

STDF PROJECT GRANT

Application form

SUMMARY

Project title	<i>Improving the use of the ePing SPS&TBT Platform to enhance transparency for market access</i>
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Country/region	<i>Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda</i>
Implementing organization	World Trade Organization (WTO) <i>Centre William Rappard Rue de Lausanne 154 Geneva 1202 Switzerland</i>
Budget	<i>Requested from the STDF: US\$ 582,851 Beneficiaries' own contribution: US\$ 199,225 Other sources (ITC, UNDESA, WTO): US\$ 39,500 Other sources (EU): US\$ 325,000 Total project value: US\$ 1,146,576</i>
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1. What specific SPS problem(s) will this project address? (Around 400 words)

Non-tariff measures (NTM) such as Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) measures have a significant impact on trade. The agricultural sector is greatly affected, with most of the world's agricultural trade subject to SPS and TBT regulations.¹ WTO Members notify more than 6,000 new or changed regulations annually under the SPS and TBT Agreements, to ensure food safety, to protect animal and plant life or health, the environment or to achieve any other legitimate objective. Such regulatory changes can affect market access and make the business environment less stable or predictable. Transparency helps ensure that trading partners are given advance notice of changes in SPS or TBT product requirements and the possibility to comment on draft SPS or TBT regulations; this is essential to keep trade flowing. However, considering the volume as well as the diversity of new or changed SPS and TBT regulations, it is challenging for interested stakeholders, particularly in developing countries, to track, adapt and/or react to changing product requirements.²

The ePing SPS&TBT Platform (ePing) is a unique global platform, developed by the WTO in collaboration with the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), which allows users to track, notify and communicate on SPS and TBT measures. ePing users have different levels of access, which allows the Platform to meet the needs of government officials, such as notifying authorities and enquiry points, the private sector, including MSMEs, and the public. Registered ePing users (public and private) receive customized email alerts on regulatory developments affecting products of interest to them and can discuss notifications of interest with other domestic users through a national forum, with a view to identifying concerns, providing comments on a notification and/or ensuring compliance with the new requirements. Furthermore, an ePing international forum allows governments to share information on SPS and TBT measures with other governments in a timely and transparent manner. Thus, by facilitating timely access and dialogue on regulatory developments worldwide, ePing can help reduce trade costs and frictions and facilitate safe trade. However, there currently is limited awareness and uptake of the range of services that ePing offers in the applicant countries and elsewhere.

Against that background, this project aims to achieve enhanced clarity, predictability, and regulatory coordination on SPS/TBT regulations affecting trade, through an increased uptake of an enhanced ePing in the applicant countries, as well as in other developing countries and LDCs. Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda are requesting this project and will act as pilot countries, providing feedback on improving ePing to better respond to their transparency-related needs, making ePing more user-friendly for all users. In addition to the in-depth engagement with the applicant countries, users worldwide will have the possibility to provide input through a survey. The project builds on work that officials in the applicant countries conducted as part of the WTO's SPS and TBT Transparency Champions programmes held in 2022-2023.³ There are currently over 23,000 registered ePing users worldwide, around one half from governments and the other half from

¹ For more information, see UNCTAD publication, [Key Statistics and Trends in Trade Policies 2020](#).

² See the [STDF Good Regulatory Practice Guide](#) for more information.

³ https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news23_e/sps_15jun23_e.htm;
https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news23_e/tbt_28apr23_e.htm.

companies, NGOs, academia and international/regional organizations. Therefore, the results of this project are expected to have an impact in the applicant countries, but also a global impact, for example through enhancements to ePing functionalities and by developing new training materials on how to benefit from ePing to enhance transparency, coordination, and market access.

The WTO will implement this regional project, as requested by the five applicant countries, in collaboration and ePing partners (ITC and UNDESA). Through technological enhancements and capacity building, the project will make it easier for public and private sector users to keep abreast of and communicate within or across countries on SPS and TBT measures affecting trade.

Given the similarities between WTO notification procedures for SPS and TBT measures, their management under the same ePing Platform, and the ultimate interest of agri-food exporters to comply with all product requirements, this project takes a holistic approach to regulatory transparency, which involves both SPS and TBT measures.

Furthermore, this project is in line with a recent Declaration adopted at the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) which highlights the importance of special and differential treatment in favour of developing and least developed countries in the area of standards and regulations (SPS and TBT). The MC13 Declaration calls for improvements in training and technical assistance to assist developing Members, and LDCs, to overcome the challenges affecting their timely engagement on SPS and TBT matters.

2. How will addressing this problem(s) increase SPS capacity and facilitate safe trade? (Around 400 words)

Since the launch of the new ePing SPS&TBT Platform in 2022, the WTO has delivered numerous technical assistance activities focused on transparency, including the SPS and TBT Transparency Champions programmes. The training under these programmes and other national/regional seminars raised awareness on the low use of certain ePing functionalities in the applicant countries and elsewhere. One issue systematically discussed relates to coordination difficulties. WTO TA tends to be limited in scope, generally focused on enhancing the capacity of beneficiary countries to implement the transparency provisions of the SPS and TBT Agreements. This project is broader in scope as it focuses on drawing benefits from transparency through optimal use of ePing and enhancing ePing for better clarity, predictability, and regulatory coordination on SPS/TBT matters. Against that background, this project is requested by five African countries that participated in the SPS or TBT Transparency Champions programmes, to build on their efforts, and to work with the WTO to develop enhanced ePing functionalities, for example, on communication.

