

**STDF WORKING GROUP  
30 MARCH-1 APRIL 2021  
VIRTUAL MEETING**

## **1 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

1. The STDF Working Group met virtually from 30 March to 1 April 2021 from 14.00 to 17.00, CET, using Zoom. The meeting was chaired by Mr Tom Heilandt, Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission.
2. The chairperson welcomed participants, explained the modalities of the meeting, and encouraged to intervene and interact as much as possible to recreate the spirit of a presential Working Group. He also informed members that the AUC, CABI, IICA, COLEACP, OIRSA, UNCTAD, UNECE, EIF, UNIDO, ITC were attending the meeting as observers.
3. Members adopted the agenda without amendments. Under item 5 (Other Business), the Codex Secretariat suggested discussing the possibility of considering PG and PPG applications earlier in future Working Group meetings (i.e. on day 2 instead of day 3).
4. All presentations and an overview of relevant COVID-19 activities and initiatives from the STDF partnership are available on the STDF [website](#). A list of participants is provided in Annex 1.

## **2 OPERATION OF THE FACILITY**

### **2.1 Selection of new SPS experts from developing countries (2021-2022)**

5. The chairperson welcomed three new [developing country experts](#) for the period 2021-2022, namely Shitar Dorjee (Bhutan), Juliet Goldsmith (Jamaica) and Unesu Ushewokunze-Obatolu (Zimbabwe), who briefly introduced themselves. The experts nominated for the period 2020-2021 will continue to serve the STDF in 2021, i.e. Mirian Bueno (Honduras), Lucy Namu (Kenya) and Visoni Timote (Fiji).

### **2.2 STDF Policy Committee – next meeting and selection of donor representatives**

6. The Working Group agreed with the Secretariat's proposal to organize a virtual meeting of the STDF Policy Committee as soon as possible after the WTO's new Director General (Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala) will have appointed new Deputy Director Generals (DDGs) for the WTO. The DDG with responsibility for the Agriculture Division will host and chair the Policy Committee meeting.

7. The chairperson reminded donor members to agree and inform the Secretariat on their third donor representative in the Policy Committee (for the period 2021-2022), in addition to Germany and The Netherlands. Sweden appealed to other donors to step forward in this regard. The United States expressed its willingness to continue if no other donor would be available. France mentioned it is considering joining the Policy Committee in view of its increased involvement in the STDF. The Secretariat agreed setting up a meeting in the coming weeks for donors to discuss Policy Committee representation.

### **2.3 Staffing and financial situation**

8. The Secretariat briefed members on STDF's staffing situation. The WTO re-advertised the COMMS position early February 2021 and close to 600 applications were received. Screening and interviews are underway. The Deputy/MEL post was issued late February 2021 and screening of applications is starting soon. The WTO also hired a short-term consultant to assist in preparing STDF's 2020 Annual Report.

9. The Secretariat then summarized the financial situation of the STDF trust fund, highlighting a positive balance of US\$976,000. In 2021, the STDF had received contributions from Canada and

Germany (BMEL). The Secretariat alerted members that in view of the current funds, pledges and staffing situation, the Working Group would be able to approve up to three PGs under agenda item 4.

10. Ireland announced a planned €200,000 contribution to the STDF in 2021 (i.e. an increase of €50,000). Finland also announced a €500,000 contribution for the period 2021-2022. Germany – through its Ambassador to the WTO – stressed the importance of the STDF as a key partnership supporting SPS capacity building and mentioned that the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) intends to make a financial contribution and join the STDF partnership as well. The chairperson thanked all donors for their generous contributions.

## 2.4 Implementation of recommendations of the External Evaluation (Action Plan)

11. The Secretariat briefed members on the implementation status of the recommendations. Out of 16 recommendations, five were reported as implemented, nine as ongoing, while implementation of two recommendations has not yet started. Several recommendations can only be fully implemented with new COMMS and MEL resources. Members then focused their discussion on implementation of recommendation 4(v) and how to increase participation of developing countries in the STDF Working Group, based on a background note prepared by the Secretariat and circulated prior to the meeting.

