

**STDF WORKING GROUP
6-7 NOVEMBER 2024****WTO - ROOM E****SUMMARY REPORT****1 OPENING****1.1 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

1. The STDF Working Group met in person on 6-7 November 2024 at the WTO Headquarters in Geneva. The meeting was chaired by Sarah Brunel (IPPC) who welcomed participants and invited new participants to introduce themselves.

2. Members adopted the agenda as presented while noting that a discussion on the dates for the 2025 Working Group meetings would take place under "Other Business". The list of participants is provided in **Annex 1**. Presentations delivered are available on the STDF [website](#), except for the WHO/IFC presentation, which was not shared at their request since the relevant report has not yet been published.

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

3. The Secretariat updated participants on STDF's current staffing situation. The Secretariat reminded members of Melvin Spreij's departure for a two-year secondment at the World Bank, and that WTO has appointed Marlynne Hopper as Acting Head. Simon Hess (previously with the EIF) was named Acting Deputy Head as of 1 November. Marlynne Hopper introduced the Secretariat team, including Joel Eshun, a WTO intern from Ghana, and Morgane Martin, who is on a short-term contract following an internship. The COMMS Officer position remains vacant, and the Secretariat is working with external consultants in the meantime.

4. The Secretariat briefed participants on the financial situation of the STDF Trust Fund, with reference to **Annex 1** of the Annotated Agenda. Contributions amounting to CHF 5,535,013 (US\$6,534,844) were received in 2024 from Australia, Canada, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United States (as of 30 Sept 2024). Expenditures in 2024 amounted to CHF 4,150,544. Regarding uncontracted commitments, four PPGs and four PGs were reported as awaiting to be contracted amounting to CHF 2,694,851 (Table 3). Regarding pledges for 2024, this includes an approved contribution from the US (USDA and US FDA) of US\$250,000. With this contribution, the balance available for new PPGs and projects (agenda item 4) amounts to US\$3.98 million. The total amount received from donors in 2024 (including the approved US contribution) amounts to approximately US\$6.8 million, which is close to the annual funding target of US\$7 million.

5. The Secretariat apologised for an error in the financial reporting in the 2023 annual report, noting that this error (now corrected in the report on the website) had not been made in previous financial reports to the Working Group. The Secretariat thanked Sweden for identifying this issue.

6. Sweden shared its decision to extend support to the STDF with a contribution of 30 million Swedish kronor for 2024 to 2026 (approx. US\$1 million per year), noting that the agreement would be signed on the margins of the meeting. The Netherlands noted that a decision on future STDF funding is currently under consideration.

2.2 STDF Strategy for 2025-2030

7. The Secretariat provided an update on the process to develop the next strategy. It organized two Zoom consultations (19 September and 10 October 2024), facilitated by Nicolas Worms, following the strategy workshop on 19 June. A zero draft strategy document was distributed to the Working Group e-mail list on 14 October for feedback, together with a document compiling all comments received and revisions inserted. A half-day strategy session took place on 5 November 2024 focused on components of the draft strategy (regional hub and private sector roundtable) that had generated most comments.

8. The Secretariat thanked members for their active engagement and contributions throughout the process, and reported on the next steps. A revised draft (taking into account discussions in the session on 5 Nov.) will be shared with the Working Group by email in mid-November for review and approval on a no-objection basis. The final version will be sent to the Policy Committee in early December for consideration and approval, also on a no-objection basis. The launch of the new strategy is expected by the end of January.

9. Sweden thanked the Secretariat for the work carried out on the draft Strategy, recommending increased emphasis on economic inclusion (small and medium-sized enterprises, informal sector, etc.) to ensure that SPS capacity development benefits the ultimate target audience. Sweden expressed interest to support updates to the MEL Framework. Other participants congratulated the team on the work done on the strategy. The Netherlands suggested developing a short video to show the strategy's relevance to food production and trade in rural areas (addressing issues related to mycotoxin contamination and control in maize production and trade) with the "three sisters".

2.3 Follow-up on the recommendations of the STDF external programme evaluation

10. The Secretariat distributed a note to inform discussions in the STDF Working Group on possible follow-up to the evaluation recommendations delivered by Project Economics Consulting in May 2024. It noted the recommendation, supported by many members, to extend the term of developing country experts to three years. If approved by the Working Group, the Operational Rules would need to be amended. France noted support for the creation of an alumni network of STDF developing country experts. The Secretariat suggested that the next meeting discuss the evaluation recommendations in more detail.

