

STDF WORKING GROUP
24-25 JUNE 2025, WTO (ROOM S3)
SUMMARY REPORT

1 OPENING

1.1 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

1. The STDF Working Group met in person on 24-25 June 2025 at the WTO Headquarters in Geneva. The meeting was chaired by Marie-Luise Rau, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH), Germany.

2. Following introductions by participants attending in person and via Zoom, members adopted the agenda. The list of participants is provided in Annex 1. Presentations delivered are available on the STDF [website](#).

2 OPERATION OF THE FACILITY

2.1 Staffing and financial situation

3. The Secretariat updated members on STDF's staffing situation. Changes since the last meeting were noted, including appointment of: (i) Peter Donelan as acting Deputy Head and Lead on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning on 1 May 2025 following a recruitment process; and (ii) Anita Mwango Moragia in February 2025 as communications officer (short-term contract, pending planned hiring process). Two recently joined Young Professionals were introduced: Angela Benefo (WTO Young Professional Programme) and Ahamed Ashiq Shajahan (China WTO General Internship Programme). Morgane Martin has provided short-term support in the interim given staffing gaps.

4. The Secretariat briefed participants on the financial situation of the STDF Trust Fund in 2025, referring to Annex 1 of the Annotated Agenda. Contributions amounting to CHF 4,662,446 (US\$5,658,308) were received from six donors (Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States) from 1 January to 4 June 2025. Under existing multi-annual agreements, additional contributions are pledged in 2025 from the European Commission and the United States. Incorporating these pledges, approx. US\$6.5 million is expected from donors in 2025, leaving a gap of US\$700,000 to execute the 2025 work plan (budgeted at approximately US\$7.2 million).

5. The Secretariat shared that it is engaging with existing and potential donors regarding contributions to the Trust Fund for 2025 and onwards, and it hopes that contributions will be forthcoming from donors providing funds on an annual basis, as well as donors with which new multi-annual agreements are being discussed. Australia confirmed it is discussing a new agreement for support to the STDF under the 2025-2030 Strategy.

2.2 Update on the implementation of the STDF Strategy for 2025-2030

6. The Secretariat provided an update on implementation of the new Strategy with particular attention to: (i) the alumni network of Developing Country Experts (DCEs); (ii) collaboration with the private sector; and (iii) regional links. The Secretariat noted that while the DCE alumni network is new, the STDF has worked extensively with diverse private sector stakeholders to date, as well as with regional organizations. The Secretariat referred to three documents (shared in advance of the meeting) that draw on inputs provided by Working Group members during the Strategy development process and provide detail on the approach to set up the alumni network, and to further strengthen private sector engagement and regional links. The Secretariat noted that this could be done in a way that is cost-neutral for the Secretariat.

7. Several members shared feedback on the approach to operationalize the DCE alumni network. WTO thanked the Secretariat for the clear document and identified opportunities for the SPS team to leverage this network, for instance to identify speakers and experts for SPS Committee thematic

sessions and the recently launched SPS mentoring mechanism. Several DCEs endorsed the network and expressed their commitment to support the STDF's work. Some highlighted opportunities to enhance coordination between the DCEs from the same region or sector. The IPPC supported the alumni network and proposed working more closely with DCEs to obtain high-quality project proposals (possibly through training on project development and results-based management). IFC expressed interest to use the alumni network to tap expertise and knowledge to support IFC's food safety projects globally.

8. Members shared views on the Secretariat's presentation and document on strengthening regional links aimed at increasing dissemination and use of STDF good practices and innovations for increased impact and sustainability. IPPC appreciated the approach to strengthen links with existing regional networks and mechanisms, including Regional Plant Protection Organizations, noting that collaboration with regional partners in nationally-focused projects could enhance visibility, scaling and integration with regional strategies. IICA supported and welcomed stronger regional links. APAARI noted the importance of also enhancing inter-regional links, pointing to strong inter-regional linkages under the STDF biopesticides projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

9. Several members expressed support for the Secretariat's document on private sector collaboration, including opportunities to hold private sector roundtable meetings linked to STDF knowledge work and projects. WTO recognized STDF's role in deepening dialogue and cooperation between STDF partners and the private sector. UNIDO and the World Bank highlighted the private sector's knowledge of SPS issues and importance of public-private collaboration to strengthen SPS systems and facilitate trade. UNIDO and some DCEs underlined the need to work closely with SMEs in developing countries, as well as multinational companies. APAARI stressed the need to improve trust between the private sector and public stakeholders in projects. IPPC suggested increasing financial contributions from private sector stakeholders to diversify funding sources for projects. France urged the Secretariat to pursue more effective and impactful public-private partnerships in the future. Some members expressed interest to participate in the private sector roundtable meeting with SSAFE on 2 October. FAO offered to support the development of the agenda for this meeting.

10. Based on the discussion and comments shared, the Working Group endorsed the Secretariat's approach to move forward with the DCE alumni network, regional links and private sector roundtables. The Secretariat agreed to update the Working Group on progress and experiences.

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

11. The Secretariat presented the document entitled "Follow up to the recommendations of the external STDF programme evaluation" for the consideration of the Working Group. The Chairperson proposed to: (i) limit the discussion to recommendations that required action, following Zoom consultations organized by the Chairperson with founding partners and donors in April 2025; and (ii) consider as complete evaluation recommendations identified as requiring no further action in the document circulated. The Working Group agreed to this approach.