12. The Secretariat explained that implementation of recommendation 4(v) should be viewed in the context of the new STDF strategy, the current Operational Rules, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual meetings present opportunities to enhance the participation of various stakeholders, including developing countries, regional economic communities (RECs) and other regional organizations. The Secretariat presented two options in the background note:

- **Option 1:** maintain the current system of individual experts in the Working Group, while encouraging the participation of RECs and other regional organizations in STDF virtual meetings, webinars, and STDF practitioner groups.
- **Option 2:** replace the current system of individual experts and expand membership - in the Working Group - to other organizations, with members having to define the criteria for expanded membership.

13. Several members considered how virtual meetings can enhance inclusiveness and also viewed that adding new members should add "value" to the work of the STDF. The Working Group agreed to move forward with Option 1.

## 2.5 Communications (COMMS)

14. The Secretariat updated members on the latest activities, including: (i) the new STDF Film "[Shaping a Safer World](#)" released on 8 February, featured in STDF and WTO news items and shared widely on social media and via members' networks; and (ii) finalization and inclusion of the STDF COMMS Plan on the STDF [website](#). Work on the 2020 Annual Report was ongoing, with a launch planned early July 2021. The Secretariat organized six webinars since the last Working Group meeting, attended by close to 650 participants, including on: (i) pandemic-driven change and what this means for the STDF; and (ii) the impact of COVID-19 on SPS capacity development (as part of the [WTO Aid for Trade COVID Stocktaking Event](#)). The Secretariat also held three information sessions for regions in Asia and Africa and issued several news items.

15. A poll was held which showed that 59% of Working Group participants had seen the new STDF film. The Secretariat encouraged other participants to watch the film and "spread the word".

## 2.6 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

### 2.6.1 Implementation of the new MEL Framework - progress

16. The Secretariat updated members on initial steps taken to implement [STDF's MEL Framework](#) (available as a Word document on the STDF website; a final designed version with cover page is under finalization). The [STDF Project Evaluation Guidelines](#) were also updated, in line with the MEL Framework and OECD's revised evaluation criteria. Work is underway to procure an accompanying MEL Tool (i.e. a cloud-based, off-the-shelf, client-solution) under WTO Procurement Rules. Efforts were made to learn about existing tools (including the EIF's experiences with its online project

management information system). The Request for Proposals (RFP) is being finalized for distribution in April. Once selected, the MEL Tool will be piloted for selected projects in the second half of 2021, in cooperation with relevant project implementing partners, before being rolled out more widely. The STDF MEL Group will also be re-established in the second half of 2021 to provide ongoing guidance to work on MEL.

## 2.6.2 Ex-post evaluations of projects

17. The Secretariat highlighted that projects [STDF/PG/242](#) and [STDF/PG/345](#) are currently undergoing remote independent ex post evaluations, with wide stakeholder engagement. Following finalization of both evaluations, webinars are planned to share the key findings, lessons and recommendations more widely with Working Group members and other interested stakeholders. Two ex post evaluations (projects [STDF/PG/486](#) and [STDF/PG/502](#)) still have to be contracted, with the evaluation in Myanmar expected to be further delayed due to ongoing political unrest in the country.

18. The evaluator of project [STDF/PG/401](#) (Lois Ransom) then presented the findings of her report. The project aimed to train phytosanitary capacity evaluation (PCE) facilitators to assist developing countries in applying the PCE tool and implement IPPC standards. She highlighted the objectives of the evaluation, the methods that were used and the key findings, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations. The presentation is available on the [STDF website](#).

