
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

**GOOD PRACTICE IN SPS-RELATED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
AN OVERVIEW AND SYNTHESIS OF THE FINDINGS OF STDF/OECD RESEARCH**

Note by the Secretariat¹

Summary

1. This paper provides an overview of research on good practice in SPS-related technical assistance, carried out by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The underlying purpose was to examine how the Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness can be applied in the highly technical area of SPS-related technical assistance.
2. The research was based on replies to a request for information on good practice in SPS-related technical cooperation (G/SPS/GEN/816 and G/SPS/GEN/816/Add.1) in Central America, East Africa and the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region (GMS). Twenty four projects – six in East Africa, eight in Central America and 10 in the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region – were nominated as examples of good practice. In-country interviews were subsequently carried out with project beneficiaries and partners from June to August 2008. Individual reports have been published documenting the findings and conclusions in Central America (G/SPS/GEN/874), East Africa (G/SPS/GEN/871), and the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-Region (G/SPS/GEN/872).
3. This document discusses aspects of good practice in terms of project design, implementation, outputs and the achievement of higher-order objectives (i.e. improved SPS situation, market access, impact on poverty alleviation, etc.). The research concludes that while "one size does not fit all", the Paris Principles offer sound guidance to enhance the effectiveness and impact of future SPS-related technical assistance.
4. The research singled out the following good practice elements in project design: (i) paying attention to the country context and absorptive capacity; (ii) promoting ownership; (iii) systematically assessing and prioritizing needs; (iv) ensuring transparency, connectivity and sequencing of activities; (v) adopting a value chain approach to maximize the market access impact; (vi) promoting the active involvement of all concerned stakeholders including the private sector; and (vii) considering the challenges and potential benefits of a regional vs. national approach.
5. Recognizing ownership as the foundation for aid effectiveness, the research underlined the challenge of achieving a demand-driven approach when national stakeholders in some countries (particularly least developed countries) are unaware of the importance of SPS capacity and/or lack understanding about prevailing SPS constraints and opportunities, and how to respond to them most

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

effectively. In such cases, there may be a case for "supply-driven" activities to sensitize decision-makers as to the importance of SPS capacity-building. Involving concerned public and private sector groups in assessing needs was seen as an effective way to increase ownership, design activities that are relevant and cost-effective, and promote linkages with completed, ongoing and/or planned assistance as appropriate. The benefits of a value-chain approach to design focused interventions that address related needs along the whole product chain was identified as a way to maximize market access opportunities.

6. In terms of implementation, the main lessons that emerged concerned the need to: (i) use strengthened country expertise and systems; (ii) ensure flexibility in implementation; (iii) pay attention to results-based management including monitoring and evaluation; and (iv) promote active learning and link skills development to practice. The importance of strengthening managerial capacity in the agencies responsible for SPS-related technical assistance (including skills to assess needs, formulate bankable projects, manage and coordinate technical assistance, etc.) was emphasized.

7. Three main lessons were drawn regarding good practice in project outputs and the achievement of higher-order objectives: (i) maximize impacts and sustainability through greater participation of beneficiaries; (ii) consider market distortions and promote sustainability in project activities and impact; and (iii) follow a multi-tiered structure of objectives.

8. The difficulties inherent in quantifying the impact of technical cooperation projects, particularly the achievement of higher-order objectives, were recognized. The fact that impact is experienced well beyond the timeframe of projects themselves makes it difficult to attribute impacts to specific interventions. Furthermore, many countries have received a variety of SPS-related technical assistance projects with similar objectives and it is complex to link particular changes in levels of SPS capacity and/or higher-order impacts to a specific project.

9. The research acknowledges that capacity building in the area of SPS is complex, involving multiple actors, needs and sources of financing. These factors, combined in some instances with the absence of clearly identified goals and/or understanding about what is needed to strengthen SPS capacity, impede the wider application of the Paris Principles. Contextual factors, particularly absorptive capacity and the nature of governance in the SPS sector, significantly influence the ability of donors and beneficiaries to apply the Paris Principles.

10. Based on the findings, recommendations are drawn for the providers and recipients of SPS-related technical assistance, and possible areas for future work identified.

11. The providers of SPS-related technical assistance are encouraged to:

- i. Focus on ownership and increase the involvement of beneficiaries in project design and implementation. Where awareness of SPS issues is lacking, sensitization of decision-makers may be a necessary preliminary step;
- ii. Promote greater harmonization in the planning and delivery of technical assistance;
- iii. Adopt a value chain and results-oriented approach to maximize market access; and
- iv. Promote integration of SPS-capacity building with investment and private sector development programmes.