12. On recommendation 5 related to strengthening the role of the DCEs and finding avenues for post role engagement, the Working Group agreed this is closely linked to the DCE alumni network. Following agreement (Nov. 2024) to extend the period of DCE participation from two to three years, the Secretariat proposed a language revision to paragraph 22 of the Operational Rules. The Working Group also discussed possible additional language updates related to: (i) the evaluation's recommendation to consider the representational role of new DCE candidates, in addition to technical knowledge and experience during the recruitment process; and (ii) gender balance of DCEs. The Chairperson proposed to circulate the proposed revisions to the Operational Rules to the Working Group via email for approval.

13. The Working Group agreed to the proposed approach to implement recommendation 2 (Increase the impact of the global platform) through regional links and private sector roundtables. The Working Group agreed to delay discussion of recommendation 3 (Improve cofinancing of project activities) until a later date, pending the planned study on financing in the 2025 work plan. In response to a question from France on the need for, and scope of this study, the Secretariat noted that the proposed study was budgeted in both the initial draft and revised draft 2025 work plan, and this could be discussed under the next agenda item. The Secretariat noted that draft Terms of Reference for this study would be shared with the Working Group for feedback prior to initiating any work.

14. The Working Group agreed that follow-up to recommendation 4 (MEL) would take place through the ongoing revision of the STDF MEL framework. There was agreement to postpone any discussion on recommendation 6 (staffing and secondments) until there is more clarity on the other recommendations and the financial health of the trust fund. The Secretariat agreed to share an updated document with the Working Group following the meeting, including to seek approval on the proposed language revisions to the Operational Rules related to DCEs.

2.4 Revised STDF 2025 Work Plan

15. The Secretariat recalled that the 2025 draft Work Plan had been provisionally approved by the Working Group in November 2024, prior to finalization of the STDF Strategy for 2025-2030. As agreed in November 2024, the Secretariat submitted a revised 2025 work plan for the Working Group's consideration. The Secretariat noted that the updated work plan included clarifications on ongoing and/or planned activities and an Annex outlining the status of delivery of key activities/outputs, and that the budget had not changed.

16. The United States appreciated the updated work plan, requesting more advance notice of STDF project workshops and missions, wherever feasible, to enhance involvement with in-country stakeholders and enable donors to join project events if possible. In response to a question from FAO on the SSAFE private sector roundtable meeting, the Secretariat noted that SSAFE Board Members will visit WTO on 2 October and requested to meet the Secretariat, offering an opportunity for a hybrid roundtable event (approx. 60-90 minutes) which interested STDF partners and other members could attend virtually. The Secretariat agreed to consult interested STDF partners (including FAO and WTO) on the draft agenda.

17. The Working Group approved the revised Work Plan for 2025.

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

18. The Secretariat provided an update on the ongoing revision of the STDF MEL Framework and results matrix. This work aims to strengthen MEL processes where possible and ensure the results matrix aligns with the new STDF Strategy for 2025-2030. The Secretariat reported that two Zoom meetings had been held in May and June 2025 with members of the MEL Group to discuss proposed improvements. These include updates to the results matrix and refinements to current MEL practices. The Secretariat updated the Working Group on the planned timeline to share the revised draft MEL Framework and obtain feedback, with the goal of finalizing the document by the November meeting. Australia and the United States expressed their appreciation to the Secretariat for the work carried out to date. The World Bank and IFC volunteered to join the MEL Group going forward.

2.6 Communications

19. The Secretariat introduced the STDF 2024 Annual Report, noting that this document is key for MEL, as well as communicating results. Several STDF founding partners, donors and DCEs commended the Secretariat for this publication. SIDA highlighted the usefulness of the report in informing parliament about STDF results and achievements linked to donor funding. The World Bank and IFC noted that the report was comprehensive and easy to understand. Rommel Betancourt (DCE) thanked the Secretariat for including DCEs' voices and experiences.

20. The Secretariat provided an update on other communication activities, including STDF events and participation in external meetings since the last Working Group meeting. Some key events were highlighted, including a joint STDF event with Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility (TFAF), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) for the 4th Regional Meeting of National Trade Facilitation Committees in Latin America (Nov. 2024), a webinar on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) voluntary third party assurance (vTPA) approach (March 2025), a side event on e-Vet certification organized jointly with WOA and IICA (May 2025) on the margins of the WOA General Assembly, and the Vienna Food Safety Forum (VFSF) jointly organized with UNIDO and Australia (June 2025).

21. The Secretariat informed the Working Group about the publication of new project stories on the STDF website (e.g. [Strengthening Senegal's Horticulture Exports through Gender Inclusion](#), [Safer Spices in Southeast Asia](#), [Wood packaging materials project in Africa](#)), in addition to key publications

including the Annual Report and new STDF Strategy. The Secretariat made a short presentation on plans to update the STDF Communications Plan, aligned to the 2025-2030 Strategy, for further discussion at the Working Group meeting in November 2025. Examples were shared of ongoing work to improve STDF's digital visibility and online presence, with attention to a new [LinkedIn page](#). The aim is to produce consistent, high-quality digital content that highlights results and lessons from STDF projects, and knowledge work, while attracting new audiences and supporting outreach and dissemination in support of STDF's two outcomes.