19. In response to a question from Sweden, the evaluator clarified that the trained facilitators are using their newly acquired skills, including to raise awareness regarding the importance of phytosanitary standards, in ongoing PCE applications. The World Bank Group (WBG) highlighted the importance of improving capacity to evaluate phytosanitary capacity needs and referred to its collaboration with the IPPC in Nepal to apply the PCE digitally, building on the results of the STDF project. The OIE indicated it is also planning to conduct virtual veterinary capacity evaluations ("PVS").

20. Several developing country experts (Juliet Goldsmith, Lucy Namu and Sithar Dorjee) also shared feedback on the evaluation findings. They highlighted, *inter alia*, the benefits and challenges (including limited knowledge and skills on results-based management) of implementing the PCE tool remotely and opportunities for regional PCE implementation in the Caribbean region; the value of the PCE tool and the STDF project for Kenya in reevaluating the NPPO's capacity and processes; and the value of the PCE tool to capture gaps and priorities across the phytosanitary system in Bhutan.

21. The IPPC thanked the evaluator for the valuable findings and recommendations and explained how the IPPC has already worked to further improve the PCE process and build capacity of facilitators, including in partnership with the World Bank Group and COLEACP. This includes a move to virtual/digital PCE approaches (while highlighting the benefits of in-person on-site training). It was agreed that the STDF and IPPC would organize a joint follow-up webinar in 2021 to share the evaluation findings more widely.

22. The Working Group also selected the ePhyto ([STDF/PG/504](#)) and eVet ([STDF/PG/609](#)) projects, which were both completed in 2020, and agreed to conduct one joint evaluation. The OIE drew attention to the differences between both projects. Several members however supported a joint evaluation and the opportunity to learn from experiences across sectors and explore synergies. The Secretariat clarified that Terms of Reference would be drafted that will explain the differences between the two projects and the expectations for the external evaluation.

## 2.7 COVID-19 – STDF response

### 2.7.1 STDF 2021 Work Plan

23. Members considered and approved STDF's [revised work plan and budget](#) for 2021. Some savings are expected due to the lack of in-person meetings, in view of COVID-19 restrictions. The Secretariat indicated it will monitor developments in the coming months and still hopes that the next Working Group meeting in October can be held in-person. If not possible, the October meeting will be held virtually.

### 2.7.2 STDF Post-Strategy Webinar (8 February 2021)

24. The Secretariat reported on STDF's [webinar](#) on 8 February to explore the implications of COVID-19 on STDF's Strategy and approach and thanked Working Group members who participated in the panel/event. The event generated an interesting discussion on how the STDF can continue to adapt and innovate, including the value of the practitioner groups (launched in 2020) to benefit from member's experience and deepen dialogue on specific knowledge work areas. Feedback from participants highlighted three key trends for SPS capacity development (i.e. regional and South-South trade, digitalization and access to technologies, and climate change), while drawing attention to the challenges posed by the pandemic (including saturation, Zoom fatigue, ongoing IT challenges in developing countries). Some participants drew attention to the importance of considering SPS capacity as part of wider food systems. The Secretariat referred to its plan to convene a webinar in mid-2021 on this nexus, linked to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit.

25. The Secretariat also noted that STDF's second COVID risk management report was distributed in [November 2020](#), with the next update to the report planned in mid-2021.

## 3 KNOWLEDGE WORK

3.1 The Secretariat provided an overview of STDF's knowledge work, identified as one of three workstreams in the STDF Strategy, recalling the role of knowledge work to identify and promote good practices and influence SPS capacity development more broadly. Practitioner Groups on knowledge topics (PPPs, P-IMA, e-certification) were launched in 2020. From March 2020 until the end of March 2021, a total of eight Practitioner Group meetings (60-90 minutes each) have taken place via Zoom (three on PPPs, two on P-IMA and three on e-certification). In addition, interested members met via Zoom in 2020 on the MEL Framework, and in December 2020 on the ongoing GRP work.

