

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) is a global partnership – established by FAO, OIE, the World Bank, WHO and the WTO – that supports developing countries in building their capacity to implement international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards, guidelines and recommendations as a means to improve their human, animal and plant health status and ability to gain and maintain access to markets.

The Evaluation

This report sets out the conclusions and recommendations of an External Evaluation of the STDF which was initiated in September 2018 and concluded in 2019. The main objective of the Evaluation, in accordance with the Terms of Reference, was to undertake an independent, systematic and objective assessment of the STDF partnership, with a particular focus on the impact and the results achieved by the STDF during the period 2014-2018. The Evaluation examines the STDF across three broad dimensions: overall objectives; structure (including operations and functionality); and deliverables across its four outputs (project grants, project preparation grants, knowledge platform and international coordination), as set out in the STDF Logical Framework.

An Inception Report agreed in October 2018 detailed the evaluation questions and assessment criteria, which were structured around the OECD/DAC's five evaluation criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability and Impact.

The Evaluation Team examined a wide range of STDF and partner documentation, using the agreed Evaluation framework. A short e-survey was also undertaken with a range of stakeholders, including institutions implementing STDF Project Preparation Grants (PPGs) and Project Grants (PGs), competent authorities in developing countries, and beneficiaries of both PPGs and PGs.

Key stakeholder interviews were conducted face-to-face with staff nominated by all of the STDF founding partners. The Evaluation Team spent two days with the STDF Secretariat in Geneva in September and also observed the October Working Group (WG) meeting. In the margins of the WG meeting, the Evaluation Team conducted key stakeholder interviews with other partners, including donors, developing country experts and other stakeholders attending the WG. These face-to-face interviews were supplemented by a series of telephone interviews with STDF Secretariat staff, the Monitoring and Evaluation and Communications experts, previous partner liaisons and other stakeholders. In total, the Evaluation Team conducted more than 100 key stakeholder interviews.

The Evaluation Team also undertook two country visits, to Uganda (conducting key stakeholder interviews in Kenya en route) and in Guatemala. The in-country case studies explore in detail the activities of STDF in all its delivery areas with core beneficiaries and implementers, covering not only PPGs and PGs, but also experience of the knowledge platform and national and international coordination facilitated by the STDF on SPS issues.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The Evaluation concluded that the STDF and the STDF Secretariat have delivered outputs and results beyond what might be expected given their budget and resources. There has also been steady evolution and improvement in the STDF's core operations, based on recommendations in previous evaluations, suggestions from within the WG and initiatives from the Secretariat itself, such as on M&E and communications.

Objectives: Is the STDF delivering and responding to the needs of the intended beneficiaries?

The STDF is responding to the needs of developing countries in its focus on building SPS capacities to enable and unlock trade. SPS capacity and application of standards are a major market access constraint, as both private sector and governments in developing countries struggle to adopt and implement necessary control measures acceptable to their target markets. There is a need to improve the alignment of perceptions and roles vis a vis the STDF across the founding partners and donors to maximise and sustain engagement and impact.

Structure: Is the way the STDF is organised (i.e. its governance structure and structure of the Secretariat), the best and most appropriate structure for delivering outcomes?

The STDF has a unique structure, offering a global partnership that includes the WTO, the SPS standards-setting and capacity-building organisations, donors, developing country experts and private sector partners. There is scope for the STDF partners and donors to capitalise more on these unique partnerships to promote innovation and take-up of best practice and learning by beneficiaries. The Secretariat is regarded as efficient, effective and responsive by founding partners, donors and other stakeholders. The small full-time team is stretched and more staff resources are required just to continue to deliver at this level and also to respond to the need identified by this evaluation for improvements in communications, monitoring and evaluation and knowledge sharing.

Deliverables: Do the activities and outputs match the objectives and intended outcomes?

STDF outputs across its deliverables (coordination, knowledge, needs assessment and capacity-building projects) match the overall needs and goals of the programme. The evaluation suggests, however, that there is scope to increase impact by focusing the STDF's deliverables more sharply, exploiting the Facility's comparative advantage. There is also scope for all of the STDF partners and donors to work together to consolidate learning and to provide a stronger framework within which all partners (SPS capacity-building organisations, donors and beneficiaries in developing countries) could build capacity and address the on-going and emerging challenges in SPS. This would help to put the STDF in a strong position to become the "go to" reference point for the latest information and know-how.

Recommendations

The Evaluation sets out a number of detailed recommendations for consideration, which are summarised briefly below:

Recommendation 1: Given its relatively small budget and its global leadership position in trade and SPS, all deliverables should focus on innovation and adding value, leaving more routine SPS capacity building activities to be implemented by others. Learning should be more clearly embedded in best practice and guidance for beneficiaries and partners.

Recommendation 2: The STDF should agree ways of maximising the impact of its unique structure on innovation and global leadership, including by clarifying relationships and responsibilities, ensuring that future STDF strategies and workplans are more explicitly linked to partners' own strategies and plans, and exploring the potential for secondments from the founding partners to the Secretariat.

Recommendation 3: The STDF should build on acknowledged improvements achieved in reporting and communications, placing increased emphasis on measuring results and impact across all STDF activities and on improving beneficiaries' access to knowledge. This should be underpinned by updating the theory of change and the logical framework to reflect an explicit focus on innovation and lesson learning.

Recommendation 4: The resources allocated to the STDF need to reflect the ambition of its objectives. Consideration should be given to increasing the STDF Secretariat's resources, including augmenting the staff complement. Investment is needed to make the knowledge platform more accessible, more easily searchable and more utilised by beneficiaries. To enrich the dialogue and strengthen knowledge networks, STDF should explore ways of increasing participation by developing countries at Working Group level.