3 PROJECT PREPARATION GRANTS (PPGS) AND PROJECT GRANTS (PGS)

3.1 Overview of ongoing and completed Project Grants (PGs) and Project Preparation Grants (PPGs)

22. The Secretariat referred members to document [STDF/WG/Jun25/Overview](#), which provides an overview of the implementation status (as of 6 June 2025) of ongoing Project Grants (PGs) and Project Preparation Grants (PPGs). The Overview document showed that 27 PGs and 12 PPGs are ongoing, with one contracted prior to the Working Group meeting. One other project and two PPGs (approved in 2024) are awaiting contracting. The Secretariat also informed members about recently completed PGs and PPGs.

3.2 Overview of new PG and PPG applications not tabled for consideration

23. The Secretariat briefly introduced the PG and PPG applications not tabled for consideration. These applications, including the reasons for not tabling them, are listed in document [STDF/WG/Jun25/Review](#).

24. A record number of 120 PG and PPG applications were received since the Working Group meeting in November 2024. Of these: (i) eight applications (7%) have been tabled for consideration by the Working Group; (ii) 64 applications (53%) did not meet the minimum eligibility requirements; and (iii) 48 applications (40%) may be eligible, however require additional information to assess fully. Among the latter, the Secretariat has initially identified 27 applications (11 PPGs and 16 PGs) that may be recommended for consideration by the Working Group in the future, and is actively engaging with applicants to clarify and finalize proposals prior to the next deadline in August 2025. The Secretariat requested to Working Group members to share any feedback on pipeline applications to help filter and prioritize incoming requests. France expressed interest in two project applications (STDF/PG/1034 and STDF/PG/1019) not been tabled for consideration, and encouraged more attention to incoming applications related to animal health.

3.3 Consideration of new PPG applications

25. The Working Group discussed the following four PPG applications. The chairperson requested members to refrain from intervening in the discussion where they were involved in any way in the application, unless requested to provide comments or clarifications.

STDF/PPG/1032: Modernizing Food Safety Systems in Timor-Leste for Safer Trade

26. The Working Group **approved** this PPG subject to revision. Members welcomed the relevance of this demand-driven application, the first from Timor-Leste. They commended Timor-Leste's efforts in modernizing its food safety management system based on international standards (Codex) and the WTO SPS Agreement.

27. Some Working Group members provided detailed recommendations to be considered before contracting the PPG and/or during the development of the project proposal. Members highlighted the need to secure outstanding letters of support from relevant stakeholders. Other key recommendations included: (i) fostering collaboration with relevant national, regional and international stakeholders; (ii) clarifying the difference (if any) between the proposed Food Safety Law mentioned in the PPG application and the "Food Act of Timor-Leste" recently endorsed by the Cabinet; (iii) ensuring that the scope of the project proposal to be developed is focused; (iv) ensuring complementarity with ongoing projects and initiatives including work supported by the World Bank; (v) clearly articulating the One-Health approach, its relevance and what this entails for the project proposal; and (vi) ensuring private sector involvement and collaboration. The Working Group further

recommended developing detailed Terms of Reference for the PPG, in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, to fully address the recommendations.

STDF/PPG/1044: Improving SPS Capacity in Zambia to Grow Regional Seed Trade

28. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application, subject to revision. Members welcomed the relevance of the topic and the demand-driven nature of the application, including strong support of public and private sector stakeholders. They recognized its strong alignment to international standards and potential to enhance seed trade and agricultural resilience in the region.

29. Some members provided recommendations to be considered during delivery of the PPG. These included: (i) further clarifying the seed types of focus and challenges to be considered (food fraud, aflatoxins and/or Maize Lethal Necrosis); (ii) ensuring coordination with ongoing initiatives and partners, given the significant investments in aflatoxin control in East Africa; (iii) strengthening links with existing regional frameworks and bodies (e.g. African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA), The African Union – Inter African Phytosanitary Council (AU-IAPSC), COMESA, SADC); (iv) promoting regional collaboration by exploring options to harmonize border quarantine procedures and risk-based inspection protocols; (v) establishing an inclusive and sustainable public-private partnership model; and (vi) learning from the STDF seed project in the Asia-Pacific region ([STDF/PG/755](#)). The Working Group recommended to develop Terms of Reference for the PPG, in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, to ensure these elements are addressed in PPG work and proposal development.

STDF/PPG/1057: Harnessing Data & AI to Strengthen Food Safety and Trade in CARICOM

30. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application subject to revisions. Members welcomed the proposal's innovative use of AI and digital solutions, noting potential for replication in the CARICOM region and scalability to other SPS sectors and regions. The STDF Secretariat recommended increasing the requested budget from US\$34,400 to US\$50,000, which was agreed.

31. Some Working Group members expressed concerns about the broad scope of the feasibility study and recommended a more focused approach and clear methodology to assess its potential impact on food safety culture. Data privacy and the need for appropriate regulatory frameworks for AI use were also highlighted. GIZ pointed to the recent Hamburg Declaration on Responsible AI¹ and FAO shared information on forthcoming AI governance guidelines. Members also emphasized the importance of engaging regional bodies such as the Caribbean Plant Health Directors Forum, ensuring synergies with the work of the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS), and leveraging other ongoing efforts by Working Group members using AI to support SPS capacity building.

