

**STDF WORKING GROUP  
21-22 NOVEMBER 2023****WTO - ROOM E****SUMMARY REPORT****1 OPENING****1.1 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

1. The STDF Working Group met in person on 21-22 November 2023 at WTO Headquarters in Geneva. The meeting was chaired by Dr Gillian Mylrea (WOAH) who welcomed participants and explained the modalities of the meeting. She invited participants to join some introductory, interactive exercises to get to know each other. These exercises created an engaging and participatory opening to the meeting and were appreciated by members. First time participants also had the opportunity to introduce themselves.

2. Members adopted the agenda as presented. The list of participants is provided in **Annex 1**. All presentations delivered are available on the STDF [website](#).

**2 OPERATION OF THE FACILITY****2.1 Staffing and financial situation**

3. The Secretariat briefed members on STDF's current staffing situation and noted that there had been no changes to the staff. The Secretariat is benefitting from the support of Ms Sandra Bucha, whose internship will end in February 2024.

4. The Secretariat further briefed members on STDF's financial situation. Making reference to Annex 1 of the annotated agenda, the Secretariat highlighted the contributions received and expenditures as at 31 October 2023 and reported a positive balance of CHF 1,679,201 (US\$ 1,831,190) available for allocation to new PPGs and PGs under agenda item 3.

5. A contribution from the United States Department of Agriculture of US\$ 150,000 was received in November 2023 under a new multi-annual contribution agreement running from 2023-2028. Further, an additional contribution from Norway of approximately US\$ 1.5 million is also expected through an extension of an existing contribution agreement running from 2021-2024. These additional contributions would bring the amount available for allocation to new PPGs and PGs under agenda item 3 to approximately US\$ 3 million.

6. Considering these additional contributions, the total amount to be received from donors in 2023 is expected to be approximately US\$ 7.9 million, which means that the STDF will meet its annual target level of funding of US\$ 7 million. The Secretariat will continue to follow up with existing and potential donors regarding new contributions to the STDF Trust Fund in 2024 and beyond.

7. Canada informed the Working Group of an additional contribution of approximately US\$ 190,000 made in 2023, bringing their total contribution for 2023 to approximately US\$ 667,011. Australia affirmed its continued support for the STDF and its activities beyond the current timeline.

**2.2 Selection of new developing country experts (2024-2025)**

8. The Secretariat reminded members that the terms of three experts (i.e., Sithar Dorjee, Juliet Goldsmith and Unesu Ushewokunze-Obatolu) will come to an end on 31 December 2023. Hence, for the period 2024-2025, the incoming chairperson of the Working Group, Sarah Brunel, in collaboration with the outgoing chairperson, Dr Gillian Mylrea, are in the process of selecting three

new experts from a roster of candidates recommended by STDF members, in accordance with the criteria and procedure set out in paras. 22-25 of the [STDF Operational Rules](#) (paras. 22-25).

9. The STDF experts selected for the 2023-2024 period will continue to serve the STDF in 2024, i.e., Jaime-Ricardo Romero-Prada, Martin Kimanya and Mary Grace Rivere-Mandigma.

10. Following discussions with both the outgoing and incoming Chairpersons, the Secretariat is considering tabling amendments to the selection process for new developing country experts for discussion at the next Working Group meeting in June 2024. The proposed new selection process would seek to link prospective candidates to regional organisations, in line with recommendations from previous external evaluations of the STDF.

### **2.3 STDF Policy Committee**

11. The Secretariat proposed that a meeting of the Policy Committee be organized in the first half of 2024 to reflect on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the external STDF programme evaluation. This meeting would be organized virtually, unless it's possible to organize an in person meeting back-to-back with another high-level event involving STDF partner organizations.

12. The Secretariat called upon donor members to inform the Working Group of their choice of representation for the Policy Committee. Donor members are currently represented in the Policy Committee by France, Germany, and The Netherlands. Donors informed the Working Group that donor representation for 2024-2025 will constitute France, The Netherlands, and the United States.

### **2.4 STDF 2024 Work Plan**

13. The Secretariat briefly introduced STDF's proposed [Work Plan for 2024](#). As the final year of STDF's current [Strategy](#) (2020-2024), the focus will be on completing and expanding the reach and use of STDF's knowledge work, including the promotion of good regulatory practices, public private partnerships, innovation, and electronic SPS certification. Priority will be given to implementation of the recommendations of an external assessment of STDF's evidence-based framework to prioritize SPS investments (P-IMA). Implementation of STDF's [Gender Action Plan](#) will also have priority.

