



Food and Agriculture
Organization of
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World Health
Organization

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**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION
AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS**

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ACTIVITIES OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS RELEVANT TO THE WORK OF CCFICS

Activities of the WTO SPS Committee and other relevant WTO activities in 2013- 2014

REPORT BY THE WTO SECRETARIAT¹

1. This report to the 21st session of the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems has been prepared by the Secretariat of the World Trade Organization ("WTO Secretariat"). The report provides a summary of the activities and decisions of the WTO Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the "SPS Committee") in 2013 and in the first seven months (January-July) of 2014, and identifies the work of relevance to Codex, including: specific trade concerns; transparency; equivalence; monitoring the use of international standards; technical assistance; and SPS-related private standards. The report also includes relevant information on relevant activities of the WTO Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), WTO dispute settlement cases addressing the SPS and TBT Agreements as well as some information about the newly adopted Trade Facilitation Agreement

2. The SPS Committee held three regular meetings in 2013: on 21-22 March, on 27-28 June and on 17-18 October.² The Committee held its first meeting in 2014 on 25-26 March³ and its second meeting on 9-10 July. The next regular meeting of the SPS Committee is scheduled for 16-17 October 2014, and will be preceded on 13-14 October by a workshop on SPS risk analysis.

3. The Committee agreed to the following tentative calendar of regular meetings for 2015: 25-26 March, 15-16 July and 14-15 October.

4. Ms Maria Albarece of the Philippines served as Chairperson as of March 2012 until July 2014. Ms Lillian Bwalya of Zambia is the appointed chairperson for the 2014-2015 period.

Specific trade concerns

5. The SPS Committee devotes a large portion of each regular meeting to the consideration of specific trade concerns. Any WTO member can raise specific concerns about the food safety, plant or animal health requirements imposed by another WTO member. Issues raised in this context are usually related to the notification of a new or changed measure, or based on the experience of exporters. Often other WTO Members will share the same concerns. At the SPS Committee meetings, Members usually commit themselves to exchange information and hold bilateral consultations to resolve the identified concern.

6. A summary of the specific trade concerns (STCs) raised in meetings of the SPS Committee is compiled on an annual basis by the WTO Secretariat.⁴ Altogether, 378 specific trade concerns have been raised between 1995 through the end of July 2014, of which 33% were related to food safety.

7. In 2013 and January-July of 2014, 34 new specific trade concerns (24 in 2013 and 10 to date in 2014) were raised for the first time in the SPS Committee, including the six new food safety issues. Of these, the following may be of relevance to the CCFICS:

- China's concerns regarding the US proposed rule on good manufacturing process and hazard analysis and risk-based preventive controls for human food (STC 352)

¹ This report has been prepared under the WTO Secretariat's own responsibility and is without prejudice to the positions of WTO Members or to their rights or obligations under the WTO.

² For 2013, the report of the March meeting is contained in G/SPS/R/70, that of June meeting in G/SPS/R/71 and that of the October meeting in G/SPS/R/73.

³ For 2014, the report of the March meeting is contained in G/SPS/R/74.

⁴ The latest version of this summary can be found in document G/SPS/GEN/204/Rev.14. This document is a public document available from <https://docs.wto.org/>. Specific trade concerns can also be searched through the SPS Information Management System: <http://spsims.wto.org>.

8. China raised concerns over the US proposed rule on "Current Good Manufacturing Practice and Hazard Analysis and Risk-based Preventive Controls for Human Food".⁵ China stated that Part 117, Subpart C, regarding the preventive control measures put in place and monitored by operators of food enterprises, exceeded international standards without scientific justification and was therefore in contravention of the SPS Agreement. The overbroad nature of this requirement would result in reduced effectiveness and increased labour costs, thus resulting in a barrier to trade. Additionally, China took issue with the inclusion of radioactivity hazard analysis in the draft Part 117.130(b)(4), as the internationally recognized HACCP system only required the identification of biological, chemical, and physical hazards. The probability of such a hazard was extremely low and did not justify the cost of running such monitoring programmes within the food industry. Lastly, the requirement in the draft Part 117.126 that all food enterprises establish a written safety plan exceeded the requirements of HACCP and the Codex standards. As such, China requested that the United States provide a scientific basis for these requirements.