32. The Working Group recommended that the STDF Secretariat develop Terms of Reference for the PPG, taking into account the various recommendations and comments received, in consultation with the applicant and relevant partners. It was agreed that the PPG should initially focus on the feasibility study and, based on its findings, a decision would be made on whether to proceed with the development of a project proposal.

STDF/PPG/1066: Assessing Laboratory Testing Needs and Business Case in Tanzania

33. The Working Group **approved** this PPG application subject to revisions. Members welcomed the proposal and acknowledged its alignment with the IPPC Strategic Framework 2020–2030 and the potential of a PPP approach to strengthen laboratory capacity.

34. Members shared recommendations to be considered during the planning and delivery of the feasibility study. These include the following: (i) clearly specifying the required expertise and qualifications of the PPG consultant(s); (ii) identifying opportunities to engage and/or build linkages with the AU-IAPSC and relevant laboratories in neighbouring countries; (iii) clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of public and private sector actors; and (iv) considering client's needs and the financial and operational sustainability of new laboratory services.

¹ https://www.bmz-digital.global/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/250603_Hamburg_Declaration-1.pdf

35. The Working Group agreed that the findings of the feasibility study should inform future work (if any) on a project proposal. Additional recommendations were shared related to the development of this potential project, subject to the feasibility study's findings. These included: (i) incorporating a sustainability model and strategies for client diversification to ensure long-term viability; (ii) establishing effective mitigation measures for key risks (e.g. accreditation delays, lower than expected demand for testing services); (iii) identifying sources of funding (including from the private sector or climate funds) to finance the resulting project; and (iv) including a phased business model to support the scaling and diversification of testing services.

36. Some Working Group members noted that any project proposal to result from this PPG may not be eligible for STDF funding given the focus on laboratory infrastructure. Therefore, it would be essential to explore alternative sources of financing from the outset. The Working Group recommended developing detailed Terms of Reference, in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, to address all the comments shared and guide work under the PPG.

3.4 Presentation of STDF feasibility study on mobile food safety lab testing in SADC

37. Nomusa Dlamini and Thulisile Nkomzwayo from the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) presented the findings of a PPG feasibility study ([STDF/PPG/765](#)), which evaluated the viability of deploying mobile ISO 17025-accredited food safety testing laboratories in South Africa, Namibia, Eswatini and Lesotho. The proposed mobile labs aim to provide accessible, real-time, and accredited food safety testing services to SMEs and remote farming communities. Two alternative models were assessed in the feasibility study, which confirmed the technical and financial feasibility. The van-type model was preferred due to its agility and adaptability to rural terrain, compared to the truck-based advanced model with full testing capabilities.

38. Members raised several questions on mobility, test quality, intended user groups and energy needs. The CSIR team clarified that the labs would be deployed with integrated systems for water, power and waste management, with protocols limiting field use to around one week per location. They emphasized that the labs are targeted at small-scale processors, farmers and value chain operators, particularly in aggregation areas, and that energy needs can be met using solar or plug-in sources (enabling the lab to remain in one area for extended periods). In response to questions, the presenters confirmed that test results of ISO 17025 accredited mobile labs are accepted internationally and the South African National Accreditation System had affirmed the feasibility of such accreditation. Several members, including DCEs, expressed interest in the model's scalability to other applications (e.g. soil and fertilizer testing, food safety services in remote regions).

3.5 Presentation on scaling

39. Dr. Richard Kohl, a senior member of the Scaling Community of Practice presented an overview of the concept of scaling and some initial findings from the ongoing STDF Scaling Case Study, which aims to inform the development of a systematic approach to mainstream scaling across STDF's workstreams, where appropriate. The presentation introduced key definitions and distinctions between transactional and transformational scaling, highlighting the need for STDF to pursue long-term, systemic impact rather than focusing solely on short-term outputs. Emphasis was placed on embedding a "scaling mindset" into STDF's strategy and operations, including through pathways such as scaling up (policy change), scaling out (replication/adaptation) and scaling deep (behavioural change). The session highlighted enabling conditions such as the presence of champions, policy reform pathways, and the critical role of intermediaries (like STDF) as conveners and facilitators.

40. Several members, including Australia, Sweden, Germany, World Bank and FAO, welcomed the scaling case study. Some posed questions around policy reform, private sector engagement, behaviour change and impact measurement. There was strong support to link the scaling study with STDF's ongoing MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning) efforts, and to develop criteria to determine when and how to scale effectively. The importance of long-term engagement, resource mobilization, and coordination across actors was also emphasized. The case study (started in June 2024) will incorporate concrete examples of STDF-funded initiatives and aims to generate actionable recommendations to inform strategic scaling under the 2025–2030 Strategy.

3.6 Consideration of new project applications

41. Four project applications were tabled for consideration by the Working Group. The Secretariat invited members to refer to their detailed reviews in the document STDF/WG/Jun25/Review. The chairperson requested members to refrain from intervening in the discussion where they were involved in any way in the application, unless requested to provide comments or clarifications.