Strengthened capacity to use ePing, and improvements to ePing itself directly impact a country's ability to react to notifications from markets of interest. The project will shed light on what improvements can be made to ePing to promote coordination and facilitate commenting on notifications of interest. In the WTO SPS (and TBT) Agreements, WTO Members must take comments on draft SPS (and TBT) regulations into account when finalizing their regulation. These provisions are key in reducing trade tensions. This project aims to make that process smoother and easier, particularly for developing countries and LDCs, to submit comments within the comment period, before the regulations are finalized and adopted.

ePing is also accessible to the private sector. Creating awareness on ePing can help the private sector, particularly relevant associations, to keep abreast of regulatory developments of interest to them, adapt to new requirements as needed, seek assistance, and/or provide comments on regulations of concern during their design stage. Indeed, early notice of changes in SPS or TBT product requirements is essential to keep trade flowing, especially for MSMEs, helping reduce shipment rejections and, thus, trade costs.

Increased engagement and dialogue between public and private sector stakeholders can contribute to designing more robust regulations, particularly by submitting comments on trading partners' proposed regulations before these are finalized and adopted. Regulatory cooperation and dialogue can also help diffuse the escalation of trade tensions, including trade concerns raised in the SPS and TBT committees.

3. What specific deliverables are envisaged to address the SPS problem(s)? (Around 400 words)

The main deliverables of the project can be summarized as follows:

(i) Deliver training/capacity building on the use of ePing

Focal points from the government, in particular SPS and TBT National Enquiry Points (NEPs) and Notification Authorities (NNAs)⁴ and the private sector (product, sector associations will be trained and tasked to make use of key ePing functionalities, and transfer the relevant knowledge to interested stakeholders, domestically. A project launch event will be held online with focal points and ePing partners to address questions related to ePing and the project's objective and activities. Periodic virtual sessions with focal points will be organized to monitor progress and uptake, as well as to address specific issues and provide feedback on their experiences. In the context of the needs assessment, national workshops will be held to assess ePing benefits and challenges.

(ii) Identify and implement enhancements to ePing based on feedback from users

The project will identify possible enhancements to ePing functionalities that will be developed, tested, and deployed for the benefit of all users. These improvements will be informed by the use of ePing in countries and feedback provided (from the applicant countries as well as other interested countries) through a needs assessment questionnaire, interviews and consultations. Foreseen enhancements include improving the precision and reliability of ePing's search and alert functions, improving software for unofficial translations of notified regulations, and further facilitating communication through ePing. Furthermore, these improvements will help to facilitate coordination and regulatory monitoring and make ePing more user-friendly for the public and private sectors. Major technological changes to ePing will be discussed with SPS and TBT delegates at the Committee meetings.

(iii) Development of customized training materials for applicant countries and general guidance for all countries

New training/technical materials on the use of ePing, including its communication and coordination functions, and enhancements resulting from the project will be developed for applicant countries, taking account of their needs. Furthermore, these materials will serve as a basis to develop general guidance documents and materials for all countries.

⁴ National enquiry points (NEPs) are responsible for the provision of answers to all reasonable questions as well as the provision of relevant documents related to SPS and TBT measures; and national notification authorities (NNAs) are responsible for the implementation at the national level of the notification procedures.

4. Logical framework

Result	Project description	Measurable indicators/Targets	Sources of verification	Assumptions/Risk
Goal:	Support market access for developing countries and LDCs, through enhanced transparency of SPS/TBT measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decrease in the number of rejections of agricultural exports from applicant countries ▪ Examples of markets accessed or maintained for agricultural products ▪ Examples of how ePing has helped the agricultural private sector to comply with SPS/TBT requirements to gain or maintain market access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Progress reports of activities ▪ Data from applicant countries and trading partners' databases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rejections and trade data are available in importing countries and applicant countries, and public and private sectors are sharing it ▪ Political stability and engagement of key stakeholders to the project are maintained
Immediate objective/Outcome:	Increased uptake of ePing to enhance clarity, predictability, and regulatory coordination on SPS/TBT regulations affecting trade in applicant countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of draft SPS/TBT regulations that have taken into account comments submitted by the applicant countries through ePing ▪ Increase in the number of fora used by public and private sectors to coordinate domestically on incoming SPS/TBT notifications from other trading partners (disaggregated by country) ▪ Increase in the number of comments submitted by officials on draft SPS/TBT regulations notified by other trading partners via the international forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Statistics from ePing ▪ Case studies from public or private sector ▪ Consultations or surveys to notifying countries receiving comments ▪ Progress reports of activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No other crises emerge which draw attention away from project activities ▪ Not many notifications are affecting the applicant countries ▪ Lack of willingness to provide data and feedback ▪ Public and private sectors have the technological