2.4 Selection of new developing country experts (2025-2026)

11. The terms of three developing country experts (DCEs), Jaime Romero-Prada, Martin Kimanya, and Mary Grace Rivere-Mandigma, comes to an end on 31 December 2024. The other three DCEs will continue to serve in 2025. The Secretariat requested the Working Group to consider extending the term of all current developing country experts by an additional year, as recommended by the external evaluation (May 2024).

12. The Working Group **approved** an extension of the terms of the current developing country experts to three years.

2.5 Selection of vice-chairperson of the STDF Working Group (2025)

13. The current vice-chairperson, Marie-Luise Rau (Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), Germany), will become chairperson of the Working Group in 2025. The Secretariat received an expression of interest from Eleonora Dupouy (FAO) to become the vice-chairperson in 2025. Members accepted and welcomed Eleonora Dupouy as the upcoming vice-chairperson for 2025, and hence chairperson in 2026. A list of all previous chairpersons of the Working Group was included in **Annex 3** of the Annotated Agenda for information.

2.6 STDF 2025 Work Plan

14. The Secretariat introduced STDF's proposed Work Plan for 2025, noting it was a provisional work plan, which may be presented at the next Working Group meeting in June if any changes occur linked to the new strategy. The proposed 2025 budget is similar to that of 2024. The Secretariat briefly presented new activities under the three STDF workstreams, including new knowledge work

on innovation and scaling, work on gender and environment mainstreaming, as well as dissemination, outreach and events, as in previous plans. The funding mechanism includes the same target level of at least 6 PPGs and 5 PGs.

15. Related to project management, Sweden recommended strengthening transparency on reporting including fiduciary aspects and audits (which may require changes to project contracts). Sweden proposed that the Secretariat revise the PPG and PG review templates to better reflect economic inclusion. France agreed with the proposal to update the review templates, and for the Working Group to re-consider the work plan following approval of the strategy. The Netherlands thanked the Secretariat for the workplan, highlighted the importance of trade for economic inclusion, and suggested that the WTO should complete the MOPAN¹ Assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement. FAO proposed inclusion of a P-IMA workshop in the workplan, based on consultations with partners following the external P-IMA evaluation. The Secretariat indicated that it would follow-up on the feedback received prior to the next meeting in June 2025, and recalled that the MEL Framework and Comms Plan would also be revised following approval of the strategy.

16. The Working Group **approved** the provisional 2024 Work Plan and budget.

2.7 Communications

17. The Secretariat introduced the publication *STDF@20*, launched to mark the STDF's 20th anniversary, which highlights results from across knowledge work and the global platform, in addition to projects and PPGs. The Secretariat also referred to the STDF photo exhibition, which captures voices from STDF partners and beneficiaries, which will be on display during November in the WTO Atrium. Members congratulated the Secretariat on the publication and photo exhibition. Some (including Germany and Australia) expressed an interest in presenting the photo exhibition in their organizations, and the Secretariat encouraged other organizations to consider doing the same.

18. With reference to **Annex 4** of the Annotated Agenda, the Secretariat provided an overview of STDF events and other external meetings in which the Secretariat participated since the last Working Group meeting. Rommel Betancourt (DCE) thanked the Secretariat for participating in a side event to mark STDF's 20th anniversary during the 23rd session of the CCLAC in Ecuador in July 2024.

2.8 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) including risk management

19. The Secretariat provided an update on implementation of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework, highlighting that eight projects and eleven PPGs are expected to be completed by the end of 2024. Final reports for most of these projects are already in progress, with the remainder expected by early 2025. The Secretariat is improving the Logalto platform for project monitoring, and has added a requirement to upload annual audited financial reports to support improved risk management. To update the MEL framework, the Secretariat plans to reactivate the MEL group, inviting interested members to participate in revising indicators, guidelines and templates. This work is due to be completed by mid-2025.