12. The recipients of SPS-related technical assistance are encouraged to:
 - i. Assess and prioritize SPS-related capacity building needs in collaboration with all stakeholders concerned in particular the private sector; and
 - ii. Develop national strategies and action plans to guide SPS-related capacity building.
13. Recommendations for possible future work focus on:
 - i. Expanding the use of cost-benefit analysis to guide the design of SPS-related technical assistance as a means to ensure that available resources are focused on areas where they achieve the maximum rate of return and greatest trade impact;
 - ii. Making greater use of available capacity evaluation approaches to assess SPS needs and priorities in a more systematic manner and build knowledge and skills on needs assessment in developing countries; and
 - iii. Tracking the achievement of higher-order objectives through monitoring and evaluation of the impact of SPS-related technical cooperation at a systems level, focusing on the performance over-time rather than trying to attach specific impacts to individual projects. Such an approach focusing on the cumulative effects of assistance would help identify the benefits for the broader economy and generate data on rates of return on capacity building as a whole.

Introduction

14. This paper provides an overview of research on good practice in SPS-related technical cooperation carried out by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).² The research was based on replies to a request for information on good practice in SPS-related technical cooperation (G/SPS/GEN/816 and add.1) in three regions: Central America, East Africa and the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region (GMS)³. The paper also builds on a report on good practice in SPS-related technical assistance commissioned by the STDF.⁴ The underlying theme of this research was to examine how the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness can best be applied in the highly-technical area of SPS-related capacity building.⁵

15. A total of 24 projects were put forward as examples of good practice in response to the information request (see Annex 1). The projects represent a good cross-section of the type of SPS-related technical cooperation offered in terms of technical and geographic scope, timeframe and budget.

² This overview paper is based on three regional research papers published in September 2008: (i) Good Practice in SPS-Related Technical Cooperation. Central America Sub-region. Jason Hafemeister (G/SPS/GEN/874); (ii) Good Practice in SPS-Related Technical Cooperation. East Africa Region Report. Spencer Henson and Oliver Masakure (G/SPS/GEN/871); and (iii) Good Practice in SPS-Related Technical Cooperation. Greater Mekong Sub-Region. Cornelis van der Meer and Laura L. Ignacio (G/SPS/GEN/872).

³ The following countries were included in this research: Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama); East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) and Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region (Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and Viet Nam).

⁴ Gascoigne, D. 2007. Identification of Parameters for Good Practice and Benchmarks for Judging the Impact of SPS-Related Technical Assistance. Report for the Standards and Trade Development Facility, Geneva. Available at: www.standardsfacility.org.

⁵ OECD. 2005. Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Available at: www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html

16. Fieldwork in beneficiary countries was carried out by three consultants from June to August 2008 to examine the projects nominated as examples of good practice. The research sought to identify elements of good practice which could be replicated in future projects, particularly with regard to project design, implementation, outputs and the achievement of higher-order objectives (i.e. improved SPS situation, market access, impact on poverty alleviation, etc.).

17. Several challenges were encountered in during the fieldwork, notably:

- the impact of technical cooperation projects, particularly the achievement of higher-order objectives, is experienced well beyond the timeframe of projects themselves, which makes it difficult to attribute impacts to specific interventions;
- many developing countries have received several SPS-related technical assistance projects with similar objectives, making it problematical to establish cause and effect for specific projects;
- the types of information available for nominated projects in each region differed, making it difficult to compare and contrast experiences within and across regions; and
- in some cases, staff turnover in donor and beneficiary organizations meant that some of the persons responsible for project activities were unavailable for interview.

Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness

18. Endorsed by 114 countries and 25 international organizations, the 2005 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* sets out a roadmap of practical commitments, organized around five key principles (see Box 1), each of which has a set of indicators of achievement.

Box 1. The Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness, 2005	
<i>Ownership</i>	Partner countries exercise effective leadership over their development policies, and strategies and coordinate development actions.
<i>Alignment</i>	Donors base their overall support on partner countries' national development strategies, institutions and procedures.
<i>Harmonization</i>	Donors' actions are more harmonized, transparent and collectively effective.
<i>Managing for results</i>	Managing resources and improving decision-making for results.
<i>Mutual accountability</i>	Donors and partners are accountable for development results.
<i>Source: Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Available at: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf.</i>	

19. To accelerate implementation of the Paris Principles, the *Accra Agenda for Action* was adopted at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Accra, Ghana in September 2008 (see Box 2).