14. The Work Plan is organized along the three work streams of the STDF: global platform, knowledge work, and projects and PPGs. The Secretariat highlighted the planned activities and outputs under each work stream. Notable highlights included a proposal for an external retreat of STDF founding partners on 17-18 June 2024; and two receptions in June as well as a possible photo exhibition to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the STDF.

15. The Working Group approved the proposed 2024 Work Plan and budget, which is estimated at US\$ 7 million.

### **2.5 Communications**

#### **2.5.1 Update from the Secretariat**

16. The Secretariat provided an update on the implementation of STDF's [Communications Plan](#), since the last meeting in June 2023. This included an update on the ongoing revision of STDF's website and publication of the latest Briefing Note on [climate change](#) as well as one jointly developed with the Food Trade Coalition for Africa on [safe food trade in Africa](#). In line with the feedback received, the Secretariat informed the Working Group of a planned webinar on communication to facilitate better storytelling and documentation of projects. The theme of storytelling will also be woven into the new website through stories from beneficiaries highlighting the impact of projects and knowledge work.

17. The Secretariat also drew attention to Annex 2 of the Annotated Agenda, which provides an overview of STDF events and other meetings in which it participated since the last Working Group meeting, including information on the reasons for participation and the number and type of stakeholders reached.

## 2.5.2 Update from Working Group Participants

18. Members shared, with the aid of Mentimeter, how they communicate to their networks about the STDF. Responses ranged from LinkedIn, emails, events and meetings to sharing STDF reports with relevant groups and answering questions about the STDF. In response to the Secretariat's question on how it could make it easier for the members to share information on the STDF, the EU suggested involvement of its delegations in the field in the execution of projects. The US suggested packaging information to members in an easy-to-share format while IPPC suggested creating thematic content that targets specific focus groups.

## 2.6 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

### 2.6.1 Update on the external programme evaluation

19. The Secretariat introduced Project Economics Consulting (PEC), the company conducting the ongoing STDF external evaluation, and the members of the Evaluation Steering Group. The Evaluation Steering Group is comprised of representatives of STDF partners (Eleonora Dupouy, FAO; Kateryna Onul, IFC; Sarah Brunel, IPPC), donors (Catherine Constant, France; Peter van Dijk, The Netherlands) and developing country experts (Mary Grace Mandigma), and its role is to provide guidance to the evaluation process and to review progress updates from PEC.

20. PEC provided an update on the inception phase, status of ongoing work and plans to deliver the evaluation, including the three project impact evaluations ([STDF/PG/375](#), [STDF/PG/432](#), [STDF/PG/495](#)). The inception report was concluded and shared with members in October. It detailed the methodology, timeframe, work plan and the selection criteria for the three projects selected for project impact evaluations. The evaluation is currently underway, with PEC having signed a contract with WTO for the full evaluation in October 2023, and it is expected to be completed by the end of May 2024 pending publication of a final report.

### 2.6.2 Cross-cutting learning assessment on environment, biodiversity and climate change

21. The Secretariat provided an update on steps to advance this assessment since June 2023. In particular, the Secretariat: (i) shared draft TORs for the assessment with the Working Group in July 2023; (ii) revised the TORs in response to comments received; and (iii) consulted the Working Group chairperson on candidates proposed by Working Group members to carry out this assessment. David Boyer, a consultant with relevant experience, including in capacity development and partnerships related to capacity development, was contracted to conduct the assessment. The assessment is underway and is due for delivery by end of July 2024.

22. In line with the next steps, the Secretariat will organize a virtual meeting in January 2024 to introduce the consultant and present the draft inception report. The consultant will thereafter hold interviews with selected Working Group members.

## 2.7 P-IMA assessment

### 2.7.1 Introduction to the P-IMA framework by the Secretariat

23. The Secretariat provided a [short introduction](#) to the P-IMA framework and shared the [P-IMA Guide](#) to set the scene for the presentation by Dr Karen Iles. P-IMA is an evidence-based approach to inform SPS decision-making processes and resource allocation. As resources are limited and countries are often plagued with many SPS gaps, P-IMA prioritizes diverse investments based on decision criteria and weights linked to policy goals.

### 2.7.2 Presentation by Dr Karen Iles (STDF consultant and external evaluator)

24. Dr Karen Iles made a [presentation](#) highlighting the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the external P-IMA assessment. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess how (and to what effect) STDF's work on P-IMA had delivered results and impact linked to STDF's theory of change, and to draw additional lessons both for P-IMA and wider STDF knowledge work.

