



Assessing food safety capacity needs

The project aimed to improve the knowledge and skills of food safety regulators from developing Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Member Economies to plan and conduct capacity building needs assessments on their national food control systems; and to assist them to develop national capacity building action plans based on the outcome of the assessments.

STDF/PG/173

Status

Completed

Start Date

01/08/2007

End Date

30/04/2009

Project Value (US\$)

\$192,000

STDF Contribution (US\$)

\$113,000

Beneficiaries

APEC member economies

Implementing Entities

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ)

Partners

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Background

An effective food control system is essential to provide consumer protection, maintain confidence in food supply and ensure safe domestic and international trade. In many developing countries, the food control systems require more effectiveness through the establishment of process-based capacity development strategies. Some donors and development partners, including FAO, have been active in the elaboration of guidance tools on how to undertake a structured process for assessing capacity-building needs. The tools have been promoted during workshops and capacity building activities with the specific objective of training participants to apply them at the national level.

At the launch of the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum in April 2007, the need to prioritize and coordinate food safety capacity building activities was emphasized. This project emerged in this context to improve capacity to prioritize, develop and implement activities aimed at enhancing food safety and quality in developing APEC Member Economies. Experts from nine beneficiary countries - Chile, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam -

received training in the use of FAO food safety capacity assessment tools. The training aimed to enhance their ability to assess capacity needs and develop food safety action plans in their own countries, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

Results

Twenty participants from nine APEC Member Economies attended a workshop in Beijing from 19-23 November 2007 and participated in follow-up activities. The workshop and follow-up activities increased awareness about the importance of assessing and prioritizing food safety needs. Beneficiaries obtained new knowledge and skills on how to carry out a needs assessment and develop a food safety action plan. An ex-post evaluation of the project concluded that the training yielded positive results and enhanced participants' knowledge and skills about capacity assessment tools.

Results and impacts varied across the countries involved. Beneficiaries in seven Member Economies reported that they had or were planning to develop an action plan with relevant stakeholders. For instance, in the Philippines, an action plan was developed by pulling together various existing plans. In Peru, the needs assessment contributed to the development of a new food safety law.

Six of the eight countries responding to a post-training questionnaire indicated that they had undertaken some form of needs assessment since the training course. Participants also highlighted the usefulness of FAO Guidelines and the Quick Guide.

Recommendations

Focusing on post-training activities and improving the project design

While the workshop fulfilled its purpose of introducing a structured methodology to assess capacity-building needs that was found to be very useful and dynamic by the participants, the post-project period is essential to improve the impact of future trainings and to focus more on incentives for post-training activities. Considering complementary measures that can create incentives for the countries to apply the gained knowledge or directly supporting the application of it should be an integral part of the project design.

Some of the participating countries reported a continuation of needs assessments and/or the development of a food safety action plan; however, other countries did not apply the structured methodology at the country level. Improved project design including post-training guidance and better monitoring of the made progress could generate more effective outcomes.

Linking the capacity building activities to on-going country dynamics and creating synergies at the national level is more likely to lead positive project outcomes. The external evaluation recommended to donors and development partners, to incorporate or link the application of evaluation and assessment tools within on-going institutional dynamics (e.g. as a critical part of project design/preparation and or project implementation). This strategy will bring practical benefits of the structured capacity building needs assessments and will encourage its application.

Improving institutional capacity to increase workshop effectiveness

The external project evaluation found that participants from countries where some SPS capacity building initiatives were already in place were in a better position to use/apply the knowledge gained in the workshop during post-training activities. Donors and partner organizations can consider identifying major institutional gaps in SPS capacity to complement the trainings on food safety assessments and development of action plans.

Engaging further the private sector

The workshop primarily delivered on objectives exclusively designed for food safety regulators. Participants at the workshop rated the methodology as very relevant and effective, but follow-up activities were not designed to consistently engage private sector representatives in the process of capacity-building need assessments. More inclusive discussion during and after the workshop could have opened more opportunities for broader stakeholder participation and improved sustainability for the project.