Box 2. Some key points in the Accra Agenda for Action, 4 September 2008

- **Predictability:** Donors will provide information on their future planned assistance to partner countries (3-4 years in advance).
- **Participation:** Developing country governments and donors will engage a broader range of stakeholders in preparing, implementing and monitoring national development policies and plans.
- **Country systems:** Partner country systems will be used to deliver assistance as the first option, rather than donor systems.
- **Partnerships:** Recognition of the role and valuable contributions of different types of stakeholders (e.g. local governments, private sector, civil society, etc.) and development of inclusive partnerships that address management and coordination challenges.
- **Demand-driven approach:** Donors' support for capacity development will be demand-driven and designed to support country ownership.
- **Reduced fragmentation:** Donors will reduce the fragmentation of aid by improving the complementarity of their efforts and the division of labour among them, including through improved allocation of resources within sectors, within countries, and across countries.

Source: Accra Agenda for Action. Available at: www.accralhlf.net.

Key lessons for good practice in the design of SPS-related technical cooperation projects

Country context and absorptive capacity

20. Country context and absorptive capacity were identified as critical factors influencing the success of SPS capacity building projects. Significant differences in absorptive capacity in the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-Region – evident through variations in institutional arrangements for SPS management and the availability of technical and managerial expertise – were seen as affecting national ownership and the ability of countries to direct, manage and maximize the benefits of available assistance. As such, it was observed that:

- performance was generally weaker in countries with the lowest absorptive capacity;
- projects that work in more advanced countries may not be appropriate for countries with limited absorptive capacity; and
- the outcomes of regional projects could be improved by better tailoring support to in-country needs and conditions including absorptive capacity.

Ownership and demand- vs. supply-driven technical assistance

21. The Paris Declaration recognizes ownership as the foundation for aid effectiveness. Experience shows that technical assistance is most effective when it supports countries' own development efforts and goals, and has the commitment of key stakeholders in the country. It is less effective when it is donor-driven. Research in all three regions highlighted that enhancing national ownership demands a strong role for project beneficiaries in the design and implementation of projects, including in needs identification, appraisal and priority-setting. It further emphasized the importance of political commitment and buy-in. Where high-level awareness and appreciation of the need for capacity building is missing, necessary institutional change can be impeded and the financial allocations required to operate and maintain capacity are less likely to be made.

22. Several of the projects considered recognized the importance of enhancing national ownership. In East Africa, the EC-funded Pesticides Initiative Programme (PIP) was recognized as an

example of good practice in obtaining political support through the establishment and/or strengthening of task forces involving the public and private sectors, dissemination of timely and reliable information, and engagement with the media. FAO's efforts to link food safety needs assessments in Tanzania and Kenya to action plans, and carry out activities to encourage national governments to adopt these plans, provided a platform to promote political support and enhance accountability for future capacity building efforts.

23. The challenge of promoting demand-driven modes of technical cooperation when national stakeholders are not aware, and/or lack understanding, of the SPS challenges they face emerged as a key finding. In these circumstances, the regional report for East Africa concluded that assistance might be more meaningfully supply-driven in certain contexts, for example where:

- prevailing levels of SPS-related capacity are weak in the public and/or private sectors, such that there may be lack of awareness of the need for, and/or nature of, specific elements of capacity;
- SPS requirements in export markets are changing rapidly and the ability to capture information on evolving SPS requirements is weak and/or not explicitly linked to decision-making processes; and
- acute risks/emergencies arise that require rapid action, especially where these risks are new and local capacity to address them is weak.

24. The difficulties inherent in ensuring effective national leadership and coordination of technical assistance when existing levels of SPS-related capacity are weak underlines the need to raise awareness about the importance of SPS capacity among public and private sector stakeholders and increase their ability to identify and prioritize their capacity needs, and formulate these needs into bankable projects.

Needs analysis is a starting point for good practice in the provision of SPS related technical assistance

25. The importance of systematically assessing and prioritizing needs emerged as a clear conclusion in all three regions studied. Carrying out a needs assessment was seen as a useful way to: (i) obtain the views of relevant public and private sector groups on proposed activities; (ii) identify the costs and benefits of the proposed activities; (iii) build on existing levels of capacity as well as any relevant completed, ongoing and/or planned assistance; and (iv) generate necessary information for log frame design and monitoring.

26. Some type of needs assessment was undertaken in most of the projects nominated as examples of good practice. However, the East Africa regional report noted that the form taken by these assessments was unclear, not all the concerned stakeholders were consulted and/or different approaches were employed, which created inconsistencies, increased transaction costs for beneficiaries and impeded the application of good practice. To respond to these problems, the wider use of existing capacity assessment tools was recommended to promote consistency and build skills and knowledge of developing country officials in needs assessment.

27. Research in Viet Nam, Cambodia and Lao PDR further underlined the importance of taking a broad public perspective in assessing needs – rather than narrowly focusing on the interests of the main public and/or private recipients of resources – to ensure that considerations related to impact, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of proposed assistance receive adequate attention. Similarly, the importance of consulting potential users of services as well as service providers, and considering the

relevance of proposed assistance, especially in terms of its contribution to higher-order objectives, was emphasized.

