

**STDF WORKING GROUP  
14-15 JUNE 2023****WTO - ROOM E****SUMMARY REPORT****1 OPENING****1.1 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

1. The STDF Working Group met in person on 14-15 June 2023 at WTO Headquarters in Geneva (Room E). The meeting was chaired by Dr Gillian Mylrea (WOAH). The chairperson welcomed participants, explained the modalities of the meeting, and introduced herself. The chairperson invited participants to join some introductory, interactive exercises to get to know each other. These exercises created an engaging and participatory opening to the meeting and were appreciated by members.
2. Members adopted the agenda with a minor amendment following a request from Australia to discuss the PPG application (STDF/PPG/935) for consideration on Thursday 15 June. The list of participants is provided in Annex 1. All presentations delivered are available on the STDF [website](#).

**2 OPERATION OF THE FACILITY****2.1 Report of the STDF Policy Committee**

3. The Secretariat briefed members on the outcomes of the STDF Policy Committee meeting on 6 April 2023. Two main agenda items were discussed during the meeting: (i) the upcoming external evaluation of the STDF; and (ii) the implementation of the current STDF Strategy (2020-2024). The Policy Committee approved the Terms of References (ToRs) and budget for the external evaluation. Some further points raised included options for the evaluation to consider: (i) a more efficient way to approve PPG applications; (ii) increasing the maximum amount for Project Grants to US\$2 million; (iii) addressing other types of standards (e.g. sustainability, environmental) in STDF's work. The summary report of the Policy Committee meeting is available [here](#). The next meeting of the Policy Committee (planned by May 2024) will focus on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the STDF programme evaluation.
4. The Secretariat reminded donor members that a rotation mechanism applies to donor representation in the Policy Committee. According to this rotation mechanism, donors agree on three representatives to serve on a two-year rotation basis in the Policy Committee (see para. 21 of the [STDF Operational Rules](#)). Donors are currently represented in the Policy Committee by France, Germany and The Netherlands. Donors need to agree on the next three representatives for 2024-2025 and are kindly requested to inform the Secretariat when they reach a decision on this matter.

**2.2 Selection of vice-chairperson of the STDF Working Group (2024)**

5. Ms Sarah Brunel (IPPC), vice-chairperson in 2023, will become the chairperson of the Working Group in 2024. The Secretariat received one expression of interest from Dr Marie-Luise Rau from the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) to become vice-chairperson in 2024. Members accepted and welcomed Marie-Luise Rau as the upcoming vice-chairperson for 2024, and hence chairperson in 2025. A list of all previous chairpersons of the Working Group was included in Annex 1 of the Annotated Agenda for information.

**2.3 Selection of new developing country experts (2024-2025)**

6. The Secretariat reminded members that the STDF currently benefits from the expertise and knowledge of the following six [SPS experts](#):

- Sithar Dorjee (Bhutan) (2021-2023)
- Juliet Goldsmith (Jamaica) (2021-2023)
- Unesu Ushewokunze-Obatolu (Zimbabwe) (2021-2023)
- Jaime-Ricardo Romero-Prada (Colombia) (2023-2024)
- Martin Kimanya (Tanzania) (2023-2024)
- Mary Grace Rivere-Mandigma (The Philippines) (2023-2024)

7. As developing country experts are selected on a two-year rotating basis, the terms of three experts (i.e., Sithar Dorjee, Juliet Goldsmith and Unesu Ushewokunze-Obatolu) will come to an end on 31 December 2023. Hence, for the period 2024-2025, the incoming chairperson of the Working Group, Sarah Brunel in collaboration with Gillian Mylrea, will be requested to select three new experts, in accordance with the [STDF Operational Rules](#) (paras. 22-25). Members are invited to recommend qualified candidates (including from LDCs) to the STDF Secretariat before 29 September 2023.

## 2.4 Staffing and financial situation

8. The Secretariat updated members on STDF's staffing situation. Ms Roshan Khan left the STDF Secretariat to take a new role in the WTO Secretariat and an internal recruitment process is ongoing. Ms Nydiane Razafindrahaingo has been hired on a temporary basis to support the team. The Secretariat is also benefiting from the support of Ms Tamara Persaud, a WTO Young Professional, and Ms Marie-Lou Zharinova, whose internship will end in July 2023.

9. The Secretariat briefed members on the financial situation of the STDF. Referring to **Annex 2** to the annotated agenda, the Secretariat summarized the financial situation of the STDF trust fund, highlighting a positive balance of CHF2.1 million (approximately US\$2.3 million) for PPGs and Projects that will be examined under agenda item 3.