9. The United States recalled that these measures had been notified to the SPS Committee on 30 April 2013, and would be available for comment through 16 September 2013. The United States urged China and other Members, as well as any other interested Members of the international community, to provide comments on the proposed rule.

- Argentina's concerns regarding the EU renewal of GMO approvals (EC Regulation 1829/2003) (STC 353)

10. Argentina raised concerns over the EU renewal procedures and processes for GMO approvals. Argentina contended that risk assessment reviews should only be undertaken in cases of new scientific justification. Furthermore, Argentina stated that the EU process was already overly burdensome and the new requirements were unclear, adding to the heavy burden of seeking GMO approval.

11. The European Union responded that it was not intending to adopt legislation as was done for the food/feed new authorizations but rather to prepare a guidance document which would complement Articles 11 and 23 of Regulation 1829/2003, providing general guidance on the renewal process.

- Japan's concerns regarding import restrictions in response to the nuclear power plant accident (STC 354)

12. Japan raised concerns over restrictions on Japanese food exports in the wake of the Fukushima incident. Following the incident, Japan had been closely monitoring food products for the presence of radionuclides and, as of April 2012, had imposed a food intervention exemption level of 1mSv/year – equivalent to the Codex standard. However, the dietary exposure estimates from total diet studies were far below 1 mSv/year across all studies—including those completed in Fukushima Prefecture. Based on this scientific data, Japan requested all Members to lift any import restrictions on Japanese exports. Japan noted that China, Hong Kong, China and Chinese Taipei continued to maintain import bans on many Japanese food exports. Japan assured that Japanese foods placed on the market were safe for human consumption without any extra control measures.

- China's concerns regarding the US proposed FSMA-related rule allowing for accreditation of third-party bodies to conduct food safety audits and to issue certifications⁶ (STC 357)

13. China raised concerns regarding the US proposed Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) related rule allowing for accreditation of third-party auditors/certification bodies to conduct food safety audits of foreign entities and to issue food and facility certifications. China noted that the statistics provided by the United States had demonstrated a generally safer level of imported foods than foods domestically produced in the United States. China requested the United States to provide scientific justification for proposing this overly burdensome and costly rule on imported foods. China considered that the proposed rule discriminated unjustifiably between foreign and domestic sources of supply and went beyond international standards without scientific justification. China urged the United States to accept the results of internationally accredited certification/audit bodies, and queried how the United States would recognize the equivalence of foreign food safety programmes, systems and standards. Referencing Article 13 of the SPS Agreement, China enquired what measures the United States would take to ensure that third-party auditors/certification bodies were WTO-compliant, and recalled that under Article 10 of the SPS Agreement, WTO Members are to take into account the special needs of developing countries in the preparation of SPS measures.

14. The United States recalled that it had provided information on the proposed rule in the SPS Committee and elsewhere, including in China, and invited Members to submit their comments through the Federal eRulemaking Portal (<http://www.regulations.gov>).

- Japan's concerns regarding Korea's import restrictions on fishery products with regard to radionuclides (STC 359)

15. Japan expressed concerns regarding Korea's fishery import restrictions, including a ban on imports from eight prefectures and additional testing and certification requirements in all cases where radioactive Cesium was detected, even in quantities below the Korean limit of 100 Bq/kg. This requirement applied exclusively to Japanese products; Korean and other trading partners' products could be distributed as long as the radioactive Cesium level

⁵ The rules were notified in G/SPS/N/USA/2502 and G/SPS/N/USA/2503.

⁶ The rule was notified in G/SPS/N/USA/2570.

remained below 100 Bq/kg. Japan reiterated that contaminated water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station had been detected only within an area of 0.3 square kilometres inside the port, and that the problem of contaminated water should not be equated with the safety of Japanese fishery products. Japan's central and local governments had taken measures to prevent the distribution of fishery products where required, and the amount of samples exceeding the limit of 100 Bq/kg had drastically decreased both in the Fukushima prefecture (from 53% in March/June 2011 to 2.2% in July/September 2013) and elsewhere (from 6.5% to 0.4% during the same periods). Japan recalled that SPS measures must not arbitrarily or unjustifiably discriminate between trading partners and urged Korea to provide a scientific basis for its measures.