3 KNOWLEDGE WORK

3.1 Public Private Partnerships (PPP) – knowledge product

20. The Secretariat provided an update on the STDF PPP Guide, authored by Peter Stanbury (STDF Consultant) with the PPP Practitioner Group, and thanked members for their valuable contributions. The final report will include some new PPP case studies and is expected to be finalized by the end of the year. It will be widely disseminated via the STDF website and other channels, and will also be used to promote PPP approaches in STDF projects. The Secretariat noted that Dr Sanjay Dave, a former developing country expert, shared experiences from STDF's work on PPPs at the Global Food Regulators Summit in September 2024 in India.

¹ Multinational Organization Performance Assessment Network, see <https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/>.

3.2 Electronic certification (eCert)

21. The Secretariat updated participants on recent work including a planned STDF event with the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility (TFAF) and the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) on digitalization for trade facilitation on 26-27 November 2024, in Uruguay. The Electronic Certification Advisory Committee (ECAC) will hold a virtual meeting on 13 November to discuss progress on SPS electronic certification. Additionally, efforts are underway to update the STDF e-Cert briefing note, develop a short film clip on e-Cert (involving ECAC members), and prepare a joint STDF/TFAF knowledge product to share best practices from Latin American countries on integrating digital SPS and trade facilitation efforts. The Secretariat noted suggestions during the strategy workshop (June 2024) to broaden the focus of ECAC to include innovation and digital technologies.

22. The United States expressed appreciation for the inclusive discussions on e-Cert, noting that it has become a model to promote innovation and catalyse additional results from STDF projects, and supported a manageable expansion of ECAC's mandate while acknowledging ongoing work required for e-certification initiatives. MaryLucy Oronje (DCE) suggested extending ECAC's scope to virtual audits. The WTO supported this, referring to ongoing discussions on innovation and new technologies in the SPS Committee. WOHAT shared an update on e-vet certification, including progress on reference data models (aligned to Codex) and revisions to the Animal Health and Aquatic Codes, and recommended more attention to food safety and animal health in any expansion of ECAC's mandate, while noting the persistence of high costs and implementation challenges. Other members (World Bank, COLEAD, IICA, TFAF, UNIDO, Germany) agreed on the relevance and value of STDF's work on e-Cert, noting opportunities to link to data-driven innovation and address issues related to food loss and waste, etc.

3.3 Good Regulatory Practices (GRP)

23. The Secretariat provided an update on the ongoing efforts to disseminate the GRP Guide, which included: (i) a virtual presentation, including GRP examples from Africa, during the AUC/AfCFTA Training Workshop for National Enquiry Points and National Notification Authorities (Sep. 2024 in Zambia) attended by over 65 participants; and (ii) a presentation by former developing country expert Lucy Namu during the 3rd African Food Safety Workshop (Oct. 2024 in Morocco) attended by over 110 food safety stakeholders.

24. The United States expressed appreciation for STDF's knowledge work and the GRP Guide, which is being piloted in Nigeria and Zambia (with USDA support), and noted that this represents an innovative model to expand the reach and uptake of STDF knowledge and good practices. The United States encouraged other members to seek opportunities to adopt STDF knowledge in their own work and further disseminate through their networks.

3.4 Evidence-based approach to prioritize SPS needs (P-IMA)

25. The Secretariat provided an update on P-IMA, which included: completion of the P-IMA assessment in The Gambia; application of P-IMA in Belize and Jamaica; plans to apply P-IMA in Chad, focusing on the livestock sector; and procurement of software used in P-IMA applications. The Secretariat is following up on the recommendations of the external P-IMA evaluation, including through meetings with founding partners and other relevant stakeholders to discuss synergies with their capacity evaluation tools and other initiatives. Based on these consultations, the Secretariat will draft a plan for follow-up on P-IMA for consideration by the Working Group in June 2025.

26. MaryLucy Oronje (DCE) suggested consideration of open-access software options to facilitate access in developing countries. FAO proposed a workshop on P-IMA and the capacity evaluation tools, as recommended by the P-IMA evaluator. The Secretariat thanked members for their suggestions and proposed to address the points raised in follow-up work.