STDF/PG/859: Strengthening Cashew and Sesame Export Capacity in Burkina Faso (RECEAS)

42. The Working Group **approved** this application, which resulted from a PPG, subject to some conditions. Some Working Group members requested to remove the small component (approx. US\$30,000) related to organic and fair-trade certification (outside the scope of the SPS Agreement), while others pointed to the need for flexibility to help producers and traders meet market requirements for their agri-food exports, taking into account that organic production supports sustainable production systems. IPPC requested to use the proposed budget line targeted at organic certification to implement the IPPC Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) tool (given a request from Burkina Faso's Plant Protection Directorate), which was agreed. The Working Group requested the Secretariat to help the applicant explore other funding sources for the organic component; UNIDO suggested it may be in a position to help.

43. Members provided further recommendations to enhance the project. These included: (i) using IPPC's ePhyto Learning Campus for phytosanitary capacity-building activities; (ii) encouraging strong engagement with the private sector and any other key stakeholders; (iii) coordinating with other relevant ongoing projects and initiatives in the country; (iv) making efforts to ensure the sustainability and replicability of the proposed model; and (v) updating the logical framework, including to reflect the structural and behavioural changes sought in relevant results and indicators.

STDF/PG/860: Facilitating Increased Trade of One-by-One Tuna in Indonesia and Malaysia

44. The Working Group **approved** this application, which resulted from a PPG, subject to some recommendations. These included: (i) expanding the number of targeted training participants from 600 to 700; and (ii) conducting an economic viability assessment of the prototype vessel to determine whether it is a suitable solution for wider sector adoption.

45. The Secretariat thanked members for written comments. In response to questions, the Secretariat clarified the decision to focus more project resources on Indonesia given the country's greater needs and higher economic importance of the tuna export industry (compared to Malaysia), noting that knowledge exchange would enhance South-South cooperation across both countries.

46. UNIDO expressed interest in engaging with project partners, linked to the UNIDO-led, ASEAN-focused STDF project on remote audits, which also addresses fisheries in Indonesia. Australia highlighted that the project was well designed, with strong potential for replicability and scalability in other island states. In response to questions about the number of beneficiaries and trainings, the Secretariat noted the intensive, ongoing nature of the planned training approach (i.e. not one-off training events) working collaboratively with fisherfolk and local communities to co-deliver results and influence long-term behavioural changes. The Secretariat clarified this is a pilot project, in which the project partners would be encouraged and supported to mainstream scaling from the outset.

STDF/PG/1016: A Regional Approach to Contain Banana Bunchy Top Disease in Africa

47. The Working Group welcomed and **approved** this application. Members recognized the importance of bananas for the economies and livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa and the threat posed by the rapid spread of Banana Bunchy Top Virus for production and trade. Members appreciated the demand-driven nature of the project, as well as the collaborative and regional approach involving relevant regional organizations and different types of countries, as well as IT and digital solutions, pointing to the importance of South-South cooperation and scalability to other banana producing regions and pests (e.g. Fusarium wilt Tropical Race 4).

48. Members provided some recommendations to strengthen the project, to be reflected in a revised application prior to contracting. These included: (i) integrating activities on vector management; (ii) refining the proposed approach to establish pest free areas and use of tissue culture technology; (iii) using available training materials on the IPPC Campus, especially on relevant International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs); (iv) leveraging the findings of the IPPC PCE tool where applied within project countries and encouraging other project countries to carry out a PCE; (v) reviewing and improving the project's exit strategy to enhance sustainability of results.

49. The Secretariat agreed to follow-up with the application on the recommendations and other points noted in the Secretariat's review, and to keep interested Working Group members informed once the project is initiated.

STDF/PG/1017: Strengthening Animal Traceability to Address SPS Issues in Kazakhstan

50. The Working Group **did not approve** this application. While some members welcomed a project focused on animal health and recognized the need for traceability, several concerns were also shared. Key concerns related to: (i) the in-kind contribution, particularly the amount budgeted for office space, which some viewed as inflated; (ii) Kazakhstan's status as an Upper Middle-Income Country, which led some members to suggest a larger financial contribution to the project would be more appropriate; and (iii) the financial sustainability of the proposed traceability system.

51. Members requested comments from WOAHP in order to inform a decision on whether or not the application should be resubmitted to the STDF. Some suggested the possibility to consider a scaled-down project, where the system could be piloted in selected regions, or for specific animal species or livestock products, prior to a wider roll-out, based on the experiences and lessons learned. One member noted that the application should include more detail on how the project would support sustainable agriculture practices and directly impact gender equality and poverty reduction.

52. Prior to concluding the discussion, FAO (the proposed implementing agency) was requested to share any clarifications. FAO stated that it considers the project technically strong and highlighted that some zones in the country have been officially certified by WOAHP as free from foot and mouth disease, which demonstrates the country's sanitary status and competitive trade position.

3.7 Decision on prioritization and funding of new project applications

53. The Working Group discussed prioritization and funding of new applications, linked to the financial status of the Trust Fund. Some members raised concerns and questions related to the high and growing number of applications for each funding cycle, the shortfall in funds received in the Trust Fund in 2025, the number of additional applications expected for the next round and the possibility that there may be no funds available. Some members mentioned the importance of sufficient resources to enable delivery of the STDF programme

54. Following a request, the Secretariat shared possible funding scenarios to inform the approval and prioritization of new applications in June and November 2025. The Secretariat recalled that the work plan anticipates approval of at least five projects in 2025. It was noted that (based on the existing funding situation, and expected average budget of STDF projects): (i) approving three projects in June would likely leave funds for one more project in November; and (ii) approving two projects in June would allow for approval of two projects in November. The Secretariat noted that should additional donor contributions be received, this outlook may change.