16 Korea indicated that its measures were in accordance with Article 5.7 of the SPS Agreement, as a result of insufficient scientific evidence and the potentially far-reaching cumulative effects of radioactive contamination on human health.

- India's concerns regarding Russia's non-recognition of testing laboratories for meat products (STC 361)

17 India raised its concern regarding the inability to export bovine meat and agricultural products to Russia. It had requested Russian veterinary experts to inspect Indian units and laboratories, and a delegation from the Customs Union Authorities of Kazakhstan (SVPSGO) had conducted site visits, including to meat-processing units, in October 2011. India had complied with all of the requirements identified in the report issued as a result of such visits and sent all the relevant information to the SVPSGO in January 2012. However, Russia had still not recognised the units and laboratories. Consequently, the export of bovine meat and egg powder to Russia had not resumed, although India's track record in the export of boneless bovine meat to over 16 countries worldwide was unblemished.

18 Nine issues relating to food safety that had been previously raised in the SPS Committee were discussed again during 2013 and 2014. These included:

- EU and US concerns regarding Viet Nam's ban on offals (STC 314);
- Norway's concerns regarding China's quarantine and testing procedures for salmon (STC 319);
- India's concerns regarding EU maximum residue levels of pesticides (STC 306);
- EU concerns regarding China's import conditions related to phthalates (STC 345);
- India's concerns regarding Japan's restrictions on shrimp due to anti-oxidant residues (STC 342);
- China's and Chile's concerns regarding Indonesia's port closure (STC 330);
- EU concerns regarding Malaysia's import restrictions on pork and pork products (STC 323);
- Paraguay's concerns regarding Japan's MRLs applied to sesame (STC 321);
- Peru's concerns regarding application and modification of the EU Regulation on Novel Foods (STC 238).

Members' information related to food safety

19 WTO Members used the opportunity of the SPS Committee meetings to provide other information relating to food safety, including:

- Australia provided an update on its retirement of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service ("AQIS") brand. In its place, trading partners would have started to see an Australian Government crest and the words "Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry";
- Canada provided updates on its new Regulatory Framework for Federal Food Inspection: The passage of the Safe Food for Canadians Act (SFCA) provides a basis for consistent regulatory requirements and inspection approaches across all fields. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) was specifically proposing to replace 13 federal food inspection regulations with one set of regulations. A notice of regulatory intent, containing supporting framework, was notified in May 2014 and the complete set of draft regulations was anticipated to be notified for consultation during Fall 2014. The SFCA and associated regulations were anticipated to come into force in 2015;
- Korea provided updates on its reshuffling of government agencies dealing with issues related to the SPS Agreement;
- The European Union provided information on four legislative proposals, the so-called "Smarter rules for safer food" package which was issued on 6 May 2013. These new risk-based measures, have been notified under the SPS Agreement and aim at a higher level of legal clarity and consistency for a safer agri-food chain;
- The European Union also provided information on the 2014/63/EU Directive published on 3 June 2014, which amends the Directive 2001/110/EC relating to honey;
- The United States provided information on amended BSE import regulations known as APHIS "BSE Comprehensive Rule";

- The United States also provided update on the progress of the US Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). Three proposed rules had been published: (i) Current Good Manufacturing Practice and Hazard Analysis and Risk-Based Preventive Controls for Food for Animals, (ii) Focused Mitigation Strategies to Protect Food Against International Adulteration, and (iii) Sanitary Transportation of Human and Animal Food;
- Burundi provided information on the creation of a National Committee of coordination and monitoring of sanitary and phytosanitary measures;
- Japan provided an update on its response to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident and highlighted the results of the latest IAEA report. Japan also indicated that it had released a monitoring report entitled "*Report on the Monitoring of Radionuclides in Fishery Products*" on 31 May 2014;
- Russia provided information on its preparations to conduct research on polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in order to determine the acceptable level of PCBs in certain types of food products;
- Pakistan provided an update on its new Ministry of National Food Security and Research which had been created as a result of the adoption of the 18th amendment of its Constitution.

Transparency

20 The SPS information management system (SPS-IMS) allows easy access and management of all WTO SPS-related documentation.⁷

21 The legal obligation of WTO Members is to notify new or modified SPS measures when these deviate from the relevant international standards, including Codex standards. The recommendations of the SPS Committee, however, now encourage the notification of all new or modified measures even when these conform to international standards.⁸ Although this recommendation does not change the legal obligations of WTO Members, it may enhance transparency regarding the application of Codex standards.