Result	Project description	Measurable indicators/Targets	Sources of verification	Assumptions/Risk
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in the number of registered users from the private sector on ePing (disaggregated by gender) ▪ Expression of interest by non-beneficiary countries in using and testing new ePing functionalities 		<p>equipment to use ePing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internet access is widely available and connectivity is stable
Output 1	Mapping of stakeholders and analysis of the use of ePing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least 4 focal points (e.g. from SPS/TBT NNA and NEP) and 2 representatives of private sector businesses in each applicant country are identified to participate in project and testing ▪ Use of ePing in 5 applicant countries analysed through a needs assessment questionnaire and collaborative process involving public and private sectors; feedback from other interested countries will also be taken into account ▪ Report shared with applicant countries and SPS and TBT Committees, to reflect on recommendations to improve uptake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bilateral meetings ▪ Statistics from ePing ▪ Progress reports of activities ▪ Feedback from needs assessment questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relevant officials not identified or available
Activity 1.1: Identify focal points in applicant countries in public and private sectors, recruit project manager/coordinator, and needs assessment expert				
Activity 1.2: Organize and deliver virtual launch event with focal points from applicant countries to address questions on ePing and discuss the project's objectives and activities				

Result	Project description	Measurable indicators/Targets	Sources of verification	Assumptions/Risk
Activity 1.3: Prepare needs assessment questionnaire and consult with applicant countries to analyse the use of ePing				
Activity 1.4: Deliver national workshops to assess benefits and challenges in the context of the needs assessment				
Activity 1.5: Draft and finalize analytical report of the use of ePing and needs in applicant countries				
Activity 1.6: Prepare and conduct a survey for WTO Members on proposed improvements to ePing considering results from applicant countries' needs assessment; and prepare a final report				
Output 2	Enhancements to ePing functionalities are operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Search/alert functionalities enhanced integrating advanced technology, where applicable ▪ Improved communication functionalities available to facilitate communication among national users, including NNAs/NEPs, and users in different countries ▪ Number of countries testing and validating new functionalities ▪ Enhanced ePing deployed and available globally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contract(s) ▪ Verification from ePing on the new functionalities ▪ Test feedback from WTO, ePing partners, applicant countries and other interested countries to be provided in progress reports ▪ Reports to SPS/TBT Committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foreseen enhancements not technically feasible or too costly ▪ Limited capacity/interest in applicant countries to test technical improvements ▪ Technological equipment and internet connectivity inadequate
Activity 2.1: Contract IT services; and discuss potential technical improvements (e.g. search, alert, communication) and assess technical and economic feasibility of foreseen enhancements				
Activity 2.2: Develop the foreseen enhancements				
Activity 2.3: Test and deploy new functionalities				

Result	Project description	Measurable indicators/Targets	Sources of verification	Assumptions/Risk
Output 3	New training/technical materials developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customized training/technical materials developed on ePing ▪ Guidance document on the use of ePing for all countries prepared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training materials, technical guides available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Qualified consultant/experts available ▪ Delays in receiving comments and feedback
Activity 3.1: Prepare training materials on new functionalities for applicant countries				
Activity 3.2: Prepare a guidance document for all countries				
Activity 3.3: Circulate materials for comments and take them into account				
Output 4	Applicant countries are trained on ePing enhancements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of national training events delivered ▪ Officials, private sector businesses from at least 3 applicant countries have used new ePing functionalities and provided feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Progress reports ▪ Statistics on ePing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of engagement of public, private sector users
Activity 4.1: Organize and deliver national training workshops for government officials and other users (private sector, other organizations) in five applicant countries to introduce new functionalities				
Activity 4.2: Organize and deliver closing regional workshop with focal points from applicant countries				

5. Risk Matrix

Risk	Probability	Impact ⁵	Mitigation/prevention
Political instability in applicant countries	Low/medium	High	Monitor the political situation and adapt where necessary
Staff turnover disrupting the implementation of project activities	Medium	Medium/high	Request commitment from applicant countries to ensure transfer of knowledge and continuity
Delays in testing and deploying new functionalities due to internet connectivity and/or inadequate equipment	Medium	Medium/high	Conduct baseline analysis to ensure sufficient requirements are in place in the relevant offices
Foreseen enhancements not technically feasible or too costly	Low	Medium	Conduct in-depth consultations with IT experts to define and agree on workplan and resources, and monitor developments
Lack of engagement of the public sector in applicant countries	Low/medium	Medium	Meet with high-level officials to ensure that they are committed to the project and importance of ePing for safe and inclusive trade
Lack of engagement of the private sector representatives in applicant countries	Low/medium	Medium	Consult with private sector to address any concerns or reach out to other interested businesses
Lack of trust between public and private sectors	Low/medium	Medium/high	Public-private sector meetings and workshops to build a network and strengthen interactions

6. Who will benefit from the project and how? (Around 200 words)

ePing makes it easier to reach producers throughout value chains and provides a means through which governments can collaborate with other governments in the development of SPS and TBT regulations. Government officials of the applicant countries, in particular the NNAs and NEPs, will benefit directly from this project as they will have an efficient means of coordinating domestic comments, on new or changed SPS/TBT regulations submitted by other trading partners. They will also be able to share comments and communicate with other trading partners more effectively using ePing.

Private sector producers and traders, including micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), will also directly benefit from this project. ePing provides a means through which producers throughout value chains have direct access to notifications of interests, can find the contact information of NNAs and NEPs, and communicate with SPS/TBT officials in their capitals who are responsible for transparency matters within their countries and with other trading partners to raise any concerns.

⁵ High: Requires immediate action; Medium: A mitigation plan should be in place; 3 Low: No specific action required but the situation should be monitored.