55. The Working Group agreed to approve the three projects identified above. Based on the discussion, the Chairperson suggested to explore in a future discussion the approach to rank incoming project applications and prioritize requests, given the growing number of applications received and limited funding available.

4 KNOWLEDGE WORK

4.1 Presentation on Innovation for Impact: FAO's Approach and Lessons for Safe Trade

56. Vincent Martin, FAO Director of Innovation presented FAO's innovation strategy, based on three pillars: (i) science-based decision-making; (ii) supporting member countries in their innovation

journeys; and (iii) strengthening FAO's internal capacity to innovate. He highlighted the importance of innovation for the STDF, noting that innovation includes all approaches that create value, including social, policy, institutional and financial innovations and technological advancements. Key initiatives were shared including the upcoming launch of the Agrifood Systems Technologies and Innovations Outlook (ATIO) knowledge platform, establishment of innovation hubs in Sub-Saharan Africa and modernization of Farmer Field Schools. The role of behavioural science in identifying and addressing barriers to innovation adoption was highlighted, as well as FAO's leadership in promoting open-source digital tools and ethical AI for agriculture.

57. Several members (including IFC, IPPC, France, UNIDO, Rommel Betancourt (DCE) and the Minor Use Foundation) shared comments and questions leading to a rich discussion about innovation within the new STDF Strategy. This included attention to the practical application and measurement of behavioural insights, challenges facing developing countries and integrating innovation into project design and evaluation. Other points emphasized the importance of tailored solutions, digital infrastructure and inclusive governance mechanisms, as well as the need for tools to assess innovation impact. Vincent Martin noted that FAO is developing structured approaches for evaluating and mainstreaming innovation internally and offered to share expertise and guidance to support STDF's increased focus on innovation and scaling under the new Strategy.

4.2 Update and discussion on STDF knowledge work

4.2.1 Digitalization and eCert

58. The Secretariat updated participants on recent work. This included a joint event with TFAF, IICA and ALADI on digitalization for trade facilitation on 26-27 November 2024 in Uruguay. Attention was drawn to two new STDF briefing notes available on the STDF website: "[Interoperability and Data Exchange: Lessons from Latin America](#)"; and "[Driving transformation with SPS e-Certification](#)". More recently, a side event on e-certification was organized with WOA and IICA during the WOA General Session on 26 May 2025 in Paris, where WOA reference data models and standards for electronic certification were presented, with attention to the STDF regional e-Vet project implemented by IICA.

4.2.2 PPPs

59. The Secretariat briefed the Working Group on recent PPP work including the PPP Guide published in December 2024 and Practitioner Group meeting in April 2025 to present the main findings and insights. The Working Group was invited to consult the PPP case stories, which illustrate practical experiences from various regions, on the website and contribute topics for new case stories. It was also noted that CABI developed its own internal PPP guide drawing on the STDF guide, illustrating how STDF knowledge work informs and supports members of the partnership.

60. The International Seed Federation (ISF) commended the Secretariat for the PPP Guide, and reiterated its commitment to the STDF partnership. The IPPC congratulated the Secretariat, noting that the PPP Guide relates to the IPPC's work on third party entities and that PPPs are expected to become a new area of focus as the IPPC revises its strategic framework for the next decade. The IPPC is also considering developing practical guidance on implementing PPPs, with the goal of encouraging financial contributions from the private sector, and will share updates as part of the IPPC's scale-up initiative. The IFC congratulated the Secretariat on the quality of the PPP Guide and confirmed that it would be shared and used within its network.

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

61. The Secretariat shared an update on P-IMA work including a PPG in Chad, implemented by CABI, and outlined ongoing efforts to explore alternatives (including AI) to the current multi-criteria decision analysis software (D-Sight) used to date for P-IMA. While testing is ongoing, the ChatGPT 4.0 (paid version) has produced results identical to the D-Sight software, at a significantly lower cost. The Secretariat is considering options to transition to an AI-based approach, and will address this in the P-IMA plan following up on the external evaluation findings and recommendations.

62. Mary Lucy Oronje (DCE) requested more information on the comparability and acceptability of the findings produced by ChatGPT (paid version) versus the current P-IMA software, highlighting that development partners recognize P-IMA's value in prioritizing SPS investments. UNIDO proposed

further assessing the use of ChatGPT for P-IMA analysis, and suggested developing a custom large language model to help prioritize and scale assessments in developing countries. FAO confirmed that the P-IMA tool complements sector-specific assessment tools and helps countries prioritize actions based on the findings of sector-specific assessments. The Secretariat explained that while initial tests showed the paid version of ChatGPT produced the same results as the current P-IMA tool, more testing is needed to assess consistency of the findings. The Secretariat is consulting WTO colleagues working on AI to assess reliability of the ChatGPT results, and plans to evaluate AI's self-assessed confidence levels in its outputs to better understand the reliability of the rankings.