10. As of 30 May 2023, contributions from Australia, Canada, Germany, Norway and the United States were received for a total of CHF3.3 million (approximately US\$3.6 million). Ireland announced a new contribution to the STDF Trust Fund of €200,000 for the year 2023. The Secretariat expects to receive an additional US\$3.4 million in 2023 under existing multi-annual agreements. Assuming these pledges are received, the STDF Trust Fund will reach its target level of funding of US\$7 million in 2023. Discussions are ongoing with current and potential new donors regarding new contributions to the STDF trust fund for 2024 and beyond.

## 2.5 Communications Plan

### 2.5.1 Presentations of the 2022 Annual Report

11. The Secretariat gave a brief overview of the 2022 annual report titled: "Adapting and Learning to Promote Safe Trade", which will be released following endorsement by the Working Group. It reports and analyses results from STDF's global partnership, knowledge work and PPGs/projects with a focus on learning to strengthen SPS capacity in ways that produce stronger results with more impact. This includes attention to STDF work on the intersections between SPS capacity development, gender equality and climate change.

### 2.5.2 Update from the Secretariat

12. The Secretariat shared some updates on the implementation of STDF's Communications Plan. For instance, the development of the new STDF website. In line with feedback received, the new website will highlight STDF's knowledge work more prominently. Other improvements will include making the website more user-friendly and engaging for its users.

13. **Annex 3** of the Annotated Agenda provides an overview of STDF events and other meetings in which the Secretariat participated since the last Working Group meeting, including information on the reasons for participation and the number and type of stakeholders reached.

### **2.5.3 Update by STDF members**

14. The Netherlands informed members that it will invite the Secretariat to the Netherlands to interact with its network of government agencies and private sector representatives to exchange on ways to strengthen coordination and promote regional approaches in SPS capacity development. The US expressed its appreciation for the Secretariat's participation in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Food Safety meetings, including a presentation during the Public-Private dialogue which led to robust discussions on how to enhance public-private dialogue and the role of the STDF. The US looks forward to a continued collaboration between APEC and the STDF.

15. The WTO expressed its willingness to continue its collaboration with the STDF in its capacity building activities. Sessions on the STDF are included in all regional and national WTO training activities on the WTO SPS Agreement (including an upcoming regional activity in Vienna for CEECAC members and the SPS Advance Course in October 2023). The EC offered to facilitate meetings between the STDF Secretariat and EU delegations, wherever useful. FAO shared that it has mentioned the STDF as an important partner in its newly released Strategic Framework. FAO also promotes the STDF and its role as a funding and knowledge sharing mechanism in its events.

## **2.6 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)**

16. The Secretariat provided updates on its work on MEL. In response to a question from Sweden, the Secretariat provided additional information on risk management. The STDF MEL Framework contains the STDF risk matrix, while risks and mitigation at the project level is explained in project documents. There has been no major change in the types of risks faced by the STDF. At the project level, some of the key risks include those related to delays in project implementation in 2020 and 2021, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. Other risks include political instability in some beneficiary countries and the increase of costs of living and transportation. The Secretariat reported on how these risks have been managed in its 2022 Annual Report. Another important risk is related to funding as about 50% of the 2023 budget (pledges) is still to be received.

17. Two external ex-post evaluations ([STDF/PG/504](#) - ePhyto and [STDF/PG/502](#) - COSAVE) were finalized in the first half of 2023. End-of-project assessments were delivered for eight projects completed in 2022. These evaluations and assessments have identified important lessons for STDF's work and SPS capacity development more broadly. In addition to highlights in the Annual Report, the Secretariat plans to analyse and disseminate these lessons via other channels (including the planned publication on knowledge work).

### **2.6.1 Presentation of LogAlto tool**

18. The Secretariat provided a demo on the use of the LogAlto tool, which offers a collaborative software platform to improve reporting across STDF projects, including aggregation of project results based on the STDF programme results framework. LogAlto was set up as a pilot in 2022, in cooperation with selected project implementing organizations, and now includes 47 STDF projects. Over 30 training sessions on LogAlto have been held with project implementing partners.

### **2.6.2 Update on the external programme evaluation**

19. The Secretariat updated members on the procurement process for selection of a firm to carry out the STDF external evaluation, following approval of the ToRs by the Policy Committee. Three proposals were received by 7 June 2023 in response to the Request for Proposals issued on the UN Global Market Place. A Technical Evaluation Committee, established under WTO procurement rules, is reviewing the technical and financial proposals. The selected company is expected to begin the evaluation work in September.

20. An Evaluation Steering Group, that would include STDF partners, donors and developing country experts, will be established to: (i) provide guidance and oversight to the evaluation; and (ii) consult with their respective constituencies to provide feedback at the various stages of the evaluation. Members interested in participating in the Steering Group should inform the Secretariat.

