participation in international SPS forums (Codex, IPPC, and SPS Committee) is a priority for many countries in the hemisphere. The problem arises from a lack of staff members specifically responsible for following international developments; high staff turnover, in spite of the need for stability over time to develop institutional memory and experience with participation; designation of inexperienced staff members with no connection to the topic or organization in question; lack of resources to keep delegations stable over time; and political rather than technical appointment of delegates.
4. Although many countries revealed weaknesses in SPS information management, the project showed that successful adaptation of existing systems in one country to another country calls for certain minimum prerequisites: a) institutional interest; b) an institution responsible for housing the system; and c) a person dedicated to operating the system with enough time available for this purpose.
5. The PVS-SPS application process revealed that most countries had very limited capacity regarding risk assessment of hazards related to food safety, due in part to the fact that specialists in charge of these assessments receive little specific training.
6. There is a need for operating manuals for national Codex and SPS committees, and for capacity building on auditing national SPS notification systems and on transparency in general.

#### **5. Results Achieved**

The project generated 26 national and four regional SPS agendas, which allowed the preparation of four regional sub-projects that directly responded to identified regional needs on SPS issues:

- Awareness creation and sustainability of SPS structures in the Caribbean;
- Development and adaptation of SPS information management systems;
- Training on good practices for effective participation in international SPS forums;
- Operation manuals for national Codex and SPS committees;



- Risk analysis: methodology and training for development of phytosanitary hazard profiles, training on risk assessment of microbiological and chemical hazards in foods, and training on risk communication.
- Dissemination of information on the causes and effects of so-called “private standards.”
- Dissemination of successful cases on SPS application and investment.

In addition, application of the IICA tool *“Performance, Vision and Strategy (PVS) for Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures”* provided a baseline for the 28 beneficiary countries to measure future improvements, and for international technical cooperation and financial institutions to better focus their SPS-related activities.