3.5 Gender mainstreaming

27. The Secretariat reported on ongoing efforts to mainstream gender, in line with the STDF Gender Action Plan. Since June 2024, gender analyses have begun for five projects (PG/768, PG/770, PG/807, PG/845 and PG/946), and a gender analysis was completed for the scale insect project in East Africa. The provisional 2025 work plan includes development of practical training materials to

address needs identified in the gender analyses. An online event is planned (as part of the PPP Practitioner Group in 2025) with LadyAgri on PPPs to empower women in agriculture. Additionally, there is an opportunity to hold an event in Geneva in March 2025, alongside the SPS Committee, to coincide with International Women's Month and the 38th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration.

28. The IPPC noted that its recent project development workshop included a session on gender mainstreaming, and gender considerations will be integrated in planned improvements to the PCE tool. Sweden emphasized the importance of strengthening gender indicators, as recommended by the external programme evaluation. WOAHA acknowledged that STDF's work on gender mainstreaming had inspired WOAHA to embrace gender mainstreaming.

3.6 Follow-up to external assessment on environment, biodiversity and climate change

29. The Secretariat briefed the Working Group on possible follow-up actions to the recommendations of the external assessment on environment, biodiversity and climate change (referring to the document shared). The Secretariat invited members to provide feedback on the proposed follow-up actions, which include a simple action plan to support mainstreaming.

30. The IPPC expressed support for the development of an action plan, noting that climate change is part of its strategic framework, and a new IPPC publication on climate change impacts on plant health is forthcoming. The Netherlands suggested more visibility for environment mainstreaming and suggested that STDF could highlight the linkages of environment and biodiversity in agriculture, food safety and trade facilitation. Mary Grace Rivere-Mandigma (DCE) supported the proposed action plan and suggested more attention to the environment in project applications. FAO shared information on its publications on food safety and climate change, which could be promoted through STDF's work. COLEAD highlighted the economic and financial costs for small-scale traders of new trade requirements, and cautioned against making application forms more difficult. Germany suggested communicating better how SPS capacity supports adaptation and resilience (noting opportunities to leverage new funding sources for SPS capacity development) without adding additional barriers for applicants and project partners. Rommel Betancourt (DCE) emphasized that the action plan should focus on SPS capacity, and provide clear guidance for applicants and reviewers.

4 PPGs AND PROJECTS

4.1 Overview of ongoing and completed projects and PPGs

31. The Secretariat referred members to document [STDF/WG/Nov24/Overview](#), which provides an overview of the implementation status of ongoing projects and PPGs. The Secretariat informed that 23 projects and 10 PPGs are ongoing, and that 4 projects and 3 PPGs are awaiting contracting.

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

32. The Secretariat briefly introduced the PPG and project applications not tabled for consideration. These applications, including the reasons for not tabling them, are listed in document [STDF/WG/Nov24/Review](#).

33. A total of 120 applications were received by the last funding deadline. Of these: (i) 75 applications (62%) did not meet the minimum eligibility requirements, similar to previous meetings; and (ii) 36 applications (14 PPGs and 22 PGs) are eligible but not tabled for consideration for various reasons (explained in an Annex to the overview document). The Secretariat encouraged members to highlight any particular eligible (but not tabled) proposals of interest to their work.

34. Some members commented on the limited geographic diversity of applications for consideration at this meeting. The EC suggested taking steps to increase the quality of applications from Africa and ensuring that applications that are tabled for consideration clearly show added value for the STDF. FAO proposed finding new ways to advance relevant (but incomplete) applications between meetings to prevent them from being prematurely deemed ineligible.

4.3 Consideration of new PPG applications

35. The chairperson announced that there were two conflicts of interest regarding the following PPG applications: MaryLucy Oronje (DCE) for STDF/PPG/968 and FAO for STDF/PPG/1027. As such, these members were requested to refrain from taking part in the discussions linked to these applications.

STDF/PPG/968 - Assessing the centre of phytosanitary excellence (COPE) to scale phytosanitary capacity and increase market access in Africa

36. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application. Members found the proposal to be highly relevant, with significant potential for positive spillover effects both regionally and at the continental level. They expressed their appreciation for CABI as the implementer. They emphasized the need to consult all relevant stakeholders (e.g. RECs including EAC and IGAD, AU-IAPSC, Africa Food Safety Initiative, IPPC), build synergies with other relevant initiatives (e.g. USDA/USAID, IPPC African Phytosanitary Programme), and use existing phytosanitary training resources.