### **2.6.3 Cross-cutting assessment on environmental evaluation**

21. The STDF Work Plan for 2023 includes a provision for an evaluation to assess how the environment, including biodiversity and climate change, is addressed within STDF work, and SPS capacity development more broadly. The aim is to learn how to address environmental aspects more effectively within STDF projects and other SPS capacity development work. This assessment will consider past STDF work, including STDF [climate change week in 2022](#), as well as STDF work on [invasive and alien species](#) and [climate change and trade](#), and other relevant work conducted by STDF partners, donors and other members on this topic. The Secretariat invited members to share their views on the scope of this assessment and any relevant resources. The Secretariat will share the draft ToRs for this assessment with members for their review and feedback and invites members to share recommendations on experts with the required expertise to conduct this assessment. The assessment is planned to begin in the second half of 2023.

### **2.6.4 Implementation of outstanding recommendations of the 2019 evaluation**

22. The Secretariat reminded members that the STDF undergoes an external evaluation every five years. The last evaluation took place in 2018 and the final report was published in 2019. 20 recommendations were identified in the evaluation report, of which 16 were accepted. The Working Group approved an Action Plan to implement these 16 recommendations in November 2019. Members agreed that this Action Plan should be a "living" document to monitor progress in the implementation of the recommendations.

23. The Working Group considered a first update of the Action Plan (Rev 1) in October 2020, a second update (Rev 2) in March 2021, and a third update (Rev 3) in June 2022. Prior to this Working Group meeting, the Secretariat shared a fourth update (Rev 4). Ten (10) recommendations have been implemented, while the implementation of the remaining six is still ongoing. The outstanding recommendations focus on two areas: (i) disseminate lessons learned and best practice; and (ii) improving STDF's operational capacity.

### **2.6.5 Presentation of the ex-post evaluation of STDF/PG/504 (ePhyto)**

24. The evaluator, Neil Pogorelsky, presented the key findings, conclusions and recommendation of the ex-post evaluation of the [STDF/PG/504](#) project ("An ePhyto Solution: Enhancing Safe Trade in Plants and Plant Products"). The project aimed to facilitate the exchange of electronic phytosanitary certificates ("ePhyto") between interested developing countries. The evaluation highlighted several important results of the ePhyto Solution on SPS capacity and trade facilitation.

25. Some key lessons include the importance of harmonization of certificates before digitization, strong private sector interest and engagement, and consideration of developing countries technology access and equipment challenges before implementation. Key recommendations include resolving financial arrangements to ensure sustainability of the ePhyto Solution, consider piloting a regional Veterinary/Sanitary certificate exchange to serve as proof of concept, and continue outreach and education efforts to bring more plant trade into the ePhyto system. The final ex-post evaluation report can be accessed [here](#).

### **2.6.6 Presentation of the ex-post evaluation of STDF/PG/502 (COSAVE)**

26. The evaluator, Andrea Spear, presented the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the report on the ex-post evaluation of the [STDF/PG/502](#) project ("Rolling-out Phytosanitary Measures to Expand Market Access"). The project aimed to strengthen the capacity of the member countries of the Southern Cone Plant Health Committee (COSAVE) to implement phytosanitary measures in order to maintain and improve their phytosanitary status and facilitate international trade.

27. The evaluation determined that the project contributed to harmonization of standards in the region, enhanced surveillance and improved regional communication, coordination and trust. Some key lessons include the importance of regularly assessing evolving national sensitivities, priorities, challenges and risks during implementation, in order to adjust and manage expectations and desired outcomes. Key recommendations include encouraging implementing agencies to include and adapt a plausible exit strategy to each project, and to look for a constructive way to institutionalise

accountability for the sustainability of the key outputs of the project. The final ex-post evaluation report can be accessed [here](#).

### **3 PPGs AND PROJECTS**

#### **3.1 Overview of ongoing and completed projects and PPGs**

28. The Secretariat referred members to document [STDF/WG/Jun23/Review](#) which provides an overview of the implementation status of ongoing projects and PPGs. The Secretariat informed members that the table with requests for no-cost project extensions, previously included in this document, has been removed since the Secretariat is handling these requests directly with the implementing partners, as suggested by the Working Group. Nonetheless, information on these extensions is still available in the Review document.

29. The Secretariat requested the Working Group to grant a six-month extension to contract two PPGs benefiting Uganda (both approved in June 2022). The main implementing partner for [STDF/PPG/846](#) (Mairey Estates) shut down operations temporarily and expects to restart in July 2023. PPG partners therefore requested that contracting be postponed until the second half of 2023. Regarding [STDF/PPG/847](#), the Secretariat has encountered difficulties in identifying an appropriate expert/institution to implement this PPG. The Secretariat will continue to reach out to different experts, including Working Group members, in order to find a suitable candidate.