Transparency, connectivity and sequencing of SPS-related technical assistance

28. The Paris Principles commit the providers and recipients of technical assistance to achieve greater harmonization and transparency in technical assistance. Building linkages with relevant completed, ongoing and/or planned assistance was seen as critical to the efficacy and sustainability of capacity-building efforts. The research underlined that this was particularly important for the planning and implementation of SPS-related technical assistance, given the number and diversity of national and donor institutions involved.

29. Concrete steps have been taken to improve linkages and synergies in the design and implementation of their activities (see Box 3). However, coordination and transparency in SPS-related technical assistance remains inadequate and duplication persists, resulting in increased transaction costs for beneficiaries, inefficient use of scarce resources and less than optimal outcomes.

Box 3: Promoting harmonization in SPS-related technical assistance

Regional research in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam recognized the efforts of donors to promote greater harmonization in their activities. For instance, the regional Southeast Asia Foot and Mouth Disease Programme (SEAFMD) involved the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and Australia, and was linked to a more general SPS capacity building programme supported by Australia. Danida's Fishborne Zoonotic Parasites Project in Viet Nam fed into the National Fisheries Sector Programme Support (FSPS). The market access support programmes in Viet Nam and the GMS, funded by Switzerland (SECO) and Norway (NORAD) respectively, are components of UNIDO's integrated programme of assistance for Viet Nam. The SECO-UNIDO project itself is an intervention arising from the needs assessment conducted by the NORAD-UNIDO project.

30. The Paris Principles recognize that inadequate attention to sequencing and excessive fragmentation of assistance at the global, country or sector level impairs effectiveness. As such, technical assistance should be planned and delivered so that projects build on each other and ensure synergies with related activities. This research acknowledged the importance of sequencing; there is no point in developing capacities higher up the SPS hierarchy if more basic types of capacity are missing.⁶ Beneficiaries supported the view that partial support for complex capacity building processes easily results in less than optimum effectiveness and sustainability. For instance, some of the beneficiaries interviewed in the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region and East Africa expressed frustration that they could not effectively utilize new skills acquired through training because of inadequate facilities and equipment in their home countries. There was consensus that a more effective approach is generally to provide substantive and well-targeted support as part of a comprehensive and long-term SPS capacity building process.

31. In a few of the projects studied, it emerged that implementation was constrained by inadequate resources. For instance, one of the frustrations noted by beneficiaries of the PIP was the inability of the project to support capital investments or staff costs. While this may have been deemed appropriate, the efficacy of some of the support provided by PIP was compromised somewhat by the inability of beneficiaries to access resources from other donor programmes or the financial sector.

⁶ Sequencing is understood to mean building capacity in a step-by-step manner so that activities are planned and delivered in a logical order to maximize impact.

Value-chain approach

32. The research in Central America highlighted the benefits of adopting a value-chain approach in the design of SPS-related technical assistance (see Box 4). Such a comprehensive approach provided a means to identify and address the need for complementary interventions – targeted at producers, private enterprises and concerned parts of government (including agencies responsible for inspection, testing and diagnosis, certification, etc.) – along the whole commodity chain from production to export. This was seen as a way to maximize market access and increase exports by strengthening the regulatory framework for SPS management and increasing the competitiveness of an industry and the firms within it.

Box 4. Value-chain approach to project design in Central America

The project to enhance the ability of Central American countries to comply with USDA regulatory requirements for exports of peppers and tomatoes set specific objectives and targeted stakeholders with different roles and responsibilities along the value-chain. Training was tailored to particular groups involved in production, packing, inspection, diagnosis and certification to ensure a comprehensive approach. Similarly, the Chinese Taipei papaya export promotion project worked with producers to increase yield and control pests, built an operational packing facility, assisted producers with import certification and provided marketing assistance. Both projects have resulted in increased exports, in some cases with substantial exports developing into markets that had been closed to exporters from the country, with sizeable increases forecast in the near future.

33. Several of the projects studied in Central America demonstrate how the use of a value chain approach can:

- increase political support for proposed project activities through the identification of clear economic benefits;
- enhance project design through the definition of appropriate objectives, targeted interventions and quantifiable indicators of success; and
- ensure that tangible economic benefits remain after the project has ended.

Active involvement of all concerned stakeholders including the private sector

34. The research in all three regions underlined that active involvement of all the concerned stakeholders, including the private sector, is crucial for project effectiveness and sustainability. Beneficiary participation was singled out as important for building ownership and facilitating coordination. In the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-Region and East Africa, several of the projects studied were strongly government focused even where impact also depended significantly on private sector involvement. The Japanese-funded project focused on thermal treatment for the disinfestation of fruit flies in Viet Nam provides a good example of how the private sector can be involved to enhance outcomes; in this case, project activities will be scaled up to a commercial size by private companies.