3.2 Some members welcomed the Practitioner Groups and expressed appreciation for their role in encouraging a deeper discussion on specific knowledge topics, including with subject experts who are not usually part of Working Group meetings. Others suggested the need for more prioritization to reduce the workload on members. The Secretariat recognized the need for better planning of Practitioner Group meetings to ensure: (i) that meetings do not take place during weeks when partners have other important meetings; and (ii) adequate spacing between meetings. The Secretariat expressed its appreciation for all the feedback received, which will be used to further improve the three existing Practitioner Groups and ensure they add value for members.

### 3.3 P-IMA Framework

26. The Secretariat briefed members on development of online modules to support training on the P-IMA framework, in accordance with STDF's work plan, by a consultant (Spencer Henson). In light of COVID-19 travel restrictions, the Secretariat underscored the importance of equipping interested countries to receive training on P-IMA in a virtual format, which may also lower the cost of P-IMA's in-country application.

27. The Secretariat updated members on other developments within the [P-IMA workstream](#). The P-IMA Practitioner Group met twice, each time drawing over 50 participants from STDF members and other organizations. The newly developed online P-IMA training modules will be tested in May 2021 in the Caribbean region, in close partnership with the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) under STDF/PPG/733. The Secretariat also highlighted STDF's partnership with [TradeMark East Africa \(TMEA\)](#) in applying P-IMA in the East African region. The Secretariat is working with TMEA to follow up on some of the key findings and results of the P-IMA regional analysis to enhance SPS capacity and boost regional trade within the EAC.

28. In response to a question from Germany, the Secretariat explained that in several countries P-IMA meetings were held in hybrid format to ensure that participants without good connectivity can attend P-IMA training in-person, while complying with the country's prevailing COVID-19 safety procedures.

### 3.4 Public Private Partnerships (PPP)

29. The Secretariat informed members on the three meetings of the [PPP Practitioner Group](#) to date, which each saw an average of 25 participants across STDF's broader network. Attention was drawn to the next meeting scheduled on 29 April 2021 with a presentation from the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (GATF/WEF). The Secretariat also invited members to continue sharing additional examples of PPPs that strengthen SPS capacity to facilitate safe trade and thanked the OIE and IPPC for their assistance in distributing the PPP survey. The survey can still be accessed and completed via the [PPP webpage](#).

30. The Secretariat also highlighted a report with findings from a survey issued in collaboration with UNIDO and IICA in February 2020 that focused on the use of Voluntary Third-Party Assurance programmes (vTPAs) in the food safety area. The STDF and UNIDO also created a data story to summarize the responses. The secretariat shared the link to the data story and survey, and can be found [here](#). UNIDO and IICA are setting up a platform to promote cooperation with interested stakeholders and leverage additional resources for the STDF regional vTPA projects.

### 3.5 Good Regulatory Practice

31. The Secretariat reported on ongoing work on [Good Regulatory Practices \(GRP\)](#), thanking members of the STDF peer review group for their inputs, as well as Camille Flechet from the WTO SPS team for her support. Following comments received and a discussion in December 2020, the Guide is being revised and will be distributed to the peer review group in April. Consultations are also planned with selected SPS regulators from developing countries to get their feedback and ensure the final GRP Guide meets their needs and is "fit-for-purpose". An STDF briefing note and an e-news are planned, as well as a side event during the SPS Committee in November 2021, to support wider dissemination of the Guide.

### 3.6 SPS electronic certification

32. The Secretariat reported on the [third meeting](#) of the Electronic Certification Advisory Committee (ECAC), held in December 2020, including a presentation by UN/CEFACT on a new Implementation Guideline for e-Certificates. The next meeting of the ECAC will take place on 15 April and feature a presentation by the OECD on its [recent study](#) on "Digital opportunities for SPS systems and the trade facilitation effects of SPS electronic certification". The OECD study shows how countries have can benefit economically from moving towards eCert systems.

33. In December 2020, the ECAC agreed to invite other interested members of the Working Group and collaborating partners from STDF's wider network to participate in future ECAC meetings. The Secretariat explained that the aim of the ECAC is to build synergies and encourage coordination and collaboration among eCert experts and recommended members to nominate participants with expertise in this domain to maintain the specialized and applied purpose of the ECAC.