37. The Working Group recommended that the STDF Secretariat develop detailed Terms of Reference (ToR), in consultation with key stakeholders, to guide PPG implementation. Reflecting the aforementioned comments, the TORs should include, among others: (i) an in-depth assessment to underline the results, lessons and potential for scaling COPE as a regional centre; (ii) collaboration with all relevant national, regional and continental stakeholders; (iii) coordination with organizations involved in phytosanitary capacity building in Africa; and (iv) attention to gender mainstreaming and consideration of opportunities to use existing phytosanitary training materials and resources.

STDF/PPG/1010 - Promoting Market Access in the Cashew Nut Value Chain in Cambodia and Viet Nam

38. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application, subject to confirmation that there is no duplication with other initiatives and donor-supported projects in the two countries. Overall members found the proposal to be relevant, demand-driven and with significant potential impact on market access. Some members noted the existence of other related projects, including projects supported by Germany and the EU (e.g. GIZ-led CAPSAFE project in Cambodia). IPPC noted recent completion of a PCE in Cambodia.

39. If confirmed there is no duplication with other initiatives, the Working Group agreed that some revisions would improve the results and sustainability of the work to be carried out. These include: (i) clarify the scope of the resulting project (raw and/or processed cashews) in the two beneficiary countries, as well as specific food safety and phytosanitary aspects for attention; (ii) identify and include incentives to drive increased investments in SPS compliance; (iii) consider gender needs, challenges and opportunities in the value chain, as well as environmental issues; and (iv) focus on compliance with international standards (Codex, IPPC), rather than specific import requirements. The Working Group recommended developing ToR that address the aforementioned points, identify the specific roles and responsibilities of the implementing agency and national partners, and include a detailed budget aligned to the expected outputs.

STDF/PPG/1027 - Mitigating Aflatoxin contamination in peanuts in India

40. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application subject to revisions. Members found the proposal relevant, demand-driven and linked to ongoing Codex work, particularly, the Code of Practice (CoP) for the prevention and reduction of aflatoxin contamination in peanuts.

41. Several members highlighted that peanuts are a major export from India with significant national investment in the value chain, and raised questions about whether the STDF was the best vehicle for this request. In this regard, members agreed that it would be essential for the resulting project to leverage substantial financing from public and/or private sector stakeholders in India (rather than seeking to be primarily supported by the STDF).

42. The Working Group recommended developing ToR, which include, among others: (i) identifying funding sources (including private sector) other than the STDF for the resulting project proposal; (ii) assessing the sustainability of proposed activities included in the resulting project (e.g. establishment of a "National Peanut Training Academy for Peanut Processors"), and including aspects

of innovation and scalability; (iii) clearly linking the resulting project to the Codex Code of Practice; and (iv) reviewing the PPG budget including to provide a clear and cost-effective breakdown of funds and reduce costs associated with a large number of in-person meetings.

STDF/PPG/1029 - Promoting safe fish production and export practices in Kenya

43. The Working Group **did not approve** this PPG application. Members recognized the demand-driven nature of the proposal; however, they agreed it could not be supported in its current form for various reasons.

44. Some members noted a lack of clarity on the target sector (freshwater, marine or artisanal fisheries) and the sanitary challenges affecting market access. Attention was drawn to Kenya's predominant reliance on freshwater (rather than marine) fisheries for domestic consumption, and the relatively limited size of the artisanal fisheries sector, which is likely to affect trade opportunities. Some Working Group members highlighted that the Department of Veterinary Services of Kenya did not appear to have been consulted and engaged on the application, which would be essential.

4.4 Consideration of new PG applications

45. The chairperson informed members that there were conflicts of interest regarding the following applications: UNIDO for PG/782; PIFS and Australia for PG/935; and Mary Grace Rivere-Mandigma (DCE) for PG/722. As such, these organizations were requested to refrain from taking part in the discussions linked to these applications.

STDF/PG/782 – More efficient audit and verification practices to facilitate food trade in Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines

46. The Working Group **approved** this application subject to: (i) revising the logframe prior to contracting while also refining the indicators during the inception phase of the project; (ii) obtaining an endorsement letter from a senior official within the Department of Agriculture in The Philippines; and (iii) ensuring that the project stays closely aligned with the relevant Codex Guidelines.