35. In Central America, most of the nominated projects worked closely with the private sector. In several cases, projects worked with producers' associations in the beneficiary countries to effectively target and enhance collaboration with farmers and processors, and utilize existing information exchange networks (see Box 5).

Box 5. Collaboration with Producers' Organizations in Central America

In Costa Rica, producer's associations took the lead in developing the *Broca de Café* project and provided a substantial financial contribution to support the project's activities. The project to establish a fruit fly free zone in Costa Rica involved producers in the selection of participants for training and implementation of monitoring and control programmes. In the U.S.-supported pepper and tomato project, producers associations helped to organize training seminars and identify sites for conducting demonstration projects. In Guatemala, local producer's groups effectively involved their members in activities of the export promotion project, supported by Chinese Taipei.

Regional vs. national approach to SPS-related capacity building

36. Several of the projects nominated as examples of good practice were regional in scope. The research concluded that a regional approach is most appropriate when addressing transboundary issues related to the management of plant pests and/or animal diseases, economic cooperation and/or trade promotion. For some of the projects considered, a regional focus shared knowledge and skills across countries, enhancing implementation and enabling benefits to be leveraged (Box 6).

Box 6. Promoting professional networks through a regional approach

A number of the projects considered in East Africa developed networks of practitioners whether as an intended impact or secondary consequence. The USDA-funded East Africa Phytosanitary Information Committee project successfully achieved its objective to establish a useful network of practitioners and organizations involved in the management of plant pests and diseases through engendering a high degree of local ownership and control. Less formal beneficiary networks also emerged from the WHO Global Salm-Surv training programme and the Swedish-supported Advanced Training Programme on Quality Infrastructure for Food Safety as potential long-term networks for sharing knowledge and experiences. In Central America, the FAO-sponsored laboratory project built on existing professional networks to share information and expertise in the region.

37. Yet the research also observed that effectively designing and implementing a regional approach is challenging. Common difficulties faced in pursuing a regional approach include: (i) the longer timeframes required for project preparation and decision-making; (ii) relatively high costs; and (iii) difficulties to design and implement activities where there are significant differences in needs, potential benefits and/or absorptive capacity across the countries/stakeholders involved. The regional report for the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region concluded that due to variations in levels of development and absorptive capacity, technical cooperation projects should be carried out as much as possible at the national level, with regional approaches focused on particular areas of significant interaction and interdependency among countries.

Key lessons for good practice in project implementation

Use of strengthened country expertise and systems

38. The Paris Principles support the use of country systems, procedures and expertise to the maximum extent possible. In general, however, donors, international agencies and consultants continue to lead the design and *de facto* implementation of SPS projects. There are compelling reasons for this including the absence of national strategies or frameworks for SPS capacity building, limited management capacity and/or technical skills in national counterpart agencies, concerns about inappropriate use of resources and/or pressure to spend budgets on time. Nevertheless, national-led design and implementation of SPS-related projects should be encouraged as a means to enhance ownership, strengthen the capacity of national authorities and contribute towards ongoing learning (see Box 7).

Box 7. Investing in local capacity to deliver training and consultancy services

One of the key elements of good practice in the PIP was the level of effort and investment in local capacity to deliver training and consultancy services to beneficiaries. Thus, while international consultants were used initially in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, over time a critical body of local private service providers was established through training and the provision of materials. These private service providers were then included on the list of approved consultants from which firms receiving PIP support could be selected. In all three countries, the capacity-building needs of exporters can now be met locally.

Flexibility

39. Research in each of the three regions confirmed that it is good practice to build flexibility into project execution and the definition and assessment of intended impacts. Circumstances may change, unforeseen challenges may arise and priorities can shift over time. What can reasonably be achieved where prevailing public and/or private sector capacity is relatively strong will noticeably differ from circumstances where a nascent industry or SPS management system is weak. Technical cooperation projects need to be able to account for such differences, especially where a project is applied across countries and/or sectors, to avoid adopting a one size fits all model and/or judging the impacts of an intervention in differing contexts using the same indicators. The need for flexibility was seen as being especially important in regional projects to ensure that the scope of interventions and their modes of delivery could be adapted as required to accommodate varying needs and capacities across multiple recipients of assistance.

Results-based management including monitoring and evaluation

40. Managing for results means managing and implementing assistance in a way that focuses on the desired results and uses information to improve decision-making. Results-based management requires close attention to the linkages between goals, objectives, outputs and inputs tied to effective monitoring and evaluation systems. This can be achieved through a good logical framework or log frame, an analytical tool to support project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. While the log frame approach is applied by many international organizations and donors, research in the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region highlighted that only some of the projects there had developed a log frame and that several of the projects that had a log frame did not effectively use it to support results-based management.