25. The assessment was centred on the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of STDF's work on P-IMA. The key findings of the assessment are that although P-IMA is highly relevant and effective, with good indications of impact and great value for money, it is currently not sustainable, as mainstreaming has been poorly developed and the training strategy is insufficient. The recommendations included adopting an integrated strategic approach to P-IMA work moving forward; developing a new training strategy focused on sustainability; partnering with organisations at regional or national level while building their capacity to provide P-IMA services; and developing stronger synergies and linkages between the capacity evaluation tools and P-IMA.

26. Members expressed their support of the findings and recommendations of the assessment. Members also put forward a number of suggestions, key among them creating linkages between P-IMA and other capacity evaluation tools. In line with the feedback provided, the report will be finalized, and an event will be organized early 2024 to share the key findings and recommendations with relevant stakeholders, including select P-IMA users.

### 3 PPGs AND PROJECTS

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

27. The Secretariat referred members to document [STDF/WG/Nov23/Overview](#) which provides an overview of the implementation status of ongoing projects and PPGs. The Secretariat informed members that 4 projects and 1 PPG are awaiting contracting. The Secretariat highlighted [STDF/PPG/721](#) and the resultant project proposal which aims to strengthen food safety and quality for select spices in Sri Lanka.

28. The Secretariat also informed the Working Group of two PPGs which had been cancelled. One of the main PPG partners for [STDF/PPG/846 \(Uganda - Post-harvest Treatment\)](#), Mairye Estates Ltd, is in the process of restructuring and is not in a position to implement the PPG at this time. The applicants may reapply in the future should they be in a position to do so. The main implementing partner for [STDF/PPG/720 \(Egypt - HPAI-free Compartment\)](#), the World Bank Group, notified the Secretariat that government priorities have shifted since the PPG was conceived in 2019 and that they had experienced difficulties in engaging the relevant stakeholders during and after the Covid pandemic. The Secretariat informed the Working Group that the resources that had been committed to fund these PPGs would be reimbursed to the STDF Trust Fund.

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

29. The Secretariat briefly introduced the PPG and project applications not tabled for consideration at this meeting. These applications, including the reasons for not tabling them, are listed in document [STDF/WG/Nov23/Review](#).

30. Since the last Working Group meeting in June, the Secretariat received 77 applications. Out of these applications, 38 did not comply with the minimum eligibility requirements while 28 of them, although eligible, were not recommended for the reasons highlighted in Annex 1 of the [STDF/WG/Nov23/Review](#) document.

31. The Secretariat briefly introduced two applications which were not tabled and requested guidance and inputs from members to inform future work with the applicants:

#### ***STDF/PPG/949 – Applying P-IMA in Senegal to identify the main SPS challenges affecting export potential***

32. This PPG request was submitted by the National CODEX Committee of Senegal. It aims to apply the P-IMA framework to prioritize SPS investments. The PPG would be implemented by the consultancy firm, Farrelly & Mitchell. While the proposal is eligible, the Secretariat would like to await the outcome of a similar PPG ([STDF/PPG/921](#)) benefiting The Gambia, also implemented by Farrelly & Mitchell, before approving a similar PPG in another country. Members will engage with the Secretariat on this application ahead of the next submission deadline on 1 March 2024.

### ***STDF/PG/955 – Implementing SPS requirements for exports in the camelid sector in Bolivia***

33. This application was submitted by the Government of Bolivia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Rural Development and Lands, and the Pro-Camelid Program). It has support from the producers' association and was developed with support from the FAO office in Bolivia. The document is well-written and aims to promote exports of camelid products to international markets. It indicates some sanitary problems that could affect this sector, such as certain animal diseases (tuberculosis, brucellosis, foot and mouth disease), vaccination requirements, use of good husbandry and handling practices, veterinary drug residues, traceability and labelling requirements, etc. However, it is not clear what the export potential of these animals and their products are, and what the specific sanitary requirements are from importing markets.

34. The Secretariat requested feedback from FAO, WOA and other members on this proposal before following up with the applicant. The US thought this application may be premature and drew attention to the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East (CCNE) which is performing a study on the use of veterinary drugs in camels in that region that they plan to present at the Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods (CCRVDF27) for discussion in October 2024. Jaime Romero, developing country expert, stated his support for the project and suggested that its scope be expanded to focus on food safety. The Secretariat will engage Mr Romero further on this application.