#### **3.2 Overview of new project and PPG applications not tabled for consideration**

30. The Secretariat introduced document [STDF/WG/Jun23/Review](#), which lists and documents all PPG and project applications tabled for consideration by the Working Group, as well the applications not tabled at this meeting.

31. For this Working Group meeting, 65 official applications were received: 9 were tabled for consideration by the Working Group, 25 were considered ineligible and 31, although not tabled, may have some elements of interest to the Working Group. Table 2 in the [STDF/WG/Jun23/Review](#) document provides more information about these applications.

32. The Secretariat briefly introduced three applications which were not tabled (STDF/PPG/906, STDF/PG/919 and STDF/PPG/927) and requested guidance and inputs from members to inform future work with the applicants.

#### ***STDF/PPG/906 - Digitizing SPS compliance Kenya***

33. This PPG application was submitted by the Fresh Produce Exporters Association of Kenya (FPEAK) and was developed by Lattice Consulting (a Kenya-based consulting company) in collaboration with Virginia Tech. The aim of the PPG is to conduct feasibility study to investigate how the development of a blockchain digital platform could address maximum residue levels (MRLs) of pesticides, pest infestation and traceability. Members indicated that the specific objective of the feasibility study was too broad, it is not clear how the technology will be used, and the application has failed to adequately identify and justify the specific SPS problem affecting market access.

#### ***STDF/PG/919 - Tea Nepal***

34. The Secretariat presented an overview of this project application and indicated that the applicant intends to submit it for the next round after improvements to the budget, receipt of additional letters of support, and clarification on stakeholders roles and responsibilities. Members indicated that the proposal was well-written, provided good opportunities for development and capacity building activities, and focused on key capacity gaps such as the private sector's ability to comply with international SPS standards. At the same time, members noted that all letters of support should be received in advance.

#### ***STDF/PPG/927 - SPS Risk Registers Kenya & Ghana***

35. This PPG application was submitted by CABI, in collaboration with the Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It aims at preparing a project proposal to improve "SPS Risk Registers" (SPSRRs) in Ghana, Kenya, Zambia,

and other potential countries. It includes the creation and maintenance of dynamic SPS Risk Registers. This application was initially received as a project proposal and discussed with the IPPC and WOAH. IPPC provided initial feedback expressing concerns (e.g. no reference to the IPPC and NPPOs; sustainability issues related to the creation and maintenance of a database; existence of several other databases EPPO, CABI, etc). IPPC also suggested involving the Interagency Liaison Group (IALG) in Invasive Alien Species (IAS). In the PPG proposal, some concerns remain, particularly in relation to the relevance to the STDF and link to IPPC's work including how "optimizing SPSRs" relates to the requirement for NPPOs to establish pest lists.

### **3.3 Consideration of new PPG applications**

36. The Chair reminded members that in line with the STDF [Operational Rules](#) in para. 43, the main criterion in awarding a PPG is the likelihood that its implementation will result in a well-drafted project proposal with the potential to achieve sustainable and effective results.

#### ***STDF/PPG/909 – Improving food safety and market access in Ghana's spice value chain***

37. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application on the condition that comments raised by members are addressed by the applicant. The Secretariat received several written comments on this PPG application before the meeting (from the US, the EC, Sweden, FAO and Martin Kimanya). Comments and recommendations for improvement included: (i) focusing on compliance with international SPS standards beyond the focus on a single regional market; (ii) including producers, processors, and exporters among stakeholders at the inception workshop; (iii) exploring synergies with existing work on similar topics conducted by the national Codex Committee, USAID Ghana and the US Foreign Agricultural Services; and (iv) including the Ghana Food and Drugs Authority as a partner.

#### ***STDF/PPG/921 – Scaling up the P-IMA tool in The Gambia***

38. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application. The Secretariat acknowledged and mentioned some of the written comments received from Members prior to the Working Group meeting. The Secretariat indicated that all comments had been reviewed and would be included in the detailed Terms of Reference to be developed before contracting. The US noted that the focus should be on meeting international standards rather than a single or regional market. They also encouraged identifying linkages between the PPG and ECOWAS priorities, as well as with USDA/USAID initiatives in the country and region.

#### ***STDF/PPG/924 - Enhancing safe trade of Kenya's honey and honey products***

39. The Working Group **did not approve** this PPG application. Several members of the Working Group recognized that the proposal was demand-driven and supported by the local public and private sector, as well as research centres. However, they also noted that it was a rather traditional PPG, focusing on a sector with a number of past and ongoing initiatives funded by several donors and development partners. They wondered about the complementarity and value added of a PPG in this sector and mentioned that the proposal seemed not to be especially innovative or replicable. Some members found that the proposal appeared to still be focusing heavily on meeting requirements from a specific market, rather than international standards.