7. How will the project address gender-related needs? (Around 200 words)

An online platform that provides real-time alerts on market access requirements is important in ensuring gender inclusiveness in trade. ePing helps to bridge information gaps, removing barriers for any producer to access SPS and TBT information affecting trade. In the applicant countries, the project will seek to better understand the use of the Platform by male and female producers, their specific needs, and how improvements to ePing can be considered. In addition, the project will aim to achieve gender balance in implementing project activities, e.g., by ensuring that both men and women participate and benefit from the project's training activities. As the ePing registration page includes an entry on gender, it will be possible to track the gender of existing and new subscribers.

8. How will the project address issues related to the environment? (Around 200 words)

Many notifications submitted via ePing are related to trade and environment issues. The WTO's [Environmental Database](#)⁶ indicates that around 75% of all environment-related notifications (under all Agreements) are SPS and TBT notifications. Therefore, the effective use of ePing will assist stakeholders in keeping abreast of regulations addressing environmental objectives and facilitate dialogue during their design stage. Improvements to ePing will further facilitate domestic and cross-border coordination on issues at the intersection of trade and the environment.

It is also worth noting that the global and publicly accessible ePing Platform has reduced the need for countries to develop or maintain their national databases and alert systems for notifications, reducing duplication of effort. For example, several WTO Members, including the United States, the European Union, and Brazil, have discontinued their national online tools and begun referring all their stakeholders to ePing. Reducing tools also creates savings in the energy needed to develop and maintain digital tools, which also have an environmental footprint.

9. How does this project fit into the national/regional SPS context? (Around 400 words)

Kenya:

- i. The Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA) Agricultural Priority Value Chains:** The ePing project directly contributes to the objectives of BETA, particularly within agricultural priority value chains. By focusing on sectors such as meat and meat products, coffee, tea, dairy, fruits, vegetables, edible oils, nuts, grains, leather, and leather products, ePing supports the government's efforts to strengthen these value chains. It facilitates market access for these products by ensuring compliance with SPS standards, thereby promoting trade and enhancing the competitiveness of these sectors.
- ii. National SPS Strategy and TBT Committee Workplan:** The project aligns with the objectives outlined in the National SPS Strategy and the workplan of the National Technical Barrier to Trade (TBT) Committee. By enhancing transparency and promoting timely notification of SPS measures, ePing supports the effective implementation of these strategies. It helps stakeholders stay informed about regulatory changes, enabling them to adapt and comply with evolving SPS requirements.
- iii. Regional and Continental SPS Strategies:** The ePing project is closely aligned with regional and continental SPS strategies, including those of the East African Community (EAC), African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). By promoting information sharing and cooperation among member states, ePing contributes to the harmonization of SPS measures within these regional blocs. This alignment fosters intra-regional trade, enhances market integration, and facilitates the movement of agricultural products across borders.

The ePing project serves as a vital link between national, regional, and continental efforts to enhance SPS capacity and promote trade in agricultural products. By aligning with government agendas, national strategies, and regional initiatives, the ePing tool through its focus on transparency,

⁶ <https://edb.wto.org/>.

information exchange, and stakeholder engagement, contributes to a more efficient and harmonized SPS regime, ultimately benefitting both producers and consumers across the region.

Namibia:

Transparency being the cornerstone of the SPS and TBT Agreements, WTO Members are required to notify their SPS measures, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures through the ePing SPS&TBT Platform to provide trading partners the opportunity to receive information on proposed measures at an early stage and raise their Specific Trade Concerns (STCs) and/or provide their comments before the measures are finalised and implemented. The effective use of ePing is vital to Namibia for the successful implementation and compliance with various policies, legislations, regulations, agreements and strategies.

i. Namibia Food Safety Policy

The objective of this policy is to protect consumer health while facilitating trade in food (nationally or exported to other countries). The policy ensures that control standards are established and adhered to with regards to food safety production, food hygiene, animal health and welfare, plant health. It further lays down conditions for regulations on appropriate labelling for these foodstuffs and food products. ePing is aligned with the implementations of this policy's objectives as it enables Namibia to ensure WTO SPS and TBT transparency obligations are complied with.

ii. Namibian Agriculture Policy

The overarching objectives for this policy are to create a conducive environment for increased and sustained agriculture production and productivity, to accelerate the agriculture sector contribution to National Growth Domestic Product, and to promote development of national agriculture sector across the value chain and enhance regional and international agricultural trade. To ensure successful implementation of these objectives, the use of ePing becomes an important element.

iii. Revised National Quality Policy 2022-2025

Namibia's revised National Quality Policy (NQP) aims to improve Namibia's international competitiveness and lead to enhanced export performance, while supporting small and medium enterprises in conforming to national standards and complying with technical regulations, thus protecting the health and safety of the Namibian people. Amongst, the implementation plan of the National Quality Infrastructure, the country is in the process of implementing the Technical Regulatory Framework. ePing is a crucial element to the NQP functionality as it enables the tracking of SPS and TBT notifications on new and updated standards, regulations and conformity assessment procedures and SPS measure.

iv. National SPS and TBT Committees:

ePing is directly aligned to the functions of Namibia's national SPS and TBT committees as they are responsible for the coordination and collaboration between Government Offices/Ministries/Agencies and private sector to ensure protection of Namibia's SPS and TBT interests and STCs are addressed.

v. Regional and Continental Value Chains, and Trade Agreements:

Namibia is a party to various trade agreements such as the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Southern African Development Community (SADC), WTO, etc. All these trading blocs have a common goal of harmonisation of SPS and TBT measures. Namibia's SPS and TBT work programmes are aligned to the regional and WTO agreements. The trade agreements emphasise the importance of transparency obligations which highlights the notification authorities and enquiry points where Members can raise their STCs on the proposed SPS and TBT measures. Members are benefiting from the use of ePing as it serves as a coordination link amongst Members and the global trading community. The ePing Platform ties in perfectly as it enables Members to

exchange information, contributes to the harmonization of SPS and TBT measures and reduce trade barriers.