34. The IPPC explained how the ECAC has been extremely useful in pushing forward the goal of greater eCert, especially in closing gaps in a thematic and technical area that is prone to divergence in approaches. The World Bank Group also restated the importance of the group as a sounding board for organizations to have a dialogue around eCert. In response to a question from Sweden, the Secretariat explained that the ECAC aims to achieve greater synergy and harmonization in the application SPS eCert, to share information and experiences and identify best practices.

### 3.7 Information exchange

#### 3.7.1 New/emerging SPS initiative/issues

35. The World Bank Group provided a brief update on their activities since the last Working Group meeting and shared the following lessons: shorter meetings are better, preparation at the country-level is key (technological capacity such as Wi-Fi, computers etc.), and identify focal points within government ministries that can continue participating in virtual meetings. It restated the importance of the Practitioner Groups and highlighted the increasing importance of One Health and cross-border agency cooperation to ensure safe and inclusive trade. It also proposed to organize a webinar with the STDF to further discuss systems-based approaches later this year.

36. The United States informed members on a [new distance learning module](#) on food safety, developed by the Food Safety Network (FSN) partnership. The module aims to provide food safety practitioners and other stakeholders with an overview of key regulatory issues for food safety. The United States also referred to a [new distance learning module](#) on animal health, developed in partnership with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Texas A&M University. It also highlighted several relevant APEC activities, including a [webinar](#) on Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) and Environmental Testing for Foodborne Pathogens, and the forthcoming meeting of the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum (FSCF) and the Partnership Training Institute Network (PTIN).

37. The WHO gave an update on how the FAO, OIE and the UN Environmental Programme in collaboration with the WHO is calling for subject matter experts on One Health approaches. The goal is to establish an expert panel to improve the capacity for One Health approach implementation. Applicants for the panel must submit their interest by 16 April 2021 on the [WHO's website](#).

38. UNIDO shared [information](#) on a discussion held amongst regulators, development practitioners and private sector actors in regions in Africa to boost capacities for SPS capacity and compliance through implementation of national vTPA programmes. It also updated members on the vTPA project ([STDF/PG/665](#)) in West Africa and announced creation of a Trade Rejection Analysis platform that is currently being tested.

39. The WTO briefed members on the outcomes of the March WTO SPS Committee meeting, including discussions on a possible SPS Declaration for the WTO's 12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference ([G/SPS/GEN/1758/Rev.5](#)) and on New Zealand's two proposals to monitor the process of international harmonization ([G/SPS/GEN/1851](#) and [G/SPS/GEN/1877](#)). A workshop on risk assessment, risk management and risk communication ([G/SPS/GEN/1769/Rev.1](#)) will be held in the margins of the next meeting in July 2021.

### 3.7.2 IPPC Presentation: Design Thinking

40. In 2020, the IPPC Implementation Facilitation Unit undertook a pilot project on Design Thinking facilitated by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to consider "how to leverage digital methods to efficiently deliver implementation and capacity development phytosanitary activities at global, regional and national levels". The study yielded concrete innovative recommendations changing the way the Unit operates towards increasing focus on end user's needs. This includes for instance revising the IPPC website based on users' experience and development of different e-learning materials that target different job profiles (The Politician, The Best-in-Class, The Pragmatic). The presentation by the IPPC can be found [here](#).

41. The IPPC shared examples of concrete actions taken such as the creation of an International Phytosanitary Portal, greater communication initiatives and the creation of an e-learning course platform, and improvement of availability of IPPC training materials across a variety of different languages. The study was ultimately an "eye-opener" for the IPPC, and fundamentally refocused their approach towards looking at target audience needs. Furthermore, the IPPC explained how the IPPC Implementation and Capacity Development Committee recommends conducting an expanded Design Thinking study including 10-12 countries.