22 A total of 2,261 notifications of new or proposed SPS measures were submitted to the WTO from 1 January 2013 through end-July 2014 (864 and 608, respectively). Among these, 1,040 regular notifications and 35 emergency notifications identified food safety as the objective of the measure. Of these, 388 of the regular and 10 of the emergency notifications identified a Codex standard as relevant, by either indicating the application of the Codex standard or a deviation from it.

23 SPS National Notification Authorities can complete and submit SPS notifications online through the SPS Notification Submission System (SPS NSS).

Equivalence

24 The guidelines on the implementation of Article 4 of the SPS Agreement on equivalence note, inter alia, the work on recognition of equivalence undertaken in the Codex, the OIE and the IPPC, and encourage the further elaboration of specific guidance by these organizations. No further information was provided by the Codex regarding work on equivalence in 2013 and the first half of 2014.

Work of the TBT Committee

25 The TBT Committee held three regular meetings in 2013: on 6-7 March, on 19-20 June and on 30-31 October. The TBT Committee held two meetings to date in 2014, on 19-20 March and on 18-19 June. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 5-6 November 2014.

Specific Trade Concerns

26 In 2013 and January-July of 2014, fifty-eight (42 and 16, respectively) new specific trade concerns were raised for the first time in the TBT Committee⁹, including the following one new issue related to trade in food that may be of relevance to the CCFICS. The other food-related issues concerned proposed labelling of food products with the objective of encouraging "healthy" eating, or with regard to the identification of halal products or food allergens.

- China's concerns regarding Canada's improved food inspection model: The Case for Change¹⁰

27 China requested the Canadian authorities to base any changes in their measures on relevant international standards, such as Codex standards. China also stated that it looked forward to receiving the notification of this measure and the opportunity to send comments.

28 Canada explained that it was developing a more consistent and comprehensive inspection approach that could be applied across all foods. Canada was consulting with Members and Canadian stakeholders on ways that its site-based inspection system could be enhanced to best manage current food safety challenges and emerging trends. Canada had already provided two opportunities for Members to comment on items related to this initiative.

⁷ See <http://spsims.wto.org>.

⁸ G/SPS/7/Rev.3.

⁹ G/TBT/34 and JOB/TBT/105.

¹⁰ G/TBT/N/CAN/365, G/TBT/N/CAN/365/Rev.1, G/TBT/N/CAN/365/Rev.1/Add.1, G/TBT/N/CAN/365/Rev.1/Add.2.

OTHER RELEVANT WTO ACTIVITIES

The WTO dispute settlement procedure

29 Any WTO member may invoke the formal dispute resolution procedures of the WTO if they consider that a measure imposed by another WTO member violates any of the WTO Agreements, including the SPS Agreement. If formal consultations on the problem are unsuccessful, a WTO member may request that a panel be established to consider the complaint.¹¹ A panel of three individuals considers written and oral arguments submitted by the parties to the dispute and issues a written report of its legal findings and recommendations. The parties to the dispute may appeal a panel's decision before the WTO's Appellate Body. The Appellate Body examines the legal findings of the panel and may uphold or reverse these. As with a panel report, the Appellate Body report is adopted automatically unless there is a consensus against adoption.

SPS disputes

30 Under the SPS Agreement, when a dispute involves scientific or technical issues, the panel should seek advice from appropriate scientific and technical experts. Scientific experts have been consulted on an individual basis in SPS-related disputes. The experts are usually selected from lists provided by the Codex, IPPC, and OIE, and other relevant organizations. The parties to the dispute are consulted throughout the expert consultation process. In addition, WTO dispute settlement panels may also seek information from relevant international organizations with regard to their standards, guidelines, recommendations and procedures.

31 As of May 2014, more than 478 complaints had formally been raised under the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism. Forty-three complaints were put forward in the context of the SPS Agreement. Twenty-four SPS-related complaints, over the interpretation and application of eleven different SPS measures, have been referred for adjudication by panels.¹² Of the seventeen panel reports adopted, nine contained findings under the SPS Agreement.