South Africa

To give effect to transparency obligations of the WTO SPS/TBT Agreements, South Africa has established the SPS and TBT National Notification Authority (NNA) and National Enquiry Points (NEPs). Furthermore, the national committees addressing SPS and TBT have been established to ensure comprehensive stakeholder consultations on WTO TBT and SPS issues.

In terms of the regional Trade Agreements at the Southern African Development Community (SADC); COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite; and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to which South Africa is a member/ State party, SPS and TBT transparency issues are implemented in accordance with the SPS and TBT Agreements.

However, our stakeholders have not been capacitated regarding ePing training to benefit from its usage and services. The STDF project will assist South Africa to achieve national/regional SPS/TBT objectives, addressing the following:

- to facilitate, coordinate and strengthen capacity to improve SPS and TBT compliance under the WTO SPS and TBT Agreements and to enhance national implementation and utilisation of the WTO SPS and TBT Agreements. South Africa's credibility for handling of SPS and TBT matters with members of the WTO will improve.
- to promote transparency, engagement, and coordination on SPS and TBT regulations. Facilitate and establish stakeholder platforms and institutional support on the WTO-SPS/TBT notifications, including transparency matters for South Africa and its trading partners.
- the use of ePing will be instrumental in navigating the fast-evolving global regulatory landscape and addressing any trade-related issues in a timely manner.
- the project will assist in addressing limited awareness on the range of services offered by ePing and how these can empower a diverse range of stakeholders within South Africa.
- this project will assist to increase the uptake of ePing's services and upgrading its functionalities to better serve the needs of different stakeholders. To improve ePing's search, alert, and communication functions, to facilitate interactions amongst public and private, domestic, and international stakeholders on SPS/TBT regulations. This project will also help to improve ePing capacity building activities and awareness implementation national and regional.
- the new WTO ePing SPS & TBT Platform will make it easier for users to notify and follow changes in product requirements for ease of trade. The value of this new online tool is in its dissemination as information is key for helping businesses adapt to the new requirements, encouraging coordination among members, and bringing about better regulations.
- the new ePing makes it easy for businesses to track a specific sector or market through filtering options and offers several communication features to share information on and discuss notified technical regulations and trade measures.

South Africa has established stakeholder forums. The use of ePing in these forums will assist sharing information, discussion of trade regulation that is notified, discussing, compiling and submitting comments on time. ePing is regarded as the future of the WTO and it is critical that South African officials, stakeholders, and the private sector are trained to effectively utilise the platform. This will ensure the country's effective participation at the WTO with all the stakeholders.

Tanzania:

Agriculture is an important sector, which continues to contribute significantly to the country's economy, employing about 65.6% of the total population.

There are various agricultural commodities finding their way to international markets, generating revenues which in turn support the development of other activities. In 2020, for example, Tanzania earned over 1.2 billion U.S. dollars from the export of agricultural items. In this view, it is imperative to capitalise on the increase of exports to boost forex gain.

To capitalise on this, Tanzania had in place a Trade Policy, in which increase in export trade is one of the goals well stated. Further to this there is a Quality Policy aimed at identifying all quality issues

associated with products, which provides broad objectives and all quality parameters to be adhered to by producers. Institutionally, the country has a Ministry responsible for trade, which works in line with the production sector ministries responsible for agriculture, livestock and fisheries.

To benefit from the export of agricultural commodities, the country has to meet SPS and TBT measures as set by the national policies and strategies to be in harmony with international organizations and export markets. The requirements are, most of the time, ever changing, as consumers are aware of safety issues and the scientific development taking place every day.

In view of the above, it is very important to have a system in place for information sharing on the SPS and TBT issues as raised by trade partners. This therefore necessitates having programmes and projects to ensure that any new information is timely received and shared with business communities, which is important not to distort trade. This project with the WTO will be a very important tool to ensure the country is well informed at national level and among stakeholders to participate effectively in international trade by abiding to SPS and TBT requirements. Implementation of this project will strengthen knowledge and information sharing, help in engaging government and private sectors hence increase the country's competitiveness and catalyse national development.

Uganda:

Uganda's Draft National SPS policy states that all the adopted and new SPS regulations and measures shall be published promptly for interested trade partners to be acquainted with them allowing a reasonable period between publication and entry into force of such regulations and or measures. This is in line with the WTO SPS Agreement transparency provisions. The expected outcomes of the Policy are (i) increased agricultural productivity and production due to reduced incidences and spread of plant and animal pests and diseases, (ii) increased consumer health and safety due to consumption of safe food products, (iii) increased income and revenues of agro-food business operators due to improved access of agricultural produce and products to prime markets. Furthermore, the validated national Uganda SPS strategy on 13th April 2023, identified the need for a comprehensive SPS public awareness and communications strategy. It has also provided an organogram for coordination at the national level, regional up to the WTO SPS committee. This structure has provided for the NNA and NEPs to ensure effective transmission, monitoring and evaluation of all information notified via the WTO ePing SPS&TBT Platform. The structure is expected to ensure effective information sharing and analysis of notified WTO Member SPS notifications, disseminate trade-facilitating opportunities and risks to private sector and across central and lower government levels, it will facilitate review and generation of inclusive comments to be transmitted back to WTO member states from Uganda. This improvement was recommended after a review of the performance of this national obligation and the negative outcomes and impacts due to non-compliance on Uganda's export trade benchmarking on the horticultural sector.