41. Managing for results requires a minimum level of capacity to formulate and implement SPS-focused policies and manage public resources to achieve goals. Yet, the research highlighted that qualified and experienced managers are scarce in the SPS services of many countries.⁷ As a way of strengthening this capacity, donors agreed in the Paris Principles to increasingly entrust the management of aid to developing countries. However, as indicated above, ownership remains weak. One of the conclusions emerging from the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region therefore focused on the need to build skills to manage technical assistance in general, and SPS issues in particular, especially in countries with weak absorptive capacity.

Active learning and linking skills development to practice

42. Several of the projects nominated as examples of good practice were focused on, or included components for, training. The research indicated that training was most effective when it was linked to the specific needs and daily duties of beneficiaries. Similarly, the impact of training reflected not only the content and mode of delivery, but also the choice of participants.

⁷ Gascoigne. 2007. Identification of Parameters for Good Practice and Benchmarks for Judging the Impact of SPS-Related Technical Assistance. Report for the Standards and Trade Development Facility, Geneva.

43. The research findings from East Africa emphasized that training only generates substantive and sustainable capacity if the individuals selected have the necessary skills and experience, as well as the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in their day to day work. Training programmes directed at more senior officials, who are not directly involved in the application of technical knowledge and skills, diluted the impact of training.

Key lessons for good practice in project outputs, impact and achievement of higher-order objectives

Maximizing impacts and sustainability through greater participation of beneficiaries

44. The Paris Principles commit donors to actively engage with beneficiaries and to give them a leading role in project design and preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Yet the research undertaken for this study indicates that technical assistance is frequently more supply-driven than demand-driven and, at times, fragmented in part due to the absence of coherent plans for SPS capacity building. These factors may result in less than optimal outcomes and achievements, and reduce sustainability. For instance, findings from research in the Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region pointed to the challenges posed by weak demand for services, both from the private sector and government authorities, putting at risk the sustainability of some project activities, which cannot be guaranteed without follow-up actions to safeguard achievements and implement the capacity created.

45. Private enterprises are responsible for exports of food and agricultural products and generally understand best what is required to respond to market access constraints. As such, actively involving the private sector in the design and implementation of SPS-related technical assistance will help to ensure that the activities implemented meet a clear need, are cost-effective and achieve the expected objectives in a sustainable manner.

46. Finally, it is important to recognize that the Paris Principles require the beneficiaries of technical assistance to exercise leadership in developing and implementing national development strategies through broad consultative processes, clearly identify and prioritize their needs, and play a leading role in the coordination of assistance based on dialogue with donors and participation from civil society and the private sector.

Market distortions and sustainability

47. In East Africa, the research recognized that while technical cooperation projects and programmes create demand for capacity building, they may also distort markets for such services. The East Africa report observed that when prevailing levels of capacity and market demand are low, external support is often critical to lay down basic and broad-based functions that avoid sequencing problems in establishing higher-level SPS functions. At the same time, donor support can act to inflate market prices, crowding out genuine market demand and inflating demand among beneficiaries that do not bear the consequences should capacity building efforts fail and/or the markets they supply do not demand such services.

48. The allocation of funds based on a cost-sharing arrangement was put forward as a means to increase the sustainability of project activities (see Box 8). For instance, exporters benefitting from the PIP had a greater stake in investments made under the project because all assistance was provided on a cost-sharing basis. Beneficiaries were further encouraged to achieve and demonstrate progress by linking support to agreed action plans and releasing tranches of funds conditional on achievement of agreed milestones.

Box 8. Promoting sustainability in project activities and impacts

The PIP has been particularly effective in encouraging the active engagement of beneficiaries to enhance sustainability, for example through the use of Memoranda of Understanding with beneficiaries linked to agreed action plans. Thus, individual beneficiaries are able to track their own progress, while taking responsibility for ensuring capacity is developed as agreed. Because capacity is developed on a cost-sharing basis, beneficiaries have a stake in their own development and an incentive to ensure that funds are appropriately spent and activities delivered on schedule.

Multi-tiered structure of objectives and intended impacts

49. While the projects considered during this research were generally focused on enhancing specific aspects of SPS capacity, the achievement of higher-level impacts (for example increased value of exports) was sometimes a related objective. The findings from all three regions reiterated the importance of clearly defining specific and well-targeted objectives. Adopting a realistic approach and setting sensible goals about what can be achieved across all of the defined impacts, based on levels of prevailing capacity, was singled out. The East Africa report observed that it is better that interventions are successful in achieving a little than unsuccessful in achieving a lot.

50. The research findings also raised the need to recognize the likely “cumulative impact” of technical assistance projects in the SPS area and related fields. While the importance of attempting to measure such impacts was recognized, the difficulties of separating out the specific impacts of individual projects was also noted.