42. The OIE asked for a clarification on the costing of the new ideas such as the e-learning platform. The IPPC highlighted the importance of a "mindset" change and mentioned that some changes are being considered through a potential partnership with COLEACP. The Secretariat noted the potential benefit of implementing a Design Thinking approach to some of STDF's knowledge work initiatives, especially in relation to the creation of audience groups to better ensure and track effectively the dissemination of knowledge and information.

### 3.8 Topics for future STDF work

43. The Working Group decided not to select any new topics for future work, in view of ongoing work and Practitioner Groups, and the limited resources in the Secretariat.

44. The Secretariat informed members on recent discussions on the topic of domestic impacts ("spillovers") of trade-focused SPS capacity development. A virtual meeting was held in February 2021 (including FAO, WHO, WBG/IFC, USDA, COLEACP, UNIDO, JIFSAN, STDF developing country

experts) to explore interest in building on STDF's previous [work](#) on the effects of SPS interventions and projects on domestic food safety, animal and/or plant health situation (i.e. beyond the trade impacts). While participants agreed on the importance of understanding the effects of trade-related interventions on health and livelihoods of the domestic population, and that trade-related projects should do more to measure these effects, they noted several challenges (e.g. weak data, limited resources for M&E). They also highlighted the need for more clarity on the range of possible domestic effects (and causal links), more solid evidence to inform development of a conceptual framework to measure domestic impacts, a more holistic approach to, and more resources for M&E in SPS projects. Participants agreed to start by looking at domestic effects of SPS capacity development within STDF projects, linked to the MEL Framework, to help understand the causal relationships, as an initial step.

45. Regarding work on climate change and the environment, previously discussed by the Working Group, the Secretariat suggested to organize a short webinar/online event on the linkages between SPS capacity and environment / climate change in the second half of 2021 (subject to available staff time as well as partners' interest and availability). This would allow STDF partners to share key findings from their recent / ongoing related work, linked to the consideration of this cross-cutting topic as part of STDF's Strategy. It could also provide the basis for additional in-depth STDF work on the linkage between SPS capacity and environment / climate change at some point in the future, building on STDF's [previous work and study on this topic](#). The Working Group agreed for the Secretariat to explore such an event.

## 4 PPGS AND PROJECTS

### 4.1 Overview of ongoing and completed projects and PPGs

46. The chairperson referred to document STDF/WG/Mar21/Overview, which provides an overview of the implementation status of ongoing projects and PPGs. Members raised no questions or comments. Members also approved several extensions to complete project activities, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

47. The Secretariat briefly introduced document STDF/WG/Mar21/Review, which includes (in Tables 2 and 3) the applications not tabled for consideration at the meeting (and the reasons for not tabling them). Members raised no further questions or comments.

48. The Secretariat requested feedback from the Working Group on two project ideas. The first idea was a feasibility study and prototype design for solar powered refrigeration units to improve the milk cold chain for small-holder farmers in Rwanda. The second idea was on breeding new chili varieties for pest and disease resistance, based on a concept note, submitted by the World Vegetable Center which has expertise in rapid breeding technologies and would use this technology to develop resistant varieties, thereby reducing the risks of aflatoxin contamination and pesticide residues.

49. The FAO shared concern around the "proposed" novelty of the small-scale refrigeration project given the extensive presence of similar cold chain projects. On the chili pepper breeding idea, it highlighted that aflatoxin contamination is more an issue of poor handling and storage rather than breeding. The OIE, France, Canada and Sweden considered that the proposed ideas were outside the scope of STDF's core SPS capacity development work.

### 4.3 Consideration of PPG applications

50. The chairperson clarified that he would identify potential conflicts of interest, prior to considering each PPG and project, and requested relevant organization(s) not to intervene in the discussion. He requested the Secretariat to provide a brief introduction on comments received in writing from members prior to the meeting, before "opening the floor".