### **3.3 Consideration of new PPG applications**

35. The Chairperson reminded members that in line with the STDF [Operational Rules](#) in para. 43, the main criterion in awarding a PPG is the likelihood that its implementation will result in a well-drafted project proposal with the potential to achieve sustainable and effective results.

### ***STDF/PPG/886 – Enhancing SPS compliance for safe cross-border trade from India's North-Eastern States***

36. The Working Group endorsed this PPG application in principle but **did not prioritize it for funding**. The Working Group recommended that the proposal be further revised and resubmitted. The EU noted that the inclusion of Myanmar could pose issues due to its funding restrictions for programmes that involve the government of Myanmar. In addition, conflict in this region may also inhibit the government of Myanmar from participating in this initiative and therefore, consideration should be given to excluding it from the PPG. The World Bank noted that the application was very export oriented and that there should be a greater focus on bilateral trade and market access to India. The Netherlands and Australia questioned whether SPS capacity building would be able to provide solutions to the larger issue of porous borders and conflict in the region. In response to questions raised about the proposed implementing agency, USDA noted that it has previously worked with the National Institute of Plant Health Management (NIPHM) and that this institution has positioned itself in recent years as a regional training body.

### ***STDF/PPG/938 – Improving the safety of palm oil in West Africa***

37. The Working Group **did not approve** this PPG application. Although some members recognized the relevance of the proposal and the innovativeness of the idea of developing protocols for a rapid on-site detection technique of Sudan IV adulteration, members noted that the involvement of other key value chain stakeholders such as producers and exporters was not clear. Furthermore, although members appreciated the regional dimension of the PPG, they noted that more research and consultations with national stakeholders, including public and private sector, should be carried out, particularly in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Benin to ensure their full engagement. Members also recommended that the PPG adopts a more holistic approach by fully addressing the mitigation of the problem and not only detection. Lastly, members also questioned the extent to which the problem persists, as the data provided in the application is not recent. Members recommended that the applicants revise this application based on these comments and resubmit in the future.

### ***STDF/PPG/941 – Promoting live animal trade and export in Eastern Africa***

38. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application, subject to some revisions. Members found the PPG demand-driven, relevant, and focused on animal health, a topic on which few applications are received. However, members also noted several areas that need revision. First, the areas that this PPG intends to cover are too broad and therefore the scope should be narrowed down. Second, further information regarding the numerous donor-supported projects and initiatives in this sector and in this region should be provided and well analysed to determine the need and value-added of the project to be developed. For this, members recommended adding a "feasibility study" that precedes project development. Third, members recommended that regional bodies, such as the East African Community (EAC) and the IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development (ICPALD), be actively involved in the PPG implementation, and that they provide letters of support. Finally, other missing letters of support from the public sector of Ethiopia and Uganda, as well as from private-sector associations from the beneficiary countries should be provided prior to contracting the PPG.

### ***STDF/PPG/945 – Evaluating Sanitary and Phytosanitary capacity of Ethiopia***

39. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application subject to the following conditions: (i) the Ethiopian Agricultural Authority (EAA) should further demonstrate its technical and financial management capacity to lead implementation of the PPG; (ii) the scope of the PPG should be limited to plant health to avoid duplication with a project proposal to strengthen Ethiopia's food safety system, which is currently being developed; and (iii) the project proposal that will result from this PPG should focus on the application of the IPPC PCE tool, the IICA Performance, Vision and Strategy tool, and other related activities to strengthen the Ethiopian phytosanitary system. The Secretariat indicated that all comments had been reviewed and would be shared with the applicant and would be integrated in the terms of references of the PPG before its contracting.

### ***STDF/PPG/952 Building Laboratory Capacity to Strengthen Pesticide Regulatory Systems in Latin America***

40. The Working Group did **not approve** this PPG application for funding. While some STDF members expressed support for the proposal, others expressed some concerns and considered that the application document needed several revisions. The main points discussed include: (i) clarifying how Africa and Asia (besides the two identified countries in LAC) would be involved in the PPG; (ii) demonstrating ownership and support from the public and private sectors from the participating countries; (iii) better explaining the concept of a "lab network" and justify why this should be the approach to be taken; (iv) elaborating on how the laboratories would be selected and if these are going to be both public and private laboratories; (v) clarifying if regulatory issues would be assessed and included in the proposal, in order to ensure that laboratory data exchanges are indeed possible among countries; and (vi) further detailing the linkages with the three ongoing STDF biopesticides projects, which include to a certain extent some laboratory strengthening activities.