#### ***STDF/PPG/929 - Feasibility study: Maintaining a fruit fly- free area in Piura, Peru***

40. The Working Group **did not approve** this PPG application. While members recognized the importance of the issue for the country and the region (northern Peru), it is not clear how the proposed feasibility study, and the project that could be developed by this PPG, could complement the various existing initiatives, both at the national and regional level, that are currently working on obtaining fruit fly free status in the country and region. It was suggested that the feasibility study and the development of a project to maintain the fruit fly free area be framed and financed by one of the ongoing initiatives that are currently working on the issue, in order to avoid duplication and create synergies with these ongoing initiatives.

#### ***STDF/PPG/935 - Advancing apiculture for economic development in the Pacific Islands***

41. The Working Group **approved** this PPG for funding subject to a number of conditions: (i) ensure there is capacity among all islands and PIFS to carry out the proposed project; (ii) integrate STDF members' written comments into the project document; (iii) ensure that interventions and proposed

standards are aligned with WOAH standards and international standards more broadly; (iv) adjust project activities to avoid any duplication with other projects in the region; (v) consult WOAH, USAID, SPREP and the World Bank throughout the PPG process; and (vi) ensure all letters of support are sent to the STDF Secretariat before contracting. The Secretariat noted that the applicant had clarified that the proposed standards would be in line with WOAH standards and international standards more broadly, welcomed the participation of the suggested partners, and reiterated that during the PPG implementation phase all current and previous projects will be identified to avoid duplication.

### **3.4 Consideration of new PG applications**

42. The Secretariat referred members to STDF's work on gender, to be presented later in the meeting, and requested a budget increase of US\$20,000 per approved project to conduct a gender assessment at the project inception phase, based on the STDF Gender Action Plan and complementary guidelines for project implementation. Members approved this request.

#### ***STDF/PG/768 - Harmonizing the phytosanitary legislative framework in Central Africa***

43. The Working Group **approved** this project with some recommendations. Members acknowledged the relevance of the project aimed at harmonizing the phytosanitary legislative framework in the CEMAC region and its importance to trade facilitation. Recommendations were made towards clarifying the language in the application document, specifically: (i) clarify that there has been no ban on exports to the EU; (ii) that only the legal module of the IPPC's Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) tool will be used; (iii) specifically mention ISPM 12; (iv) ensure synergies and complementarities with ongoing initiatives on the continent, including the Codex Guidelines for Developing Harmonized Food Safety Legislation for the CCAFRICA Region ([CXG 98-2022](#)); and (v) ensuring the active involvement of the private sector from the outset. Members also advised to adjust the logical framework and to take account of trade facilitation, food security, gender and environmental aspects when drafting legislative instruments.

#### ***STDF/PG/770 - Digitalizing accreditation and conformity assessment systems in West Africa***

44. The Working Group **approved** this project. Members acknowledged the work made during the PPG phase and found the resulting proposal demand-driven, relevant, innovative, and timely. They provided some comments to further strengthen the proposal. These include: (i) clearly ensuring synergies with other donor efforts in the area of accreditation in the participating countries; (ii) involving other regional bodies (including ECOWAS); and (iii) exploring existing work on similar topics in national Codex Committees to identify potential synergies, among others.

#### ***STDF/PG/786 – Enhancing aflatoxin management in Ghana's maize and groundnuts***

45. The Working Group **endorsed** this PG application **but did not prioritize it for funding**. Several members of the Working Group recognized the critical food safety challenges facing the export of maize and groundnut from Ghana and appreciated the leadership of CSIR-STEPRI to address these issues in collaboration with stakeholders. The Working Group recommended that the proposal be revised and resubmitted in the next round of funding. Members made a number of recommendations to improve the proposal including: (i) revise language in the project document to reflect international standards rather than specific regional standards; and (ii) consult with USDA, USAID and the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) before and during project implementation.

#### ***STDF/PG/845 – Improving SPS compliance to boost Nigeria's export capacity for cowpeas and sesame***

46. The Working Group **approved** this project subject to integrating the comments provided by members into the project document. Written comments included: (i) focusing efforts on meeting international standards rather than emphasizing efforts in regard to a single/regional market; (ii) align the project with ongoing regional harmonization efforts on pesticide regulation with ECOWAS and West African Pesticides Registration Committee (WAPRC); and (iii) to revisit and potentially increase the target number of beneficiaries during the inception phase of the project. The Netherlands requested that project partners seek solutions to transportation and storage infrastructure weaknesses in the supply chain. COLEAD noted that improper pesticide application often occurred during post-harvest storage rather than in production, and that the project should extract lessons from the Dutch-funded fact-finding mission on Nigerian beans and pesticides that

took place a few years ago. COLEAD further highlighted the potential spillover effects for the domestic market since pesticide residues continues to be a major food safety issue. France suggested that the project consult and seek partnership opportunities with Bureau Veritas given their expertise in this area.