#### **STDF/PPG/761 – Armenia**

51. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application, subject to some revisions. Members provided several recommendations to strengthen the work under this PPG, notably in terms of: (i) obtaining additional letters of support from the agencies in charge of plant and animal health and

from the Ministry of Economy in Armenia; (ii) ensuring that the implementing organization has a record of good governance and financial integrity; (iii) considering the inclusion of the presence of a facilitator who is well-versed in P-IMA implementation; and (iv) budget review by providing additional detail for selected budget lines. The Secretariat will take these recommendations into account in formulating the PPG's terms of reference

#### ***STDF/PPG/768 – Central Africa***

52. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application, subject to some revisions. Members noted the importance of applying the PCE tool in six countries and considered that the resultant project would contribute to the harmonization of phytosanitary legislation at the sub-regional level and have strong benefits to the region's overall phytosanitary capacity and resulting market access. Members recommended the applicant to strengthen the application, including by: (i) obtaining a letter of support from the NPPO in Cameroon; (ii) hiring an international consultant with expertise in phytosanitary capacity evaluation; and (iii) conducting a revision of specific budget lines, such as the proposed preparatory meetings. The Secretariat will take these recommendations into account in formulating the PPG's terms of reference.

#### ***STDF/PPG/786 – Ghana***

53. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application. Members noted the importance of applying the P-IMA framework in mitigating the challenges caused due to high aflatoxin levels resulting in the reduction of export quantities of maize and groundnut products. Members found that the PPG will build on existing aflatoxin work done so far in the country and the region, and acknowledged the widespread multi-stakeholder, cross-cutting and public-private nature of a potential subsequent project proposal. The Secretariat will develop detailed terms of reference with a more detailed budget and clear roles and responsibilities for the international consultant and the national coordinator.

#### ***STDF/PPG/788 – Azerbaijan***

54. The Working Group **did not** approve this application and suggested that the applicant send a regional revised application. Members, while noting the importance of pest surveillance initiatives in general, identified several issues requiring clarification (scope, destination market, relevant international standards, link to private sector and academia, among others). They also noted that Azerbaijan is an Upper Middle-Income Country (UMIC) that benefitted from a phytosanitary project, funded by the STDF, that ended in December 2018. Members noted that the PPG could be considered in a future meeting, subject to the applicant providing a revised proposal that showcases a regional approach.

### **4.4 Consideration of PG applications**

#### ***STDF/PG/672 – Senegal***

55. The Working Group **endorsed** this application, recognizing its multi-stakeholder, interdisciplinary and regional approach, and its potential to develop synergies with STDF's ongoing SPS initiatives. Further, the application was endorsed subject to the consideration of the written comments submitted by various Working Group members prior to the meeting.

#### ***STDF/PG/770 – West Africa***

56. The Working Group **did not endorse this project application**. Instead, members **approved it as a PPG**, aiming to help the applicant undertaking a *feasibility study* and review the proposal. Members acknowledged the innovative nature of the idea and its potential. Yet, they identified risks and indicated areas requiring clarification. They highlighted the need for a baseline survey / feasibility study to be conducted to get a better understanding of the digital infrastructure in each country and in the region, submission of a revised project application. Members tasked the Secretariat to work with the applicant in defining the PPG's terms of reference and budget.

#### ***STDF/PG/782 – Cambodia/Kenya***

57. The Working Group **did not endorse this project application** due to systematic concerns regarding the use of remote inspection for food safety and lack of a robust food safety system in the

two countries. Instead, the Working Group **approved the application as a PPG** to identify current best practices and solutions related to remote food safety inspection in general, as well as the related regulatory requirements that would have to be considered. The PPG could also assess feasibility of the concepts presented in the project regarding SPS capacity issues and potential challenges raised by a dual-product approach.

58. The Secretariat noted that Australia and the UK were planning to present a new work proposal on remote inspections at the next CCFICS meeting in June and that the applicants had been in touch with the proponents to explore ways of building linkages with this future CCFICS topic. The Secretariat also clarified that the approach could be a blended use of remote inspection rather than being fully remote.