47. The Secretariat explained the overall concept of remote audits and inspections, and highlighted that this project would identify and pilot good practices at both the domestic and international level. In response to a written recommendation from MaryLucy Oronje (DCE) to identify the gaps in the regulatory frameworks in the beneficiary countries, the Secretariat noted such an assessment would be conducted through a complementary Australia-funded project in the region. The Secretariat confirmed that the project partners would consult relevant resources shared by the US in written comments. Marie Grace Rivere-Mandigma (DCE) recommended that the guidelines on the operationalization of remote practices consider applicability to small and medium enterprises. Several members underscored the potential for scalability across and beyond the ASEAN region, and the promising approach to help modernize food safety auditing. The World Bank/IFC emphasized that the project could help create an environment that promotes private sector development, and it would be important to learn about the barriers (visible and hidden) to use of remote audit.

STDF/PG/858 - Piloting One Health in Asia to Manage Aflatoxins

48. The Working Group **did not approve** this application. While members welcomed the topic and agreed the proposal was demand-driven, they found certain aspects inadequate.

49. Several members indicated that the project was overambitious and included too many countries and subregions for a pilot. It was strongly recommended to focus on a smaller number of countries and on specific products whose trade is being affected by aflatoxin contamination. In addition, it was recommended to: (i) focus on supporting compliance with international standards (Codex, IPPC, WOH) rather than specific import requirements of trading partners; (ii) actively involve all relevant stakeholders (including ministries of health) in the beneficiary countries; (iii) make use of existing knowledge products, communication materials, research and data on aflatoxin contamination; and (iv) build on and link to existing national and regional One Health networks, efforts and resources.

STDF/PG/935 - Pacific Beekeeping Enabling Environment (BEE)

50. The Working Group **approved** this application subject to: (i) the project document including further references to the relevant WOAH standards on apiculture to ensure alignment with international best practices; and (ii) that the continued participation of the seven countries in the project be dependent on the results of Output 1, with a feasibility study carried out to evaluate each country's ability to proceed with subsequent outputs. Output 1 will assess the pest and disease status of various honey bee species populations, industry expansion capacity, and other biosecurity concerns in each beneficiary country.

51. In response to a question from WOAH, the Secretariat explained that it was unrealistic to expect all 7 countries to be able to export honey by the end of the 3-year period. Therefore, the proposal has set a target for at least 2 of the 7 countries to be able to export by the end of the project. For the remaining countries, the project will take a stepwise approach to establish the foundation for future exports, which may take several years to materialize after the project concludes. The Secretariat noted that PIFS is engaging donors to secure additional funding for the full project proposal (US\$4 million) developed through the PPG, and clarified that the STDF project (comprising the first 3 outputs of the larger project) is designed to succeed independently of whether additional resources materialize.

52. France suggested to engage the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in the project. Lastly, in response to a question from IPPC, it was clarified that PIFS would seek additional funds to enable the participation of the Cook Islands in the project, as they are currently ineligible to receive STDF funds due to their absence from the OECD DAC list.

STDF/PG/722 - Strengthening Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) Implementation to Facilitate Safe Trade of Meat and Meat Products in the Philippines

53. The Working Group **approved** this application subject to: (i) ensuring that the regulations that will be piloted are harmonized with relevant WOAH and Codex standards; (ii) elaborating on how the project will complement (not duplicate) existing government initiatives on RIA (including with regards to the institutional arrangements in the Department of Agriculture); (iii) further detailing a plan for long-term sustainability of the work and results to be delivered; and iv) clarifying how RIA reports and other information generated through the pilot will be made available to ensure transparency to all stakeholders. Members overall welcomed the topic of the proposal and noted that it was demand-driven, well-supported and potentially replicable.

54. Members requested clarifications on the complementarity of the project and the existing government initiatives on RIA, as well as the institutional arrangements. The Secretariat conveyed the responses received from the applicant, and their willingness to address all comments received. FAO requested some clarifications on the implementing partner's team and on the budget, which were subsequently addressed by the Secretariat.