### **3.5 Decision on prioritization and funding new project applications**

47. The Secretariat informed members that US\$2.3 million were available in the STDF trust fund to support new projects and PPGs. In view of the limited resources available, the Working Group prioritized STDF/PG/768 (Central Africa), STDF/PG/770 (West Africa), and STDF/PG/845 (Nigeria) for STDF funding, in accordance with the criteria established in the STDF Operational Rules. The Working Group endorsed - but did not approve for funding - application STDF/PG/786 (Ghana). It encouraged the applicant to re-submit the proposal for consideration at the next meeting in November 2023 and noted that this application (if re-submitted) would still need to compete with new applications for the next round of funding.

## **4 KNOWLEDGE WORK**

### **4.1 Presentation by IPPC Secretariat on the Africa Phytosanitary Programme (AFP)**

48. Mr Osama El-Lissy, Secretary of the IPPC Secretariat, delivered a presentation on IPPC's new Africa Phytosanitary Programme (AFP). The concept has emerged to respond to the problem posed by invasive plant pests which destroy 40% of agriculture crops worldwide (costing around US\$220 billion annually) generating some US\$100 billion of environmental losses annually. The programme is designed to help African NPPOs to effectively and timely detect plant pests by establishing a proactive surveillance system, ensuring adequate pest identification and diagnostics, and establishing effective pests' data collection, storage and analytics. It will help to safeguard biodiversity by supporting NPPOs in protecting agriculture and natural resources while facilitating safe import and export of agricultural products. During implementation, coordination between the NPPOs, the RECs, AU-IAPSC and FAO will be ensured.

49. Members congratulated the IPPC for this ambitious initiative and highlighted the importance of ensuring coordination and avoiding duplication with other ongoing policies and initiatives supporting phytosanitary capacity building in Africa, such as the AfCFTA SPS Policy Framework for Africa, or the work carried out by COLEAD, CABI, the EU and other donors.

### **4.2 Prioritization of SPS Investments for Market Access (PIMA)**

50. The Secretariat provided an update on the ongoing external assessment of the P-IMA framework which has two main goals: (i) to look at the results and the impacts of the use of P-IMA by the STDF and other stakeholders; and (ii) to assess lessons learned and inform future work. The evaluation report is expected to be finalized by end August 2023. The Secretariat informed members that a [revised P-IMA guide](#), a [P-IMA Facilitator's Handbook](#) and a series training videos are available on the [STDF's P-IMA webpage](#).

### **4.3 SPS electronic certification (eCert)**

51. The Secretariat briefed members on the upcoming event titled: "Electronic SPS certification in the Americas: learning from past experiences and exploring new approaches". The event is co-organized with IICA and will be held in San José, Costa Rica, from 25-27 July 2023. It will bring together experts from all 34 IICA Member States to provide a platform to exchange lessons learned on electronic SPS certification and discuss ways to pilot test a regional approach for the exchange of electronic veterinary/sanitary certificates.

52. Further, the Secretariat shared updates on the last meeting of the eCert Advisory Committee (ECAC) which took place in May 2023. During the meeting, the OECD presented its work on eCert for animal products and upcoming analytical work on SPS eCert (updating the current state of SPS eCert exchanges, quantifying the potential impacts of Covid-19, and exploring linkages with traceability and transparency). In addition, members were informed of available funds in STDF's Work Plan for 2023, for interested ECAC members to jointly develop a knowledge product in areas such as: a practical eCert readiness assessment guide, eCert communication material, an eCert video product, among others. The Secretariat will facilitate follow-up discussions with interested

members on the proposed knowledge product and convene a meeting with these interested members in the near future. The [summary report](#) of the ECAC meeting is available on the STDF's [ECAC webpage](#).

#### **4.4 Good Regulatory Practices (GRPs)**

53. The Secretariat updated members on its work on GRPs. The guide on GRPs is now available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#). A budget of US\$20,000 was allocated in the 2023 Work Plan to organize a regional client-facing event on GRPs. This will be a collaborative event with the AU Commission, the AfCFTA Secretariat and USDA on 21-22 September 2023, back-to-back with the AU SPS Coordination Forum. The event will be targeted at government regulators and the private sector, and will share examples of the practical use of GRPs (e.g. transparency, regulatory impact assessment, etc.). Working Group members are invited to share examples on the use of GRPs in Africa for consideration in this event. More information will be posted on the STDF's [GRP webpage](#).