59. The FAO supported the application and thought it was an opportune time to explore new ways of providing risk-based inspection services and to study the legal framework that would be required. It further suggested the project should clarify how these best practices would improve quality and safety for the domestic market.

60. The United States expressed concern with the concept of remote inspections and questioned whether the approach would have a positive impact on food safety systems in the two countries. It further noted that it had additional concerns regarding the lack of food safety infrastructure in the two countries.

61. Canada acknowledged the innovative nature of remote inspections but raised concern over the project being implemented in two different continents, countries and product lines. There also appeared to be unanswered questions related to the concept of remote inspections.

62. Lucy Namu (Developing Country Expert), Australia, the WBG and the WTO expressed overall support for the idea, noted its innovative nature but acknowledged the concerns raised by other members. For Australia, the value of the project was in the digitization of critical government services to increase the opportunities for transparent inspection.

63. UNIDO highlighted that GFSI was working on this issue, too, and stated that there were certain inspection practices already underway that used ICT technologies. UNIDO further noted that the PPG could research what other countries were doing and start identifying best practice from the outset.

#### ***STDF/PG/759 – Jamaica***

64. The Working Group **endorsed** this application subject to minor adjustments proposed by FAO, IPPC, United States, and Juliet Goldsmith. Some of the more important adjustments include: (i) clarifying concepts such as risk-based approaches to food safety; (ii) separate the fresh pepper value chain actors from the processed pepper value chain and target their agriculture and post-harvest practices differently; (iii) include references to all the relevant ISPMs and IPPC Guides; (iv) explore the use of the "Beyond Compliance" tools in the project; (v) incorporate content from courses such as the Produce Safety Alliance so that farmers can be aware of the regulatory requirements for export markets such as the US; and (vi) include references to regional policies and action plans in the project document.

65. The IPPC supported the approval of the project with improvements while also encouraging the applicant to engage with their Caribbean regional representative who is based in Belize. Miriam Bueno (Developing Country Expert) questioned whether this level of funding should be granted to a single country project. The Secretariat clarified that projects are demand driven and that this would be the first STDF project to be implemented in Jamaica. In response to a question from Sweden, the Secretariat clarified that FAO would serve as the implementing agency for the project.

#### ***STDF/PG/782 – Latin America***

66. The Working Group **did not endorse** this application. While some members noted the innovative, interdisciplinary, cross-cutting, and South-South trade boosting approach to this project, concerns were raised mainly related to the lack of data that will prevent the development of a robust and reliable model, and the lack of references to mechanisms, guidelines and strategies currently available to assess and respond to food safety emergencies. Members found that the project was premature given that the COVID-19 pandemic is still currently underway, which makes it difficult to obtain relevant information and envisage a clear outcome. Some members highlighted that since

the project will address a global problem, more institutions and countries could have been involved. They also suggested to carefully look at the implementation modalities proposed to reflect the wideness of the scope and possible impact of the project.

#### **4.5 Decision on prioritization and funding of new project applications**

67. The Secretariat clarified that the STDF trust fund has sufficient resources to fund the two projects endorsed, and that no prioritization was needed.

### **5 OTHER BUSINESS**

68. The Codex Secretariat suggested that the Secretariat reconsider changing the day when PGs and PPGs are discussed for the next meeting of the Working Group. The chairperson mentioned that this will be discussed with the Secretariat and that a decision will be shared with the Working Group prior to the next meeting.

69. The Secretariat informed members that the next meeting will be held on **19-21 October 2021** and thanked Tom Heilandt, on behalf of all members, for effectively chairing the virtual meeting.

### **6 CLOSURE**

70. The chairperson thanked participants for their engagement and closed the meeting at 17:12.

## ANNEX 1

**STDF WORKING GROUP  
30 MARCH - 1 APRIL 2021**

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