



Strengthening SPS system

The project aimed to develop a strategy to strengthen the SPS system in the Comoros that should ensure access to regional and international markets for quality Comorian agricultural and fishery products, and thus help improve the livelihoods of agricultural producers/traders.

STDF/PG/242

Status

Completed

Start Date

17/09/2012

End Date

30/06/2018

Project Value (US\$)

\$1,321,075

STDF Contribution (US\$)

\$1,106,030

Beneficiaries

Comoros

Implementing Entities

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Partners

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

International Trade Centre (ITC)

Ministère de l'agriculture de la pêche de l'industrie et de la protection de l'environnement, Union des Comores

Ministère de la santé, Union des Comores

Ministère du commerce, Union des Comores

World Health Organization (WHO)

Background

The agricultural sector is the driving force behind the Comorian economy. Most of its population is occupied in the sector, it provides a large share of the food products consumed, contributes significantly to household income and is the country's main source of foreign exchange. Due to poor, or a lack of, knowledge of SPS issues and good agricultural practices in the sector, agricultural production is particularly affected by challenges, including the presence of pests and animal diseases and the misuse of plant protection products.

The SPS system in the Union of the Comoros remains rudimentary and documentary evidence on the existence of SPS problems and the potential risks they pose is almost non-existent. The country suffers from a lack of technical capacity in both material and human terms. Agricultural product exports, besides cash crop products, do not offer substantial market opportunities for Comorians. Opening up to the region's markets, and even to the world's markets, remains a challenge, with problems relating to SPS, competitiveness, critical mass and regularity of supplies.

The Comorian SPS system requires major restructuring in order to stimulate national discussions on capacity development priorities. This project is therefore aimed at establishing a national SPS system that should ensure access to regional and international markets for safe and quality agricultural and fishery products.

*Please find the ex-post Evaluation, finalized in 2021, available in the tab "Documents"

Results

SPS gaps identified

A full diagnosis of the SPS system was carried out through a subsectoral capacity assessment including four diagnostic reports on the assessment of phytosanitary capacities, institutional arrangements regarding food safety, laboratory analysis facilities, and institutional arrangements for the fisheries sector. This included the application of the IPPC's Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) tool, creating the phytosanitary profile of the country and developing the strategic framework for plant protection, and assessing the institutional arrangements for food safety (SSA), conducted in collaboration with the FAO, to identify key constraints and institutional strengthening needs. Close collaboration between various national institutions and experts was essential for the implementation of these diagnostic reports. Four subsectoral budgeted and operational action plans were therefore developed with stakeholder involvement.

In addition to the expected results of the project, the funding required for the construction of a national multidisciplinary analysis reference laboratory was mobilized from the JICA, following the completion of the full feasibility study, in order to meet the country's needs for strengthening its reference analysis infrastructure to support agricultural product exports. Furthermore, funding for the establishment of a single window phytosanitary inspection system by COMESA, following the recommendations of the national SPS strategy, has been provided.

Increased awareness of and capacity building on SPS issues

Stakeholders from the private sector, senior officials and, more generally, the general public are now aware of SPS issues and are making known their desire to obtain support in order to further strengthen their capacities. The population, schoolchildren and community and village associations have improved their knowledge of food safety and hygiene, thanks to an awareness campaign carried out through radio and television broadcasts and lectures and discussions, focus groups, roving radio events and the distribution of leaflets and booklets.

Together with the ITC, the Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with the island government departments responsible for agriculture and NGOs, organized awareness raising sessions for producers and professional bodies, in order to improve quality and crop and plant disease pest control.

Senior central and regional government officials now have the necessary expertise in the implementation of SPS requirements and are able to raise awareness among economic operators in this area. We therefore note that 52 senior central and regional government officials have undergone capacity building training in the SPS Agreements and the "three sister bodies" (IPPC, Codex, OIE) and in SPS information systems. In addition, 46 senior national government officials have been trained in SPS reporting tools with support from the FAO.

Building on cooperation frameworks between the Union of the Comoros and countries in the region, senior officials of bodies involved in SPS issues have received training to strengthen these capacities. Thus:

- Two (2) ONCQPH inspectors have enhanced their knowledge of control and inspection of fishery products through a practical training course in Uganda.
- The national inspector responsible for fisheries surveillance now has a good command of modern surveillance tools thanks to a practical training course in Madagascar.
- The Director of INRAPE and the director responsible for livestock management have undergone capacity building training in the field of animal and veterinary health at the Moroccan National Food Safety Office.
- Two (2) DNSAE officials have undergone capacity building training in the control and optimal use of pesticides, as well as in methods of controlling plant pests, on Reunion Island.

Strengthening of the legislative framework

The recommendations made from the diagnostic exercises revealed the main regulatory texts to be revised and those to be developed. Thus, five (5) regulatory texts, including three laws relating to foodstuffs, plant protection and the fisheries code, were updated and promulgated in order to meet international requirements. The law on pesticides was drawn up and validated by the stakeholders. The support provided made it possible to update the Comorian legal system, although most of these texts are to be adopted.

Furthermore, the ONCQPH was established by decree. Similarly, thanks to the technical and methodological support provided under the project, the National Codex Alimentarius Committee was established and around ten Codex Alimentarius standards were adopted as national implementing texts.

National SPS strategy developed

With private sector and civil society involvement, the Government of the Union of the Comoros developed and validated the SPS strategy for the next five years. The strategy aims to:

- Reduce food borne diseases, harmful factors and effects of diseases, harmful organisms and pollutants with an impact on the environment, animals and plants;
- Increase exports of Comorian products to the international market; and

Improve the level of integration of small scale producers (agriculture and fisheries) into the most remunerative sectors in order to reduce poverty.

Recommendations

Speed up operationalization of the national SPS strategy

Building on the project's results, the next essential step to strengthen the SPS system in the Comoros should include the establishment of a national body for the coordination of food safety and quality in the Union of the Comoros. The latter will be responsible for leading the country's SPS strategy.

Enhance private sector awareness

Capacity building on SPS standards should continue to reach out further to the private sector, agricultural producers, fishers, industrialists, importers and cooperatives, with a view to having a positive impact on the export of their products. Once made aware, the various stakeholders should advocate with the Government to encourage the operationalization of the national SPS strategy.

Ensure dissemination of the project's achievements

To capitalize on the project's achievements, a knowledge management platform in the form of a website is worth considering. The platform should disseminate the studies and analyses carried out, as well as the lessons learned in the SPS field, both through the project and through other initiatives, to encourage more effective implementation of the recommendations.