Conclusions and recommendations: Expanding good practice in SPS-related technical cooperation

51. Capacity building in the area of SPS is complex, involving multiple actors, needs and sources of financing. These factors, combined in some instances with the absence of clearly identified goals and/or understanding about what is needed to strengthen SPS capacity, impede the wider application of the Paris Principles. Contextual factors, particularly the absorptive capacity of countries and the nature of governance in the SPS sector, significantly influence the ability of donors and beneficiaries to apply the Paris Principles in SPS-related technical assistance.

52. Promoting national ownership is problematic when stakeholders at the country level are unaware of the importance of SPS capacity and/or lack understanding about prevailing SPS constraints and opportunities, and how to respond to them most effectively. Against this background there may be a case for "supply-driven" activities to sensitize beneficiaries as to the importance of SPS capacity-building.

53. The need for greater attention to the impact and sustainability of SPS-related technical assistance projects at the project design stage emerged as a key conclusion. In this context, the research highlighted the importance of:

- carefully considering the relevance and costs and benefits of the proposed activities;
- sequencing activities to ensure that the basic foundations of an SPS system are in place before more advanced capacity is developed;
- creating stronger linkages with the private sector, including potential users of services and groups that could assume responsibility for financing and delivering activities after the end of the project;

- making use of log frames to better understand the linkages between project inputs and outputs; and
- effectively using M&E systems to track progress.

54. Experiences in Central America clearly demonstrated how the use of a value chain approach provided a framework to effectively target public and private sector groups and focus assistance on particular commodities and markets where it would have the greatest impact on trade performance. The main role of government is to provide an enabling legal and regulatory framework for the management of SPS issues, including available technical assistance, in the context of a global SPS environment that is increasingly competitive and challenging. The private sector needs to understand and be able to comply with SPS measures and related international requirements.

55. A common criticism of technical assistance projects is that they expend too high a proportion of funds on goods and services supplied from outside the beneficiary country.⁸ Beneficiaries, on the other hand, may prefer that procurement be concentrated to the maximum extent possible within their territory to stimulate domestic economic activity or for other reasons. In general, the guiding principle should be to design SPS-related projects to maximize the surplus of benefits over costs, and to source inputs from international, regional or national sources as appropriate.

56. The Paris Principles are a point of reference rather than a matter of prescription for SPS-related technical assistance. One size does not fit all. Nevertheless, the Paris Principles provide sound guidance for enhancing the effectiveness and impact of future SPS-related technical assistance, and more attention is needed to expand their use in SPS-related technical assistance. The following recommendations are offered to this end.

Recommendations for the providers of SPS-related technical assistance

- *Focus on ownership and increase the involvement of beneficiaries in project design and implementation:* Enhancing ownership requires a stronger role for beneficiaries from the public and private sectors in project design and implementation. Enhancing managerial capacity (including skills to assess needs, identify priorities, develop bankable project proposals, plan and coordinate technical assistance, and monitor progress) as well as technical expertise will be essential to achieve this. The shift towards programme-based approaches offers potential to better align donor assistance with national priorities (although this presupposes that SPS figures among these priorities).
- *Promote greater harmonization in the planning and delivery of technical assistance:* Donors are making efforts to ensure greater harmonization in SPS-related technical assistance but more needs to be done to improve coordination in planning and implementation to make the most effective use of available resources and ensure that the final impact is greater than the sum of its parts.
- *Adopt a value chain and results-oriented approach to maximize trade impact:* Taking a value chain and results-oriented approach will help to target resources for SPS capacity building to specific areas where they are likely to have the greatest trade impact.
- *Promote integration of SPS-capacity building with investment and private sector development programmes.* One particular complaint levelled against SPS capacity building projects is that they

⁸ Gascoigne. 2007. Identification of Parameters for Good Practice and Benchmarks for Judging the Impact of SPS-Related Technical Assistance. Report for the Standards and Trade Development Facility, Geneva.

tend not to include provision for investment either at a company level or in infrastructure. Support to enhance technical expertise and managerial skills, combined with complementary investment flows as part of a comprehensive and long-term SPS capacity building process would enhance impacts and sustainability.

Recommendations for the recipients of SPS-related TA

- *Assess and prioritize SPS-related capacity building needs in collaboration with all stakeholders concerned:* Identifying and prioritizing SPS capacity needs is essential to raise awareness about prevailing constraints and opportunities facing the public and private sectors, and identify the most cost-effective and relevant options to respond to them. Assessing needs can also help to clarify institutional responsibilities and increase awareness about synergies in the roles of different types of stakeholders.
- *Develop national strategies and action plans to guide SPS-related capacity building:* Comprehensive and coherent national strategies and action plans for SPS-related capacity building – developed on the basis of a systematic and thorough needs assessment and in partnership with all the concerned stakeholders – would provide a framework for SPS capacity building and a clear set of priorities for donors to align behind. This would enhance efforts to focus technical assistance on priority needs and optimize efforts to match demand for technical assistance to the available supply.