### ***STDF/PPG/969 – Improving the sanitary and phytosanitary quality of Cameroonian cocoa***

41. The Working Group **approved** this PPG for funding, subject to a few revisions. Members found this PPG was relevant and that the resulting project would benefit a sector with a high concentration of young people and women, help improve the living conditions of the target populations and promote sustainable production and market access. However, members also questioned the relevance of the issue, given that the data provided in the application form dates back to 2012. Members made the following recommendations to strengthen the PPG: (i) provide additional information to justify that the SPS issue is still topical; (ii) ensure its complementarity with ongoing projects and initiatives in this sector in Cameroon, in order to identify possible synergies and avoid duplication; and (ii) draw up detailed terms of reference for the international consultant and the national consultant.

### ***STDF/PPG/970 – Improving the implementation of food safety standards in Saint Lucia***

42. The Working Group **approved** this PPG for funding, subject to a few revisions. Members found the PPG demand-driven, relevant, and noted the focus on MSMEs as positive. However, members also noted that the potential to benefit the region and other commodities should be considered in the resulting project proposal. Members also provided comments on other areas that should be taken

into account during the development of the proposal (define baselines, identify past and current capacity-building programs, involve academia, among others). The US expressed an interest in being involved during the PPG implementation to ensure synergies with its programs.

### 3.4 Consideration of new PG applications

#### ***STDF/PG/734 – Modernizing Bhutan's border management ecosystem to facilitate safe agri-food trade***

43. The Working Group **approved** this application for funding, subject to the following conditions which should be integrated into the project document: (i) incorporate Bhutan's NPPO in project activities in a more explicit manner; (ii) revise Output 2 indicator to reflect the exchanging of ePhytos rather than the simple connection to the ePhyto Hub; (iii) seek synergies with US FDA given their work with Indian regulators on risk-based approaches for border inspections; (iv) explore collaborative opportunities with the World Bank, which is currently supporting Nepal in risk-based border management practices; and (v) strengthen the institutionalization of risk-based approaches to help improve the project's sustainability. Members further suggested that project partners explore the option of introducing project indicators linked to local earning capacity to help sustain the modernization of the border management ecosystem.

#### ***STDF/PG/946 – Strengthening phytosanitary capacities to contribute to the development of exports of horticultural products from Senegal***

44. The Working Group **approved** this application for funding, subject to a few revisions. The Working Group recognized the need to strengthen Senegal's phytosanitary system and appreciated that the project was based on the results of the country's phytosanitary capacity assessment. However, some members made the following recommendations to strengthen the project: (i) ensure better integration of key stakeholders such as port and customs authorities, as well as major exporters and importers, through awareness-raising activities and by encouraging their participation in the project; (ii) explore the possibilities of replicating/sharing experiences with other ECOWAS countries, through the dissemination of best practices; (iii) take stock of other similar projects and initiatives that have already been carried out in Senegal, and identify possible synergies to avoid duplication; (iv) ensure that agents responsible for project implementation benefit from IPPC online courses; and (v) explore possible synergies with initiatives led by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) with ECOWAS and the Inter-African Phytosanitary Council and ensure information sharing with these entities.

#### ***STDF/PG/786 – Strengthen the capacity of value chain actors in pre- and post-harvest aflatoxin management in Ghana for market access***

45. The Working Group **approved** this application for funding, subject to the following conditions: (i) including a project "inception phase", in which some pre-implementation activities can take place (e.g. validate the logical framework with all stakeholders, further develop the risk mitigation strategy, ensure complementarity with past and ongoing projects and initiatives, discuss environmental impact and possible mitigation activities, among others); (ii) collecting data on aflatoxins in maize and groundnuts in Ghana to inform ongoing Codex work on the development of maximum limits that are sufficiently geographically representative and inclusive of Ghana's conditions; (iii) including a sustainability strategy to incentivize producers and exporters to continue the use of good practices after the end of the project; and (iv) ensuring that the national food safety authority has a key role in the project Steering Committee.

#### ***STDF/PG/856 – Enhancing multilateral e-veterinary certification in Latin America and the Caribbean***

46. The Working Group **approved** this application for funding, subject to the following conditions: (i) assess the possibility of conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the development of the generic system in the initial phase of the project, to take into account the capacities of the pilot countries; (ii) work in a step-wise approach, with an evaluation after each phase to determine the feasibility of success for the next phase; (iii) look carefully at the interconnection between animal health and food safety aspects of products of animal origin; (iv) ensure the active involvement of the private sector in all phases of project implementation; and (v) give special consideration to aspects related to sustainability and replicability of project results in other regions that could be very interested in this

type of system. FAO and the US expressed their interest in participating in the implementation of the project.