#### **4.5 Public Private Partnership (PPP)**

54. Mr Gabor Molnar (UNIDO) presented its new tool to assess voluntary third-party assurance (vTPA) programmes. This tool, related to Codex Guideline on Principles for the assessment and use of vTPA programmes, was developed in parallel to work under the STDF vTPA regional project in West Africa ([STDF/PG/665](#)). A four-day training was organized in Cairo, Egypt in March 2023 for participants from the six pilot countries of the three STDF-funded vTPA projects benefiting Central America (Belize and Honduras), West Africa (Senegal and Mali) and East Africa (Rwanda and Uganda), as well as a SIDA-project benefiting the Arab region.

#### **4.6 Presentation by TradeMark Africa (TMA) on its strategy and SPS work**

55. Mr Andrew Edewa, TMA's Standards Director presented TMA's strategy and work in the SPS field. TMA's SPS Programme focuses on reducing trade barriers arising from the application of food safety, animal health and plant health requirements by enhancing regional and national SPS systems for efficient SPS service delivery to address SPS risks and enabling enterprises to manage SPS risks along the agrifood chains and to meet market requirements. TMA's activities include interventions at the continental, regional and national levels.

#### **4.7 Gender Assessment and Action Plan**

56. Ms Ignacia Simonetti, STDF gender consultant, presented the STDF Gender Action Plan (and the complementary guidelines for project implementing organizations and the STDF Secretariat), which was shared with members for review and comments prior to the meeting. Following the [Gender Assessment](#) conducted in 2022, the STDF developed this Action Plan as a roadmap to ensure a more systematic and coherent approach to gender mainstreaming in STDF's work for stronger results and impacts. It has two objectives: (i) to advance and support women's capacity to meet trade related SPS requirements; and (ii) to promote increased attention to gender mainstreaming in SPS capacity development work led by the STDF's global partnership. The Gender Action Plan accompanies the STDF Strategy for 2020-2024. It will be reviewed in mid-2025 based on experiences in implementation and to ensure alignment with the new STDF Strategy.

57. The Secretariat informed members of an STDF event to present the Action Plan on the margins of the WTO SPS Committee on 13 July 2023 (see the [STDF website](#) for information). It indicated that the Gender Action Plan would be published prior to this event, and requested members to share comments (if any) by COB on 22 June 2023. Members welcomed the Action Plan and congratulated the Secretariat for this important step in mainstreaming gender in STDF's work. The Netherlands highlighted the importance of women in food crops and the need for the STDF to have an approach on gender mainstreaming. COLEAD expressed interest to align with STDF's approach on gender mainstreaming and CABI encouraged the collection of sex-disaggregated data via LogAlto.

## 4.8 Information exchange

### 4.8.1 STDF involvement in the implementation of MC12 SPS Declaration

58. WTO shared updates on progress made on the implementation of the MC12 SPS Declaration and on STDF's involvement in the thematic group five on "How to increase participation of and support for the special needs of developing members in the development and application of SPS measures". In March 2023, the STDF and the thematic group five coordinators organized a workshop to raise awareness on the work of the STDF among SPS delegates. More information about this event is available on a [dedicated webpage](#) at the STDF website and the [recording](#) of the workshop is available at the WTO YouTube channel. Further, a [dedicated webpage](#) on the SPS declaration is available on WTO website.

### 4.8.2 Artificial Intelligence (AI) and SPS capacity

59. The World Bank expressed its keen interest in AI and SPS capacity and in particular on how machine learning tools could be used for SPS risk profiling and risk management purposes. This could represent opportunities for developing countries under certain criteria and conditions. The World Bank would like the STDF and the broader SPS community to deepen knowledge in this area to support developing countries. The US, FAO, UNIDO and CABI shared their organizations' respective experiences on the use of AI. The chair suggested to bring an expert on this topic to deliver a presentation in a future Working Group meeting.

### 4.8.3 Other new/ emerging SPS initiatives/issues

60. US FDA shared several updates on its work on innovation, traceability, and digitalization in the food safety space. Under the [New Era of Smarter Food Safety initiative](#), FDA has issued a [Final rule on Food Traceability](#) and a proposed Rule to revise certain quality and testing requirements for pre-harvest agricultural water established by the [Produce Safety Rule](#); completed work on [lab accreditation, e-commerce](#), and [modernizing food safety culture](#); published a [Food Safety Foodborne Outbreak Response Improvement Plan](#); and explored the incorporation of [data](#) and [modern tools and approaches](#) like [artificial intelligence and machine learning](#) to prevent or mitigate food safety issues. On 17 May, US FDA, in cooperation with the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and the USAID, executed a one-day hybrid workshop to introduce WGS technologies, data analysis, and data sharing for pathogen detection to the APEC region to improve traceback and overall food safety management. On 18 May, US-FDA/CFSAN, USDA/FAS, and the Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration (DOC/ITA) collaborated to implement a Food Safety FSCF Public-Private Innovation Dialogue. The event was designed to discuss the future of food safety by examining innovative methodology, digital solutions, and new technologies.