STDF/PG/831 - Improving the Implementation of SPS Best Practices for Export-Oriented Vegetables in Bangladesh (IPSEV-Bangladesh)

55. The Working Group **approved** this application subject to the following conditions: (i) clarification of roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, with need for close collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE); (ii) integration of IPPC's technical expertise during project implementation; (iii) ensuring that tailored trainings and materials avoid duplication and utilize existing resources from STDF partners (including FAO, IPPC and IFC); (iv) inclusion of a comprehensive gourd export market study (including small "ethnic market shops" in developed countries) at the inception phase of the project to guide activities; (v) exploration of the possibility to add another district (alongside Jashore) to enhance geographic diversity in farmer engagement; and (vi) clear identification and monitoring of political and organizational risks in the project's risk matrix, with realistic mitigation strategies.

56. The proposal was well-received, with members noting its potential to enhance both plant health and food safety capacities, as well as its replicability and attention to key cross-cutting issues. The EC recommended to explore synergies with work supported by its delegation in Bangladesh, noting the existence of many donor-supported initiatives in the country.

4.5 Information exchange

4.5.1 CropLife International Sustainable Management Pesticides Framework (SMPF)

57. Delisa Jiang from CropLife International provided an introduction of collaboration to date with the STDF in a number of projects globally, and pointed to opportunities to expand collaboration in the context of future work under the SMPF. The presentation highlighted how SMPF aligns with the FAO/WHO International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management to promote responsible pesticide use that supports crop resilience while protecting human health and the environment. The SMPF framework is backed by over US\$13 million for initiatives in nine countries across Latin America, Africa, and Asia over five years. Key activities include capacity building, technical cooperation, supply chain integration, and information sharing. Achievements so far include regulatory improvements, innovations like drone and gene-editing technologies, strengthened governance, as well as reduction on illegal trade in banned or counterfeit products. The presentation emphasized the importance of sound regulation as a basis for innovation and increased market access, and the role of partnerships in driving systemic change. Several members thanked the speaker for the clarity and depth of her presentation, recognizing the complexity of the topic.

4.5.2 IFC/WHO Investment case for national food safety systems and infrastructure

58. Kateryna Onul (IFC) and Simone Moraes Raszl (WHO) presented the critical public health and economic benefits of investing in foodborne disease surveillance to guide government and donor decisions on food safety. They drew attention to the huge cost of foodborne diseases (FBDs) in terms of illness, deaths and productivity losses in low- and middle-income countries, comparable to the global impact of tuberculosis and malaria. The IFC/WHO investment analysis covers 17 countries (with limited FBD surveillance). It estimates that investing US\$492 million over 10 years could prevent 19 million illnesses and 13,092 deaths, yielding US\$23 billion in benefits for 800 million people. The analysis highlights that surveillance investments are most beneficial in countries with high disease burdens and limited treatment capacity (including Africa and South-East Asia). The presenters noted that the publication is under finalization and that this was the first presentation to an external audience. In response to a question from the Netherlands, the presenters clarified that the investment analysis did not include expenditures from NGOs or foundations (e.g. Gates Foundation) but this could be worth considering in the future. Martin Kimanya (DCE) commended the study for its value in supporting advocacy in developing countries and urged donors to invest in addressing SPS-related challenges. Jaime Romero-Prada (DCE) highlighted the importance of studying the lag time between establishing surveillance systems and achieving impactful results.

4.5.3 Using PVS data to spur action (WOAH)

59. Jennifer Lasley introduced WOA's PVS Information System (PVS IS), which digitalizes the PVS Pathway programme for veterinary and aquatic animal health services. PVS IS enables access to data and information from individual PVS Reports, facilitating advocacy for investment, sustainable funding, and progress tracking towards WOA standards. Since 2006, the PVS Pathway has conducted over 600 activities, generated 228 evaluation reports, and engaged 146 member countries. PVS IS aggregates data and information from these reports to empower WOA members with better access to data so they can act on the PVS recommendations to strengthen veterinary services. Several members thanked WOA for the interesting presentation. Some pointed to opportunities to apply a similar digital approach to data and information generated through other capacity evaluation tools. In response to questions, WOA clarified that the online PVS IS had been developed and customised for WOA, that there are links to the OIE Observatory, and that WOA would be pleased to share additional information with IPPC, Codex and others.