4.2.4 Good Regulatory Practices (GRP)

63. The STDF briefed the Working Group on its initiatives in disseminating the GRP Guide. The Secretariat made a presentation at the Quarantine Regulators Meeting (QRM) in Manila in April 2025, co-hosted by the Philippines' Bureau of Plant Industry and Australia's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), where the GRP Guide was introduced to nearly 100 officials from 22 countries. A GRP presentation was also delivered by an STDF project stakeholder (Dennis Ndolo, South Africa) in June 2025 during an online event organized by the USDA-funded Africa Food Safety Initiative and the Nigeria Bilateral Food Safety Project for 30 Nigerian participants. This presentation (available via a YouTube video) shared practical experiences from an STDF-funded biopesticides project in applying GRPs, particularly regulatory stock-taking.

64. UNIDO inquired about upcoming GRP-related activities in Africa, expressing interest in potential collaboration on UNIDO-implemented regional initiatives. The Secretariat welcomed the opportunity to discuss and explore possible synergies on GRP work and outreach with UNIDO.

4.3 Update and discussion on cross-cutting issues

4.3.1 Gender mainstreaming

65. The Secretariat reported on ongoing efforts to mainstream gender, in line with the STDF Gender Action Plan and shared examples of gender mainstreaming in ongoing projects. As part of the Senegal horticulture project ([STDF/PG/946](#)), gender clauses were included in the revised phytosanitary legislation. Similarly, Roadmaps developed under the East Africa vTPA project ([STDF/PG/842](#)) for the aquaculture sector in Uganda and horticulture sector in Rwanda included gender considerations. CABI is using the findings of the gender analysis conducted under the Scale Insects project ([STDF/PG/807](#)) to inform a paper (under development) for a peer-reviewed journal.

66. The Secretariat has had meetings with STDF partners to learn about their work on gender mainstreaming and ensure complementarities to future STDF work (including the gender training materials in the 2025 STDF work plan following a recurring recommendation from completed gender analyses and requests from national stakeholders). The Secretariat noted that IPPC has ongoing work to integrate gender in the PCE tool and plans a step-by-step guide for NPPOs on how to integrate gender in their work, and related work is planned linked to the FAO/WHO Food Safety Capacity Evaluation tool. The Secretariat is taking steps to ensure that any new STDF materials on gender complement resources and training materials developed by STDF partners. Following further discussions on these complementarities, draft TORs for the planned STDF training materials to raise awareness on equal opportunities in SPS systems (included in the STDF work plan for 2025) will be shared with the Working Group for feedback.

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

67. The Secretariat briefed the Working Group on follow-up actions undertaken in response to the recommendations of the external assessment on environment, biodiversity and climate change completed in 2024. The Secretariat informed members that a preliminary draft of the Environment Action Plan, as recommended by the assessment, was shared with some STDF partners and implementing organizations for feedback. The Secretariat will continue consultations with members and plans to present a draft document to the Working Group in November.

68. The Secretariat informed members that it had presented the findings of the assessment during the 15th meeting of the CBD Inter-Agency Liaison Group meeting on Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in April 2025 in Paris, which also provided an opportunity to explore collaboration with other

organizations working on environment and biodiversity conservation. Some Working Group members, as well as members of the Inter-Agency group, expressed interest in updating the STDF/IPPC/WOAH publication (2013) on IAS and trade.

4.4 STDF Scaling session and case study

69. Following the presentation on Scaling by Richard Kohl, an interactive session including breakout groups, led by the lead consultant (Charlotte Coogan), was conducted to enable Working Group members to explore how the STDF can mainstream a systematic approach to scaling. The session aimed to clarify the definition of "scaling" within the STDF context, gather initial feedback, and identify opportunities for more deliberate integration of scaling across STDF operations (including the grant mechanism, knowledge work and global platform). A proposed working definition of scaling was shared, and feedback was collected through live polling and open discussion. While reactions to the definition were mixed, participants acknowledged the need for a shared understanding and intentional strategy to promote sustainable, impactful growth beyond project completion.

70. Key reflections from the breakout discussions included the importance of distinguishing between innovation and scaling, ensuring organic scaling processes are supported, and considering how scaling aligns with the existing STDF mandate. Participants also raised questions about integrating scaling into project formulation, collaborating with financing institutions, and capturing lessons learned through systematic monitoring and evaluation. Breakout group discussions produced several practical suggestions, including enhancing STDF's convening role, improving access to knowledge products, creating follow-up mechanisms for impact tracking, and considering new grant types or criteria focused on scalability. The meeting marked an important first step in shaping a common vision for scaling within the STDF. Additional consultations are planned with selected Working Group members and other STDF stakeholders as part of the scaling case study. A Zoom meeting is planned to present the initial findings of the study to the Working Group prior to finalization; more details on this meeting will be shared with the Working Group via email.

4.5 Information exchange

71. The WTO provided an update on recent developments in the SPS Committee following its periodic review of the SPS Agreement. Three main initiatives were highlighted: (i) the launch of an SPS Mentoring Programme to enhance transparency and support the engagement of developing countries on SPS matters; (ii) as part of the Sixth Review recommendations, members have reaffirmed their commitment to continue working with the STDF; and (iii) a new Working Group on SPS Transparency is being established to examine how notifications and comments on draft SPS regulations are managed. This group's work, beginning in November 2025, will connect with the STDF ePing project. Upcoming thematic events include: (i) a session on import controls during the SPS Committee week (3-7 November 2025); and (ii) a session on special and differential treatment (S&DT) to take stock of the implementation of the MC13 S&DT Declaration in the SPS area (date to be confirmed). There may be opportunities to share STDF work at these sessions.