Uganda's SPS Policy has been aligned to national, regional and international SPS frameworks (East African Community (EAC) SPS Protocol, the IGAD SPS strategy, the African Union (AU) SPS Policy framework and the WTO SPS Agreement. Transparency is a guiding principle as indicated in Chapter 5 of Uganda's Draft National SPS Policy. In 2013, Uganda signed the EAC SPS Protocol. One of the objectives of the EAC SPS protocol is to ensure partner states implement the SPS measures and standards to promote intra-inter-regional trade and minimize negative effects on trade. Article 2 of the EAC SPS protocol articulates the obligations to comply with the transparency SPS provisions. Article 9 of the EAC SPS protocol provides for cooperation in SPS Measures information sharing, establishment and maintenance of regional information management systems, development of an SPS portal on measures or any other relevant information. Uganda's participation in SPS transparency capacity-building activities at the WTO and IGAD confirms its commitment to improving its compliance with the relevant obligations. Uganda is an active AU member. The AU recognizes that improved implementation and harmonization of SPS systems is critical to ensuring that any agricultural trade protects human, animal and plant health, mitigates trade distortions and facilitate market access. This is in line with the Agenda 2063. It requires that SPS laws and regulations within AU member States must be updated to meet the WTO SPS Agreement commitments and be based on international standards that ensure the safe trade of agricultural products with minimal trade distortion. Uganda ratified the Africa Free Continental Trade Area Agreement in November 2018 and has been an active member in ensuring the alignment and applicability of its Annex 7 provisions. Despite this, these efforts are in infancy stage and met with glaring capacity and information gaps across public ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) and amongst private sectors. These gaps have been articulated in Uganda's National Draft SPS Policy.

10. How does this project complement or build on other initiatives? (Around 400 words)

As highlighted earlier, the WTO Secretariat ran SPS and TBT Transparency Champions programmes targeting NNAs/NEPs from selected African countries in 2022-2023 to scale up the application and benefits of the SPS/TBT transparency framework. The programmes provided training on ePing to participants in the five applicant countries. These participants have expressed strong interest in receiving further assistance to increase the uptake of ePing by their national stakeholders. This STDF project will build on the lessons learned, and experience gained through the SPS/TBT Transparency Champions programmes to extend the reach and benefits of ePing, initially for the pilot applicant countries and eventually globally.

The WTO is responsible for maintaining and enhancing ePing. However, it receives limited feedback from developing countries and LDCs on improving ePing to better respond to their needs. This project would help generate such feedback and help developing countries and LDCs benefit from ePing.

As noted earlier, this project is also in line with a recent Declaration adopted at the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) which highlights the importance of special and differential treatment in favour of developing and least developed countries in the area of standards and regulations (SPS and TBT). The MC13 Declaration calls for improvements in training and technical assistance to assist developing Members, and LDCs, overcome the challenges affecting their timely engagement on SPS and TBT matters.

Other international organizations, including ePing partners, use SPS and TBT information available on ePing in their tools.

ITC is an ePing partner and supports capacity building and outreach efforts, while also managing the rollout of ePing interface languages that are not the three official languages of the WTO. ITC's programme on non-tariff measures (NTMs) aims at increasing transparency and helping countries better understand the non-tariff obstacles to trade faced by their business sectors. In close collaboration with national and regional stakeholders, ITC is engaged in a multi-agency initiative that assists countries in finding solutions tailored to meet their specific needs. The programme aligns with the ITC corporate strategy to focus on the areas of expertise in which it can have the greatest impact.

The NTMs programme falls under the ITC's focus area, "Trade and market intelligence for SME competitiveness", which promotes transparency in trade and business intelligence to facilitate decision-making. Solutions to trade obstacles offered fall under other focus areas.

UNDESA built the pilot version of ePing as part of a trade capacity building project for LDCs. During the implementation of that project, access to and dissemination of product requirements from trading partners were identified by the applicant countries as key impediments to entering foreign markets. Since its launch, DESA has cooperated with the WTO and ITC and has been involved in several capacity building projects over the years, which have benefitted various countries, particularly LDCs. DESA's involvement mainly responds to LDC's graduation concerns and builds on DESA's achievements on graduation support and momentum afforded to graduating and graduated countries under various projects. Since the launch of ePing, requests for training and assistance for the implementation of ePing in LDCs have increased.

11. How was this project developed? (Around 400 words)

Following an increased interest by WTO Members to scale up the functionalities of ePing and discussions in technical assistance activities, the project through a consultative process involving the applicant countries and the WTO, in collaboration with ITC and UNDESA. As described above, the applicant countries became aware of the ePing's potential through their participation in the Transparency Champions Programmes and wished to take better advantage of this system to benefit from SPS and TBT transparency. While globally, virtually all SPS and TBT notifications are now submitted through ePing by WTO Members, there is a vast untapped potential not only in terms of the number of stakeholders who could register on ePing to receive timely alerts on evolving product requirements but also for them to benefit from the various communication functions available through ePing for early engagement on issues of interest. The low use of ePing communication functions is confirmed by the user statistics on ePing.