61. FAO shared recent updates including new publications: [FAO's Strategic Priorities for Food Safety for 2022-2031](#), FAO's booklet on [Safe food for everyone](#) (sciences, standards and good practices), [Risk assessment of food allergens - Part 3, ACT now - Action to support implementation of Codex AMR Texts \(ACT\)](#), [The impact of microplastics on the gut microbiome and health](#), [The impact of veterinary drug residues on the gut microbiome and human health](#), [The impact of pesticide residues on the gut microbiome and human health](#), [Food safety aspects of cell-based food](#). Updates were shared on the World Food Safety Day 2023 on 7 June with the theme "Food standards save lives", which celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Four events were held at FAO: (i) [FAO/WHO World Food Safety Day High-Level event](#), (ii) [Launch of a new web-based food safety toolbox](#); (iii) [Expert panel hosted by FAO and the World Food Programme](#); and (iv) [A new project assessing food control and plant health systems in Africa](#). A number of assets have been made available in the six FAO official languages on the [Trello board](#) and [Asset bank](#). A report on events around the world is also in preparation and a [Flickr](#) album with photos have been compiled. FAO shared information on a new AMR leaflet "[Why should policymakers act on antimicrobial resistance in agrifood systems?](#)" and project "[Action to support implementation of Codex AMR texts \(ACT\)](#)" in six countries.

62. WTO shared that at the request of the US, the subject of the thematic session on the margins of the SPS Committee meeting in November 2023 will be on risk information, miscommunication, and disinformation.

63. CABI updated members on a new programme on improving food safety in domestic markets with potential spillovers to international markets. The programme captures various topics including pests' preparedness, strengthening systems to detect and respond to pests' outbreaks, improving farm advisory and reducing pesticide risks. Further, CABI's Medium Term Strategy 2023–25 lists five major goals, one of which is "Improve the food security and livelihoods of smallholder communities". Priority areas were identified through regional consultations with CABI's member countries, SPS compliance was identified as one of the key areas to be addressed.

64. The EC indicated that the latest [EU Aid For Trade report 2022](#), released in January 2023, includes a focus on food safety, food security and supporting resilient food systems. The EU and its member states remain among the major global providers of Aid for Trade with EUR 23 billion provided in 2020, representing 40% of global Aid for Trade. At the WTO SPS Committee March 2023, the EU submitted information on SPS-related technical assistance provided to third countries in 2019–2020 by the EC and by EU Member States. During this period, the EU provided SPS-related technical assistance to more than 80 countries, groups of countries, regional organisations, and international organisations within the framework of over 275 projects. The total budget for these 275 projects amounts to EUR 490 million. Lastly, [meetings on the 15th WTO Trade Policy Review of the EU](#) took place the week of 5 June 2023.

65. IPPC informed members that IPPC has developed a [Guide on Pest Risk Communication](#) and stakeholders' engagement. IPPC has also published new guides: on [emergency preparedness](#), on [wood packaging material](#), and on [Prevention, preparedness and response for Fusarium Tropical Race 4 \(TR4\)](#). TR4, a pest affecting banana, has retained the interest of several African and Latin American countries who asked the IPPC Secretariat to ensure the global coordination of this pest. The IPPC is planning to develop a surveillance and diagnostic training course and a simulation exercise on TR4. The IPPC is currently rolling out the implementation of the PCE tool in nine African countries in collaboration with colleagues working on food safety.

## **5 OTHER BUSINESS**

66. The Secretariat informed members that the summary report of the meeting will be shared with members for review prior to finalization. A recap of key decisions taken (projects and PPGs approved, the selection of vice chairperson) will be shared with members by email immediately after the meeting. The draft Annual Report will also be shared with members for their approval before its dissemination.

67. Members were invited to recommend candidates for the selection of new developing country experts by 29 September 2023. Donors were also invited to select three representatives for the Policy Committee for 2024 and 2025, and inform the Secretariat. The next meeting of the Policy Committee will take place in the first quarter of 2024. All the presentations delivered during the WG meeting will be made available on the STDF's website.

68. The next meeting of the Working Group is scheduled on 21–23 November 2023. The Secretariat proposed to hold the meeting in person, with the possibility to join virtually. This will allow the evaluation team to witness an in-person WG meeting and to interview participants on the margins. The STDF will fund the participation of developing country experts. A suggestion was made to hold the WG meeting in June 2024 in Rome (FAO/IPPC).

## **6 CLOSURE**

69. The chairperson thanked all participants for their active engagement and closed the meeting at 16:33.

**ANNEX 1**

**STDF WORKING GROUP**  
**14-15 JUNE 2023**

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