Other recommendations for possible future work

- *Use of cost-benefit analysis to guide the design of SPS-related technical assistance⁹:* Cost-benefit analysis provides a means to ensure that available resources are focused on the areas where they would achieve the greatest rate of return. Additional work to promote and expand the use of cost-benefit analysis more widely at the project design stage, as a means to ensure that available resources are allocated to areas where they would achieve the greatest trade impact, would be beneficial.
- *Systematic use of available capacity evaluation approaches:* Different evaluation tools have been developed to assess capacity needs in the SPS area.¹⁰ Making more systematic use of these tools would enable capacity needs to be assessed in a consistent manner across the SPS area. It would also provide opportunities to develop capacity assessment skills in developing countries that would empower beneficiaries to better identify their SPS priorities and needs.
- *Tracking the achievement of higher-order objectives:* This research has underscored some of the difficulties inherent in linking project outputs to the achievement of higher-order objectives. Monitoring and evaluating the impact of SPS-related technical cooperation at a systems level would facilitate a focus on overall performance over-time, rather than trying to attach specific impacts to individual projects. Focusing on the cumulative effects of assistance in this way would help to identify the benefits for the broader economy and generate data on rates of return on capacity building as a whole.

⁹ Gascoigne. Identification of Parameters for Good Practice and Benchmarks for Judging the Impact of SPS-Related Technical Assistance. Report for the Standards and Trade Development Facility, Geneva.

¹⁰ These include the FAO Guidelines and Quick Guide to Assess Capacity Building Needs of National Food Control Systems, the FAO Guide to Assess Biosecurity Capacity, the IPPC's Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) Tool, the OIE's Tool for Evaluation of the Performance of National Veterinary Services (OIE-PVS), and the Performance, Vision and Strategy tools developed by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture for food safety, veterinary services and plant health. See G/SPS/GEN/821 (<http://docsonline.wto.org/DDFDocuments/t/g/sp/GEN821.doc>).

Annex 1. Responses to the WTO/OECD questionnaire survey

Region	Project	No. of projects nominated
East Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pesticides Initiative Programme (PIP): Nominated by EC EuropeAid • East Africa Phytosanitary Information Committee: Nominated by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) • Capacity-Building Needs Assessments: Nominated by FAO • Advanced Training Programme on Quality Infrastructure for Food Safety: Nominated by Sweden • Global Salm-Surv Training Programme on Laboratory-Based Surveillance of Food-Borne Diseases for Anglophone Central and Eastern Africa: Nominated by WHO • Study on Costs of Agri-Food Safety and SPS Compliance in Tanzania, Mozambique and Guinea: Nominated by UNCTAD 	6
Central America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of <i>Broca de Café</i> pest in Panama and Costa Rica: Nominated by Costa Rica • Establishment of fruit fly free areas: Nominated by Costa Rica • Papaya export promotion project in Guatemala: Nominated by Chinese Taipei • Provision of food safety in Panama: Nominated by Chinese Taipei • Peppers and Tomatoes Mitigating Measures Training in CAFTA-DR countries: Nominated by USDA • SPS Assistance in the Americas: Nominated by Canada • Strengthening Food Safety Laboratories in Central America: Nominated by FAO • Strengthening National Codex Committees: Nominated by FAO 	8
Greater Mekong Delta Sub-region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market Access and Trade Facilitation Support for Mekong Delta Countries through Strengthening Institutional and National Capacities Related to SMTQ Phase I: Nominated by UNIDO • Market Access Support for Viet Nam Through the Strengthening of Capacities Related to Metrology, Testing and Conformity: Nominated by Switzerland • Southeast Asia Foot and Mouth Disease (SEAFMD): Nominated by Australia and OIE • Multilateral Trade Assistance Project Viet Nam II (MUTRAP II): Nominated by EC EuropeAid • Fish-borne Zoonotic Parasites (FIBOZOPA): Nominated by Denmark • Plant Quarantine II – Thermal Treatment for the Disinfestation of Fruit Flies: Nominated by Japan • Sanitary and Phytosanitary Capacity Building Programme (SPSCBP): Nominated by Australia • Zoonotic and Animal Diseases Affecting Trade in Viet Nam: Nominated by Switzerland • Follow up to Regional Laboratory Diagnostic Workshop: Nominated by USDA • Costs of Agri-food Safety and SPS Compliance: Nominated by UNCTAD 	10
Total		24