## 4 KNOWLEDGE WORK

### 4.1 Implementation of STDF Gender Action Plan

47. The Secretariat provided an update on the implementation of the [Gender Action Plan](#), as approved in June 2023. Implementation is taking place across the three pillars of the Action Plan, in collaboration with project implementing organizations. With regard to outreach and dissemination, the Secretariat hosted a [side event](#) on the margins of the July 2023 SPS Committee, in addition to giving a presentation at the African Union Commission SPS Coordination Forum in September 2023. The Secretariat is planning an event with UNCTAD on [gender and trade regulations](#) during [UNCTAD's eWeek](#) in December. The Secretariat also detailed efforts to mainstream gender in STDF projects, including the projects approved in June 2023 ([STDF/PG/770](#), [STDF/PG/768](#) and [STDF/PG/716](#)) and other projects in the inception phase ([STDF/PG/842](#) and [STDF/PG/807](#)).

48. The chairperson inquired on the possibility of a gender training for Working Group members. Referencing the Secretariat's gender training by SIDA, the Secretariat noted that a similar training could be organized for the Working Group if members were interested.

### 4.2 Reducing Non-Tariff Barriers to facilitate safe trade

49. Christian Knebel (UNCTAD) delivered a [presentation](#) on reducing non-tariff barriers to facilitate safe trade. On aggregate, SPS and TBT measures are the costliest non-tariff measures. The fixed-cost element of many SPS and TBT measures disproportionately affects LDCs, women and MSMEs. Consequently, the objective of reducing non-tariff barriers is not to eliminate SPS and TBT measures, but rather to reduce their costs without harming public policy objectives.

50. Some of the solutions presented to reduce trade costs of SPS and TBT measures include: transparency, which would cut the cost of SPS and TBT measures by 15% and 21% respectively; mutual recognition for SPS and TBT standards; and harmonizing SPS and TBT standards towards international standards. UNCTAD also informed members of its [toolkit on assessing cost-effectiveness of non-tariff measures](#).

51. Members lauded UNCTAD for its findings and solutions. Interventions acknowledged the disproportionate effect of the impact of non-tariff barriers on LDCs, MSMEs and women. Challenges on mutual recognition and payment for access to services by national standard-setting bodies were also raised and discussed.

### 4.3 Update and dialogue on STDF knowledge work

#### 4.3.1 Climate change

52. The Secretariat updated the Working Group on a new Briefing Note entitled "[Strengthening SPS systems to mitigate and adapt to climate change](#)". The publication of this Briefing Note follows a series of STDF webinars on climate change and SPS capacity development in 2022. The Secretariat detailed efforts to disseminate this work, including a planned side event hosted by the Secretariat and STDF partners at the Trade House Pavilion at COP28 on 10 December 2023. Members were encouraged to disseminate the Briefing Note through their networks.

#### 4.3.2 Electronic certification

53. The Secretariat briefed members on the STDF and IICA-organized eCert [event](#) held in Costa Rica in July 2023. The event was aimed at exchanging lessons learned on electronic SPS certificates and discussing the possibility of a regional approach for the exchange of electronic veterinary certificates. The result of this event was a declaration of all 29 participating countries requesting the support of IICA and the STDF to develop a mechanism for the issuance and exchange of electronic veterinary certificates. The event further culminated in a project application, which was approved by the Working Group (STDF/PG/856).

54. The Secretariat also briefed members on the 8<sup>th</sup> virtual meeting of the [ECAC](#) Practitioner Group which was held in October 2023, where the ex-post evaluation of the STDF-funded ePhyto project was presented and discussed. In line with the 2023 Work Plan, the Secretariat is in the process of producing a joint knowledge product with a few ECAC members. The terms of reference for this work, which are currently under development, will be shared with members.

55. The Secretariat noted to follow up with the IPPC Secretariat on their news item on ePhyto as well as with the World Bank on their video on how to implement the ePhyto solution, as based on work conducted in Zambia.