32 Ten complaints addressed food-safety related issues:

- complaints by the United States and Canada in 1996 regarding the European Communities' ban on meat treated with growth-promoting hormones; *EC – Hormones* (WT/DS26 and WT/DS48, respectively);
- complaints by the United States, Canada and Argentina in 2006 regarding the European Communities' measures affecting the approval and marketing of biotech products; *EC - Approval and Marketing of Biotech Products* (also referred to as *EC - GMOs*) (WT/DS291, WT/DS292 and WT/DS293, respectively);
- complaints by the European Communities in 2008 regarding the United States' and Canada's continued suspension of obligations relating to the EC-Hormones dispute; *US - Continued Suspension and Canada - Continued Suspension* (WT/DS320 and WT/DS321, respectively);
- complaint by the United States in 2009 regarding European Communities' measures affecting poultry meat and poultry meat products; *EC - Poultry* (WT/DS389);
- complaint by Canada in 2009 regarding Korea's measures affecting the importation of bovine meat and meat products from Canada; *Korea - Bovine Products* (WT/DS391); and
- complaint by China in 2009 regarding US measures affecting imports of poultry; *US - Poultry* (WT/DS392).

33 Dispute settlement panel/Appellate Body reports have been adopted with respect to the following food safety issues: (i) the EU ban on imports of meat treated with growth-promoting hormones, challenged by the United States and by Canada (EC-Hormones) and the subsequent EU challenge of compensatory measures imposed by Canada and the United States; (ii) EU measures affecting the approval and marketing of biotech products, brought by the United States, Canada and Argentina (EC - Approval and Marketing of Biotech Products); and (iii) US measures affecting imports of poultry from China (US - Poultry). No panel has to date been composed to consider the US complaint regarding EU poultry restrictions, and Canada and Korea announced a mutually satisfactory solution in their BSE-related dispute before the panel issued its report.

Recent developments on SPS disputes

34 Argentina requested the establishment of a panel regarding the United States import prohibition of fresh (chilled and frozen) beef due to FMD concerns. The panel was composed on 8 August 2013 and deliberations are on-going.¹³

35 Also ongoing are the deliberations in the case on India's import restrictions on poultry products and pigs due to avian influenza, a dispute initiated by the United States.¹⁴

¹¹ A flow chart of the dispute resolution process is available at http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/disp2_e.htm.

¹² For summaries of all disputes that have cited the SPS Agreement please refer to: http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/dispu_agreements_index_e.htm?id=A19#selected_agreement.

¹³ WT/DS447.

¹⁴ WT/DS430.

36 On 8 April 2014, the European Union requested consultations with Russia regarding measures affecting the importation of live pigs and their genetic material, pork and pork products due to African swine fever.¹⁵

37 The developments in these and other disputes can be followed at <http://www.wto.org/disputes>.

TBT disputes

38 As of January 1995, 49 cases have cited the TBT Agreement in their request for consultations. Nine TBT-related complaints have been referred to a panel.

39 One of these disputes referred to a Codex standard: Peru's complaints against the EU Regulation (EEC) 2136/89 which prevented Peruvian exporters to use the trade description "sardines" for their products.¹⁶

Trade facilitation

40 At the WTO's 9th Ministerial Conference in Bali, Indonesia in December 2013, Members concluded negotiations of a Trade Facilitation (TF) Agreement.¹⁷ Trade facilitation, which in a nutshell could be described as simplification of trade procedures in order to move goods in cross-border trade more efficiently, has been a topic of discussion since the WTO's Singapore Ministerial Conference in December 1996. After several years of exploratory work, WTO Members launched negotiations on trade facilitation in July 2004.

41 The legal review of the TF Agreement was completed on 2 May 2014 and adopted by the Preparatory Committee on Trade Facilitation (PCTF) on 10 July 2014. However, WTO Members failed to formally agree to incorporate the TF Agreement into Annex 1A of the WTO Agreements by 31 July 2015, as had been expected. Once this procedure has been completed, the TF Agreement will enter into force following ratification by two thirds of WTO Members.¹⁸

42 The final text of the TF Agreement consists of three sections. Section I sets out the substantive obligations on facilitating customs and other border procedures in 12 articles. Section II contains special and differential treatment provisions for developing and least-developed countries. These WTO Members have flexibilities in implementing the Agreement, and designated, by 31 July 2014, which commitments they can implement immediately, and which they can only implement with more time and/or technical assistance.¹⁹ Section III is the Institutional Arrangements and Final Provisions where a WTO Committee on Trade Facilitation is established as well as national committee on trade facilitation in each WTO member to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement.