4.5.4 New/emerging SPS initiatives/issues and opportunities for future STDF work

60. During this agenda item, several members shared information on ongoing or planned work of relevance for the STDF. UNIDO announced the new EU-funded Africa Trade Competitiveness and Market Access Programme (ATCMAP), launched in October 2024, aimed at harmonizing standards, strengthening SPS coordination, and advancing electronic certification across five African regions. UNIDO referred to the launch of an ASEAN food safety project promoting digital solutions (funded by Australia), linked to the newly approved STDF remote audit regional project. Additionally, UNIDO is preparing an EU-funded project in Liberia to enhance national food safety systems, based on use

of the FAO food control system assessment. In June 2024, UNIDO organized a Dialogue on Benchmarking of Voluntary Third-Party Assurance schemes. UNIDO announced that the next Vienna Food Safety Forum (VFSF) will be held from 10-12 June 2025, and proposed collaboration with the STDF on this (based on the successful experience in 2022). More information on UNIDO's SPS activities can be found [here](#).

61. IPPC drew attention to its side event during the 29th Session of the FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG), entitled "Plant Health: Why is it Crucial for the Success of One Health?", which attracted over 390 participants. The event highlighted the importance of plant health within the One Health framework and discussed antimicrobial resistance and early warning systems. IPPC also shared an update on its successful project development workshop in Rome in October, in collaboration with COLEAD, which trained phytosanitary officials from nine African countries, and thanked the STDF Secretariat for its contribution to the programme.

62. The IFC shared an update on selected work, including: (i) a webinar on food safety culture in the agricultural business sector to mark World Food Day; and (ii) signature of a cooperation agreement with the World Food Programme in Ukraine to support local SMEs in food safety. Looking ahead, the IFC will host the second Food Fortification Forum on 9 December 2024 in Bangladesh, and the Global Food Safety Forum on 9 June 2025 in Kenya, which focuses on the private sector and will include a session on gender. IFC noted that both events offer opportunities for collaboration with the STDF.

63. FAO's update drew attention to a recent webinar on artificial intelligence in food safety, highlighting AI tools used by food safety authorities in strategic surveillance, early warning, and food safety management. Three new reports on food allergens were published as part of the meeting. These reports include the review and establishment of precautionary labelling for priority allergens, the review and establishment of exemptions for certain food allergens, and the review and establishment of threshold levels for specific tree nuts (Brazil nut, macadamia nut, Queensland nut), soy, celery, lupin, mustard, buckwheat, and oats.

64. The WTO announced that next week's SPS Committee week would include two thematic sessions: (i) emerging risks and agricultural technologies; and (ii) use of the Codex Guidelines for Voluntary Third-Party Assurance Programmes, which includes several speakers involved in the STDF's three regional STDF vTPA projects. In December 2024, a regional SPS workshop will be held in Rabat, Morocco for Francophone Africa, and a thematic session on regulatory approaches is planned in March 2025. The WTO noted that the 6th Review of the Operation and Implementation of the SPS Agreement was ongoing and that several proposals emphasize the relationship between the SPS Committee and the STDF, with potential recommendations currently under discussion.

65. Codex provided updates relevant to the STDF, highlighting work from two Codex Committees. The 27th session of the Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection focused on digitalizing food control systems, with proposals for a standardized appeals process for rejected imports, and unified sanitary requirements. Codex is consolidating guidance on equivalence and updating traceability and food fraud guidelines. Additionally, the Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs introduced action levels for residues from feed cross-contamination, aiming to address trade challenges. The upcoming Codex Alimentarius Commission session will cover topics such as labelling, MRLs for pesticides, and veterinary drugs, with side events involving the SPS and STDF Secretariats.

5 OTHER BUSINESS

66. The Secretariat discussed upcoming dates for the Working Group. It was agreed to hold the next meeting on 24-25 June 2025, the week immediately following the WTO SPS Committee meetings (16-20 June). Two options were considered for the second meeting in 2025: (i) 30-31 October, enabling the Working Group to take place immediately before the SPS Committee; or (ii) the week of 17 November, not be linked to the SPS Committee. Following different views on the timing, it was agreed to further consult members and finalize the exact dates separately.

6 CLOSURE

67. The chairperson thanked all participants for their active engagement and contribution to the Working Group meeting. The meeting concluded shortly before 15.00.

ANNEX 1

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