#### 4.3.3 Good Regulatory Practices

56. The Secretariat briefed members on the progress of its initiatives related to Good Regulatory Practices (GRPs). In collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC), AfCFTA Secretariat, and USDA, the Secretariat organized a [workshop](#) in Accra, Ghana, in September 2023. The workshop, attended by over 50 participants both in-person and online from across Africa, aimed to enhance understanding and application of GRPs. Subsequent to the workshop, the Secretariat is compiling case stories that showcase the application of GRPs in Africa. Furthermore, the Secretariat is collaborating with USDA on the development of a complementary toolkit for SPS regulators. This toolkit, which builds on the [STDF GRP Guide](#), offers practical assistance to regulators. In response to an inquiry from IPPC regarding the potential linkage of STDF's GRP work with P-IMA, the Secretariat highlighted ongoing discussions among partners and implementing entities on the importance of connecting GRPs with capacity evaluation tools. The Secretariat emphasized its commitment to featuring such linkages in the upcoming GRP case stories.

#### 4.3.4 Public Private Partnerships

57. The Secretariat updated members on its work on public private partnerships (PPPs). The Secretariat co-organized a webinar with AGRA Food Trade Coalition for Africa in October 2023 which drew over 150 participants and speakers from both the public and public sector. Regarding future PPP work, the Secretariat is planning on having a PPP Practitioner Group session with the International Seed Federation (ISF) aimed at profiling ISF's work with regulators. The Secretariat is working on a PPP knowledge product, to be co-created with the PPP Practitioner Group and delivered within the first half of 2024.

### 4.4 IFC's Global Food Safety and Food Loss Prevention Platform

58. Kateryna Onul (IFC) delivered a [presentation](#) on IFC's Global Food Safety and Food Loss Prevention Platform. The platform, which is part of IFC's agribusiness advisory, focuses on addressing food safety and food loss prevention primarily in developing economies and emerging markets. The Platform was rolled out in two stages, the first which began in 2015 and ran for five years, and the second one which is currently ongoing.

59. The main objectives of the platform include: increasing performance and efficiency of investment clients in food safety; building capacity and credibility in global markets by creating assessment and diagnostic tools for national authorities responsible for food safety and food quality; and evaluating food losses and identifying potential cost savings. Key activities under the platform include: assessment of national food safety, food fortification, food loss and waste systems based on the [IFC Scan Guide](#); advisory in development of national policy and regulatory frameworks; support in strengthening capacity of private and public sectors; and contribution to the global and regional food safety agenda.

### 4.5 Next Global Review of Aid for Trade

60. Vishva Subramaniam of the WTO briefed the Working Group on the 2023-2024 Aid for Trade work plan and the forthcoming Global Review of Aid for Trade scheduled for 25-28 June 2024. The Aid for Trade initiative seeks to mobilize resources to address trade-related constraints as identified by countries. Since the start of the initiative in 2006, more than US\$630 billion of Aid for Trade has been disbursed globally to help countries address shortfalls in supply-side capacity and trade-related infrastructure. As building productive capacity in the agriculture sector and strengthening trade

policy alignment are key Aid for Trade priorities, the work of the STDF is particularly relevant in both contexts.

61. Approximately US\$113 billion, or 18% of total Aid for Trade disbursements, has been channelled to build agricultural capacity since the start of the Aid for Trade Initiative in 2006 to 2021. Over the same period, US\$18.5 billion or 3% of total Aid for Trade funding has been disbursed to support trade policy and regulations. Though funding is comparatively smaller, this support generates high impact on the trade potential of developing countries, where SPS capacity building is a key concern.

62. Mr Subramaniam noted that the STDF is an active stakeholder in the Aid for Trade initiative through, for instance, its regular participation in the WTO Committee on Trade and Development session on Aid for Trade. The work of this Committee provides a forum at which STDF initiatives can be made known to a wider audience.

63. In line with the approved 2024 Work Plan, the Secretariat will host an event as well as a reception during the Global Aid for Trade Review Week to celebrate STDF's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## **4.6 Information exchange**

### **4.6.1 New/emerging SPS initiatives/issues and opportunities for future STDF work**

64. Partners, donors, experts and other organizations were invited to share information about new and emerging SPS initiatives and issues. Members were also encouraged to raise or highlight opportunities for future STDF work.

65. The International Grain Trade Coalition (IGTC), first-time participant at the Working Group, shared its work on disseminating information and sharing ideas to facilitate innovative, resilient and responsible trade and investment. IGTC members and stakeholders are currently working with five policy teams on topics such as plant breeding innovation, phytosanitary issues and MRLs. These teams allow experts to convene, share experience and contribute to common problem-solving. IGTC also has a working group on electronic trading documentation, which is currently supporting advancement of the digitalization of trade documentation through information collection and sharing as well as direct involvement with the IPPC in relation to its ePhyto Solution.

