

## **Policy recommendations on SPS capacity-building in Tajikistan**

### **Background:**

1. An International Trade Centre mission, funded by SECO, visited Tajikistan in July 2006 to review legislation relevant to the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement) and to make recommendations concerning capacity-building in the areas of food safety and animal and plant health protection. The mission was led by Mr. Digby Gascoine, international consultant to ITC.
2. The SPS capacity of a nation can be defined as its ability to maintain and enhance human, animal and plant life and health by identifying, evaluating and controlling pest and disease risks and ensuring the safety of the food supply by means of sanitary and phytosanitary measures.
3. SPS infrastructure promotes human welfare by protecting life and health against pests, diseases, toxins, and so forth. The economic development of a nation is dependent on SPS infrastructure in many different ways. In the agricultural sector, protection of animals and plants against pests and diseases is crucial in maintaining productivity and in achieving and maintaining access for products into international markets. At the same time the enhancement of agricultural potential by importation of new genetic materials – seeds, semen/ova, live animals and plants, etc. – must not be undermined by the consequential importation of new pests and diseases. The attractiveness of a country for international tourism depends in part on whether potential travellers believe that it will be safe to eat the food at their destination.
4. The SPS Agreement applies only to measures applied by governments. However biosecurity is not achieved by government measures alone. SPS measures are implemented by a combination of public and private sector activities, and their effectiveness therefore depends upon the competence and integrity of both sectors. Public and private sectors must work together in a kind of co-regulatory partnership to achieve SPS objectives in the most efficient way possible. So, for example, a system in which government employees are present in food processing plants to inspect activities and products may be replaced by another approach whereby the government mandates the use of Hazard Analysis/Critical Control Point systems by food producers and audits the HACCP system's performance from time to time. The development of competence in the private sector will therefore play a crucial role in ensuring food safety, especially where the capability of the public sector institutions is constrained by limited resources and low wages.

### **Action recommendation:**

5. Tajikistan's food safety system is in need of a broad modernisation program that should be designed and implemented in a cooperative way by the relevant Ministries, based on a clear understanding on roles and responsibilities within the framework of a farm-to-table approach. Tajikistan's animal health and plant health systems have sound legislation and there are programs in place to try to implement proper control of movements of animal and plant products across international borders; but systems and facilities need to be upgraded and there are many gaps to be filled.

6. All key parties interviewed in Tajikistan by the mission team agreed that the present situation concerning SPS capacity in Tajikistan is not well understood, and that **it would be desirable to conduct a systematic and comprehensive SPS capacity assessment in each of the fields of animal health/quarantine, plant health/quarantine, and food safety**. The purpose of these capacity assessments would be to identify major weaknesses and gaps in the existing capability, having regard to current and future threats and to prospective needs for enhanced capacity in the light of opportunities to increase export trade in agricultural products.

7. From these assessments it would be feasible to:

- identify capacity improvements that should be made;
- give them a priority ranking;
- design projects that would implement the necessary improvements, and
- present these projects as part of a coherent plan.

By this process it would be possible to give donors the opportunity to support efficient and effective SPS capacity-building by funding well-designed projects. The ITC consultants assess that there is a very good chance of attracting significant additional international funding for SPS capacity-building in Tajikistan if sound project proposals are brought forward within the framework of a proper plan.

8. The proposed capacity assessments should be carried out using the methodologies developed for this purpose by the relevant international organisations: the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the FAO (for food safety), and the secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). The capacity assessment tools cannot provide useful guidance on capacity-building needs and priorities if they are used in a mechanical way. They are best regarded as comprehensive frameworks for gathering the information required for needs assessment. The evaluation of the data that are gathered should be carried out by national experts, in consultation with international experts who know international requirements and the approaches that have been followed in other countries.

9. The OIE is currently engaged in a program of applying its veterinary-sanitary capacity evaluation tool in 15 countries. The World Bank has taken a decision that it will not in future provide technical assistance in the veterinary-sanitary field without a prior assessment of this kind. Clearly it would be in the interest of Tajikistan to seek to have an evaluation carried out. The first step in this process is for the chief veterinary officer, who is Tajikistan's representative to the OIE, to make a formal request to the Director-General of the OIE.

## **Relationship to NDS/PRSP**

10. Tajikistan's National Development Strategy is being drawn up. Its Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) is now also undergoing revision, for completion towards the end of the year. The action recommendation described above is fully consistent with the methodology of the PRS:

- analyse the national economic situation and prospects, with emphasis on growth constraints;
- systematically identify the strategies and policies that will facilitate growth;
- identify the programs that need to be implemented to give effect to these strategies and policies;
- identify the capacity-building initiatives that are required, in both the public and private sectors;
- seek support from donors by a consultative process for capacity-building programs.

This approach aims to link capacity-building to the over-riding goals of poverty-reducing growth and welfare enhancement, to facilitate coordination between donors, and to avoid piecemeal technical assistance initiatives.

11. The PRS methodology is particularly applicable to development of national sanitary and phytosanitary capability. This is especially true if there are SPS issues that may constrain exports of agricultural products and/or the import of superior genetic material (such as cotton seed) to improve the productivity of the domestic industry; the overcoming of such technical barriers to trade should be a major driver of the SPS capacity enhancement plan.

International Trade Centre

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