43 The TF Agreement concerns all border agencies – not just customs authorities – and therefore raises interesting questions with regard to its relationship with the SPS and TBT Agreements given that many SPS and TBT controls are implemented at the border. Possible conflicts between the TF and SPS/TBT Agreements are addressed in paragraph 6 of the Final Provisions of the TF Agreement, according to which "nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as diminishing the rights and obligations of Members under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade and the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures". This provision would seem to safeguard the areas in which SPS and TBT provisions differ from those in the TF Agreement. On the other hand, there are a few provisions where the TF Agreement goes beyond the SPS and TBT Agreements and can contribute to facilitating trade in goods subject to SPS and TBT controls, without diminishing Members' existing right to take science-based measures to protect human, animal or plant life or health within their territories, or to pursue other legitimate objectives.

44 The Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility (TFAF) was launched on 23 July 2014 to ensure that TF assistance is provided to all those Members that require it for the implementation of the TF Agreement. The facility will support developing countries and LDCs to assess their specific needs and identify possible development partners to help them meet those needs. The WTO Secretariat will ensure the best possible conditions for the flow of information between development partners and Members by creating an information sharing platform for the demand and supply of TFA related technical assistance, and will assist Members to access the assistance should it be difficult for them to secure funds for project implementation. The facility will also provide funds for the exceptional cases where countries have made thorough attempts to secure assistance but have failed to receive the necessary support.

45 The facility provides support two different types of grants: (i) to assist with preparation of projects, and (ii) to assist with the implementation of the projects. The facility will become operational when the Protocol of Amendment is adopted.

¹⁵ WT/DS475.

¹⁶ WT/DS231.

¹⁷ WT/MIN(13)/36, WT/L/911.

¹⁸ WT/MIN(13)/36, WT/L/911, paragraph 2.

¹⁹ Developing and LDC members are to designate all the substantive provisions in three categories: Category A, which they can implement upon entry into force of the Agreement; Category B, which they can implement only after a transitional period; and Category C, which they can implement only after a transitional period and capacity building.

The Standards and Trade Development Facility

46 The Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) is a fund created by the FAO, OIE, the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to assist developing countries enhance their capacity to meet international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards, improving the human health, animal health and phytosanitary situation, and thus gaining and maintaining market access. The WTO is the administrator of the STDF and provides the secretariat.

47 The STDF is carrying out research work in selected countries in Asia and Africa to identify, analyse and foster dialogue on how to improve the implementation of SPS controls in a way that facilitates safe trade. This work examines how SPS measures are implemented for selected products based on the provisions of the SPS Agreement most directly related to trade facilitation (notably Article 8 and Annex C). The objectives are to: (i) raise awareness about the synergies between the implementation of SPS measures and trade facilitation; (ii) identify key needs, opportunities and good practices to improve the implementation of SPS measures in a way that ensures the appropriate level of health protection while minimizing trade transaction costs; and (iii) make recommendations to enhance future work and technical cooperation focused on SPS and trade facilitation. Consultant's reports documenting the findings of the regional research work will be available by the end of 2014. The background note on the STDF regional research work is available at <http://www.standardsfacility.org>.

48 In this context, the STDF held a thematic session entitled "Implementing SPS Measures to Facilitate Safe Trade" in Geneva on 26 March 2014, back-to-back with the WTO SPS Committee meetings. It provided an opportunity to hear about the preliminary findings and recommendations of three regional studies conducted in Africa, Asia and Latin America and to assess similarities and differences among them.

49 The increasing attention on trade facilitation as a means to stimulate economic growth and competitiveness has generated a renewed focus on SPS measures, how they are applied to imports, exports and transit goods, and the extent to which, if any, these measures unnecessarily increase the cost (including time) of doing business. At the same time, the recent adoption of the WTO Trade Facilitation (TF) Agreement is expected to give further impetus to technical assistance programmes in this area, which provides opportunities to build and strengthen SPS border management capacity.