Through consultations, the applicant countries confirmed their interest in this project and commitment to support its implementation in collaboration with the WTO.

The project will begin with a virtual regional workshop to clarify the purpose and expected results of the project, working closely with focal points from NNAs/NEPs and the private sector. After a testing period of the ePing functionalities, a needs assessment will be carried out to help identify possible enhancements to be developed and then tested by the applicant countries. Capacity building activities organized in the applicant countries and customized training materials will improve the uptake of the foreseen improvements.

12. How the project will be implemented? (Around 200 words)

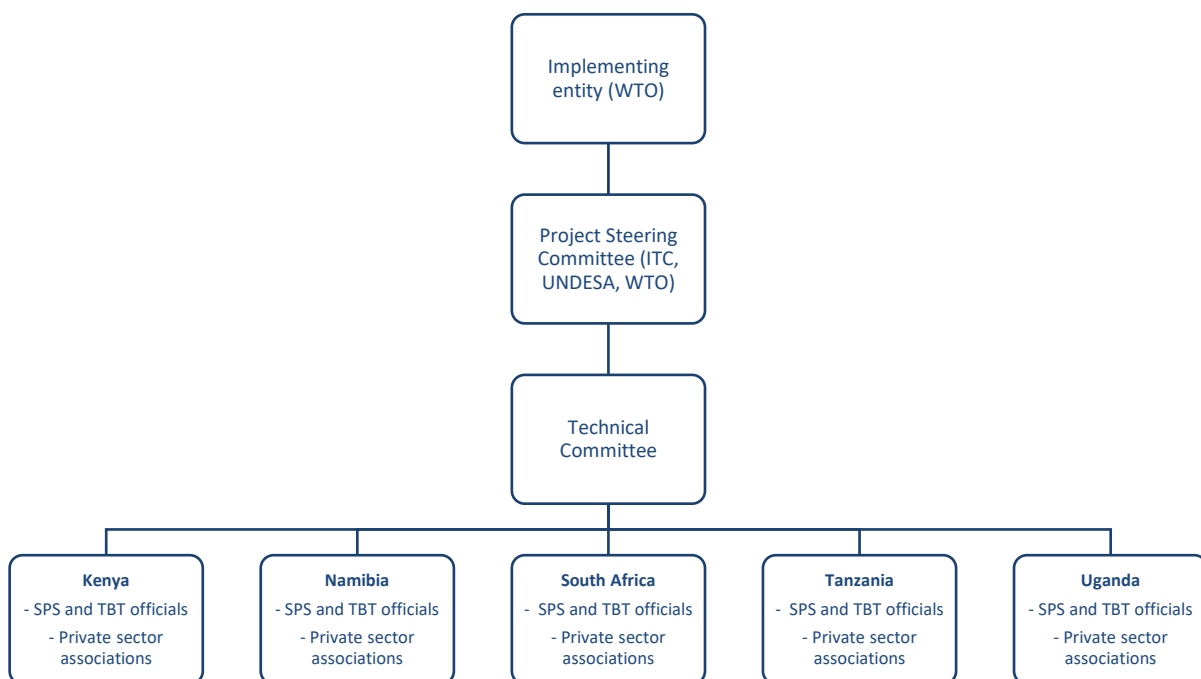
The WTO will implement the project and be responsible for project management, disbursement of funds, and reporting to STDF.

In addition, a Project Steering Committee (PSC) will coordinate and monitor the implementation of the project. The PSC will include representatives from the ePing partner organizations, ITC and UNDESA. The PSC will meet once every six months via Zoom and plan in-person meetings on the margins of the national or regional training activities implemented under this project. The purpose of these meetings will be to monitor the project's development, discuss challenges, identify solutions, and make decisions related to the implementation of the project. Decisions will be made in agreement with the PSC representatives.

A Technical Committee (TC) comprising six focal points in charge of coordinating the implementation of the project in each applicant country (see Figure 1), will oversee the implementation of activities in their respective country and report to the PSC. The TC should meet at least, before every PSC meeting, to ensure regional coordination on the implementation of project activities and appropriate reporting to the implementing entity and partners.

A project manager (PM) will be hired to facilitate the management and coordination of the project. The PM will support the organization of the TC and PSC meetings and prepare reports of meetings if requested.

Figure 1



13. How will project results be communicated? (Around 200 words)

The WTO delivers national and regional workshops on the SPS and TBT Agreements. These activities typically include sessions dedicated to transparency and ePing and are an effective way of reaching countries' public and private sectors. The WTO also organizes specialized courses on transparency, such as the SPS and TBT Transparency Champions programmes, where participants receive in-depth training on ePing and are encouraged to use this knowledge to build capacity upon return to their countries. In addition to WTO technical assistance, the SPS and TBT teams also participate in several other outreach activities each year. Overall, SPS and TBT technical assistance activities can help to raise the awareness of an estimated 1,000 persons annually on the project and ePing more generally.

Regular updates on the project can be communicated to 164 WTO Members and Observer governments and organizations through the SPS and TBT Committees, in the regular meetings or workshops or other dedicated sessions on transparency and the use of ePing. The STDF could also share the project results as part of its interventions in the SPS, Aid for Trade, and other WTO bodies.