66. Aside from ePhyto, IGTC brings together its members and a variety of other stakeholders to discuss opportunities and challenges in grain trade. IGTC recently held a two-day event in Geneva to address opportunities to foster safe, predictable, sustainable, affordable, nutritious, and secure food supply across the world. The sessions addressed safe trade issues, plant production and genetics, and innovating digital information systems (including ePhyto).

67. The International Seed Federation (ISF) detailed efforts to implement an alternative phytosanitary certification based on a Systems Approach. ISF is currently piloting this alternative approach in collaboration with The Netherlands, Chile, the US and South Africa. Additionally, ISF held its Annual Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, where the STDF Secretariat gave a presentation on phytosanitary challenges in Africa. As a result of this Congress, ISF is planning meetings with at least 10 different NPPOs in 2024 in a bid to resolve some of the issues discussed at the Congress. ISF also continues its work, in collaboration with IPPC, on the implementation of ePhyto. ISF, OECD and STDF will be hosting a side event at [UNTCAD's eWeek](#) on the importance of e-certification.

68. IPPC informed members of its recently published [Guide on eCommerce](#) and of its planned side event at CPM in 2024 to disseminate the Guide. IPPC encouraged the Secretariat to publish knowledge products on gender and plant health; PPPs; and the link between P-IMA and various capacity building tools. IPPC also suggested having side sessions attached to the Working Group meetings in 2024 on the linkages between the capacity building tools and on innovative learning tools such as (e-learning).

69. WTO informed members that the SPS Committee has finalized its report to the next Ministerial Conference. The report mentions the STDF and notes the key role it plays in providing and coordinating assistance. The report also notes that ensuring adequate resources for STDF will enable

the STDF to continue to address the growing number of requests for assistance by least developed and developing countries, including when dealing with emerging challenges and opportunities.

70. FAO informed members of a number of new publications since the last Working Group meeting, including on [economic concerns associated with foodborne antimicrobial resistance](#), [microbiological hazards in fresh fruits and vegetables](#), [food fraud](#) and [risk assessment of food allergens](#). FAO also conducted a number of events and stakeholder meetings, including a [technical expert meeting](#) on food safety implications for plant-based food mimicking animal-derived foods. Further updates can be found [here](#).

71. ITC detailed its continued efforts to assist enterprises to meet technical market requirements, including its ARISE Plus Project, which is currently being implemented in [Malaysia](#), [Philippines](#), [Myanmar](#) and [Lao PDR](#). Further updates were provided on select projects such as the [Systematic Mechanism for Safer Trade \(SYMST\)](#) in Lao PDR and Vietnam, which seeks to strengthen the regulatory framework for control of plant health and pesticides in the fruits and vegetable sector. ITC has also been providing technical assistance to government agencies related to food safety, plant protection and animal health in Pakistan through its [Growth for rural advancement and sustainable progress project](#). ITC also highlighted its Quality for Trade platform, which serves as a one-stop shop for access to information on technical requirements, country-specific conformity assessment services and experts available in a given country. Further updates can be found [here](#).

72. The Minor Use Foundation (MUF) informed members of its participation in projects aimed at encouraging and increasing the use of biopesticides in different regions. MUF will be holding its 4<sup>th</sup> Global Minor Use Summit in February 2024, where a prioritization exercise of crops and pests will be carried out and other topics of interest will be discussed. Further updates can be found [here](#).

73. In response to IPPC's suggestions for future work, WOAHA informed members of the ongoing digitization of the PVS Pathway tool. WOAHA also tabled a proposal for a presentation on the system at the next Working Group meeting, the modalities of which could be discussed with the Secretariat and incoming chair.

74. In response to IPPC's suggestion on innovative learning tools and platforms, the Secretariat informed members about the WTO course on eCommerce and the [eLearning platform](#) on SPS capacity development created by the US which features modules on plant health, animal health and food safety.

## 5 OTHER BUSINESS

75. The Secretariat informed members that a draft summary report of the meeting will be prepared and shared with members for review prior to finalization. A recap of key decisions taken (2024 Work Plan approved, projects and PPGs approved) will be shared with members by email immediately after the meeting. It also reminded members that the next meeting of the Policy Committee will take place in the first quarter of 2024. All the presentations delivered during the Working Group meeting will be made available on the STDF's website.

76. The next meeting of the Working Group will be held on 20-21 June 2024. The Secretariat proposed to hold the meeting in person, with the possibility to join virtually for those who are unable to attend.

## 6 CLOSURE

77. The chairperson thanked all participants for their active engagement and closed the meeting at 16:16.

**ANNEX 1**

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