72. The IFC highlighted the success of the 12th International Food Safety Forum, on 5 June 2025 in Nairobi, entitled "Waiting for Safer Food, Less Waste and Better Nutrition", attended by 150 participants from the private sector, governments, development agencies and donors. FAO and WHO were acknowledged for their active roles in the policy panels, and IFC donors (including Canada) were recognized. The IFC is conducting a food safety system assessment in Zambia, using the IFC's Scan Guide. This pilot, requested by the Ministry of Health, is the first of its kind in Africa following similar assessments in Asia and Eastern Europe. The study is due by the end of summer, with early feedback highlighting the tool's value. The IFC thanked the STDF Secretariat and UNIDO for their contributions to the Scan Guide and noted collaboration with local and international partners in Zambia, including Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) and WHO, as key enablers of progress.

73. FAO announced an STDF/FAO webinar on 10 July 2025, entitled "From Assessment to Action: Mobilizing Investments for Stronger Food Control Systems". The one-hour session will draw on insights from a recently concluded €6.4 million EU-funded project. The 3.5-year initiative focused on strengthening food control and phytosanitary governance in ten African countries. The webinar will demonstrate how assessment results are informing efforts under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's SPS policy framework. Emphasis will be placed on leveraging assessment outputs to attract investments at national and continental levels and

addressing identified system gaps. The FAO encouraged Working Group members to attend the session and promote it within their networks.

74. IPPC presented the outcomes of a large EU-funded initiative aimed at strengthening phytosanitary systems in COMESA countries. The project used the PCE tool to guide systemic improvements. Eleven PCEs were conducted, resulting in 11 national strategies, eight revised national plant health legislations, the certification of additional PCE facilitators, and the preparation of eight project proposals. IPPC launched an e-learning platform, comprising over 10 courses (in English, French, and soon Spanish), which has already reached more than 6,000 individuals. Gender and youth considerations were also integrated into PCE themes. A separate study, conducted with support from AU-IAPSC, modelled the PCE's trade impacts in Africa. The findings were consolidated into an SPS Gap Analysis, published on IPPC's website. The IPPC encouraged broader dissemination and integration of PCE resources in STDF and partner activities.

75. UNIDO provided a comprehensive report on recent events and initiatives. Key highlights included: (i) the ASEAN regional workshop in April on remote audits and e-certification, which also served to launch the new STDF project on Remote Audits ([STDF/PG/782](#)); and (ii) the UNIDO/STDF/Australia Vienna Food Safety Forum (VFSF) which had a strong focus on digitalization and AI applications. The VFSF was attended by over 300 participants from around 80 countries. It featured 10 side events and nine technical sessions, and two "Lighthouse Sessions" (with AUC, ASEAN and AfCFTA Secretariats). In addition, UNIDO initiated efforts in June 2024 to define benchmarking best practices, as well as the development of a technical document aimed at standardizing criteria for benchmarking organizations. Collaboration with ITC is ongoing to pilot this framework in areas such as vTPA programmes aiming to ease collaboration between regulators and industry. UNIDO reported progress under the €200 million EU-funded Africa Trade Competitiveness and Market Access (ATCMA) Programme, which supports value chain-driven initiatives, including SPS harmonization, across regional economic communities such as ECOWAS, COMESA and SADC.

76. The World Bank announced the second phase of its Trade Facilitation Support Program (TFSP). This expanded initiative covers 27 countries, with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and a dedicated trade facilitation sub-programme in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, supported by funding from Sweden. The programme involves cross-border agency collaboration, including SPS authorities, with a strong emphasis on risk management and diagnostics. The World Bank underlined the importance of aligning with STDF activities, particularly through National Trade Facilitation Committees to improve public-private dialogue. The World Bank recognized opportunities to explore practical ways to integrate STDF diagnostics into larger World Bank loan operations (e.g. labs, infrastructure, digitalization) and development policy operations (DPOs) linked to the scaling focus in the new STDF Strategy. Further discussions with the STDF Secretariat are needed to find ways to follow-up on these opportunities. For instance, STDF grants could serve as prior actions for DPOs, leveraging significant budget support (e.g. US\$50–100 million) where legal, regulatory, or infrastructure reforms are clearly actionable.

77. The STDF Secretariat announced that it would host an official virtual side event on 2 July 2025 during the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) in Seville, Spain. The event will showcase the STDF's new Strategy and highlight the role of the P-IMA framework in supporting evidence-based policymaking and mobilizing financing aligned with the SDGs. Further details are available on the STDF website.

5 OTHER BUSINESS

78. Members considered a proposal (shared by one member following the November meeting) to hold a future STDF Working Group meeting outside Geneva. The Secretariat noted that the first Working Group meeting in 2020 was due to take place in Rome (however, an in-person meeting was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Some members suggested holding a Working Group meeting in Washington, D.C. An additional option was proposed to link the Working Group meeting to an STDF project or a regional STDF workshop. The Secretariat requested members to share further feedback, noting the need for early planning, as well as due consideration of logistical aspects and financial implications.

6 CLOSURE

79. The Chairperson thanked all participants for their active engagement and contribution to the Working Group meeting. The meeting concluded shortly before 17:00.

ANNEX 1

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