ITC and UNDESA also conduct trainings related to ePing including for MSMEs in developing countries and LDCs.

Other than the above, materials developed during the project will be made available via ePing in the three WTO working languages, and where applicable, disseminated through social media using the already existing hashtags #ePingalert #WTOsps, #WTOtbt.

14. What steps will be taken to ensure that the project results will be sustained in the long run? (Around 200 words)

Results of the projects will be integrated into training materials and disseminated by the WTO, as well as ePing partners, in at least the three WTO working languages.

The project will result in a more robust and user-friendly tool with enhanced functionalities, facilitating adoption by other countries. ePing is hosted and administered by the WTO and is free for all users. The WTO expects ePing to continue to be used after completion of the project, particularly by its Members, and the WTO (and ITC, UNDESA) will continue to provide training on the use of this tool in its technical assistance activities.

To ensure that ePing can continue to adapt to changes in the technological environment and be fit for purpose, other potential funding mechanisms could be envisaged so that continuous improvements to ePing are financially feasible after the project ends.

15. Why should the STDF fund this project? (Around 400 words)

The project is well aligned with STDF cross-cutting work, including digitalization and its impact on men's and women's participation in trade. By improving ePing, an innovative and unique online platform on SPS and TBT regulations, the project reduces information barriers and the time and cost for producers in applicant countries and beyond to track and react to measures affecting market access. ePing is available to government officials and the private sector, helping strengthen public-private coordination on regulatory matters in a timely manner. Furthermore, lack of regulatory transparency on non-tariff measures can increase trade costs; thus, by improving transparency and regulatory dialogue at national and international levels, this project helps in reducing costs and facilitating trade. As mentioned in the STDF GRP guide "transparency is a cross-cutting principle of good regulatory practices...".⁷ ePing is an important tool in this process as it helps to promote coordination and consultations on SPS and TBT regulations.

The project will be implemented by the WTO, thus benefitting from its experience in designing and delivering training, as well as building capacity in developing countries. This regional project was developed by the applicant countries in consultation with the WTO to address the needs and challenges that developing countries and LDCs face in using ePing to comply with SPS and TBT transparency requirements, and to take advantage of the information provided in notifications from

⁷ See page 52: https://standardsfacility.org/sites/default/files/STDF_GRP_Guide_EN.pdf

trading partners to enhance and maintain their access to export markets. It also builds on the discussions and work undertaken as part of WTO technical assistance activities.

The project has the potential for global impact. It will start with the applicant countries in Africa, and the results will benefit ePing users around the globe. In addition, the training materials can be replicated or adapted to different national/regional contexts and will be integrated into WTO TA activities developed and delivered by the SPS and TBT teams, including with the Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC).

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix 1: Work plan (see attached)

Appendix 2: Project budget in Excel (see attached)

Appendix 3: Letters of support from organizations that support the project request



APPENDIX 1: Work Plan

STDF projects should have a maximum duration of three years.

Please shade or otherwise indicate when the activity will take place

Activity	Responsibility	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Output 1: Mapping of stakeholders and analysis of the use of ePing													
Activity 1.1: Identify focal points in applicant countries in public and private sectors, recruit project manager/coordinator, and needs assessment expert	Applicant countries, ITC, UNDESA, WTO												
Activity 1.2: Organize and deliver virtual launch event with focal points from applicant countries to address questions on ePing and discuss the project's objectives and activities	Project manager, ITC, UNDESA, WTO												
Activity 1.3: Prepare needs assessment questionnaire and consult with applicant countries to analyse the use of ePing	Needs assessment expert, project manager, applicant countries, WTO												
Activity 1.4: Deliver national workshops to assess benefits and challenges in the context of the needs assessment	Needs assessment expert, project manager, applicant countries, WTO												

Activity	Responsibility	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
Activity 1.5: Draft and finalize analytical report of the use of ePing and needs in applicant countries	Needs assessment expert, project manager, WTO												
Activity 1.6: Prepare and conduct a survey for WTO Members on proposed improvements to ePing considering results from applicant countries' needs assessment; and prepare a final report	Needs assessment expert, project manager, WTO												
Output 2: Enhancements to ePing functionalities (search, alert, communication) are operational													
Activity 2.1: Contract IT services; and discuss potential technical improvements (e.g search, alert, communication) and assess technical and economic feasibility of foreseen enhancements	IT consultant, project manager, ITC, UNDESA, WTO												
Activity 2.2: Develop the foreseen enhancements	IT consultant												
Activity 2.3: Test and deploy new functionalities	IT consultant, applicant countries, ITC, UNDESA, WTO												
Output 3: New training/technical materials developed													
Activity 3.1: Prepare training materials on new functionalities for applicant countries	Consultant, project manager												

Activity	Responsibility	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
Activity 3.2: Prepare a guidance document for all countries	Consultant, project manager												
Activity 3.3: Circulate materials for comments and take them into account	IT consultant, project manager, applicant countries, ITC, UNDESA, WTO												
Output 4: Applicant countries are trained on ePing enhancements													
Activity 4.1: Organize and deliver national training workshops for government officials and other users (private sector, other organizations) in five applicant countries to introduce new functionalities	Project manager, WTO												
Activity 4.2: Organize and deliver closing regional workshop with focal points from applicant countries	Project manager, ITC, UNDESA, WTO												
