

Mission summary of WTO- STDF consultant to Liberia

Needs assessment and strategy for the development of Liberia's SPS system (STDF/PPG/324)

Londa Vanderwal; 5-23 July 2008

The consultant carried out a mission to Liberia to conduct a needs assessment and assist with the development of a strategy for the development of Liberia's Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) system, under an STDF project preparation grant (STDF/PPG/324). The request for this mission was made by the Liberia Ministry of Commerce and Industry to assist in the process of meeting the SPS-related requirements of WTO membership, and to improve food safety, animal and plant health in Liberia.

Strengthening the SPS system in Liberia will enable the country to prevent the import of sub-standard products that may threaten public health or plant and animal health, improve the health and safety of domestically produced and processed foods, and will also assist future food and agriculture exports from Liberia to meet international SPS standards.

The international consultant worked in close collaboration with the Ministry of Trade of Liberia, as well as a national consultant hired to assist in the assessment and planning of a future project. The consultant also worked closely with the National Technical Coordinator of the West African Quality Programme (WAQP), which is implemented by UNIDO, and also presented her Terms of Reference and sought input from the members of the WAQP national steering committee in their regular meeting on 22 July 2010.

The consultants met with numerous relevant stakeholders in food safety, animal and plant health in Liberia in the private sector, public sector, NGOs, UN agencies, and other civil society organizations, as indicated in the attached list of persons met (Annex 1). A consultative meeting was held on 9 July 2010 with the main government agencies responsible for food safety, animal and plant health. The consultant also attended a workshop that was organized on 20 July 2010 by the Ministry of Agriculture regarding an Agro-Industrial Development Policy, which allowed her to meet numerous stakeholders working in agriculture in Liberia.

In conducting the needs assessment, the consultant utilized a "Biosecurity" capacity evaluation tool which was developed by FAO to assess needs in an integrated food safety, animal and plant health system. The consultant met with relevant stakeholders, visited food production, processing, and handling facilities, the seaport, and other relevant locations. The consultant also reviewed the results of a number of related capacity evaluations for information. The resultant complete report of the capacity evaluation will be submitted to the national stakeholders for their review and comments.

The consultant also met and corresponded with various donors, technical agencies, and other civil society organizations (Annex 1) regarding the development of a project to strengthen the SPS system, based on the results of the capacity assessment. The consultant drafted a project proposal to be submitted to various donors for funding and implementation. The Integrated Framework National Implementation Unit (IF-NIU) was particularly involved in this process and will ensure the successful implementation of the resultant project.

As previously indicated, the assessment report and project proposal will be submitted to the various stakeholders and donors in Liberia for their review and comments in August 2010. A validation

workshop will then be held in September 2010 where the consultant will present the findings of the assessment report and the final project proposal and receive additional comments and will make revisions as necessary.

Conclusions and recommendations

The food safety, animal and plant health system in Liberia has been greatly weakened by nearly 20 years of civil strife and requires extensive strengthening, which was recognized by all of the stakeholders visited in this assessment. Liberia also has vast natural resources and exciting potential for agricultural production, which can reduce dependency on food imports (which are often of inferior quality) and can also be exported to lucrative export markets. Further, importing countries have shown great interest in buying products from Liberia and have included the country in preferential market access schemes such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). However, these importing countries have strict quality and safety requirements which must be met in order to take advantage of these lucrative trade opportunities. In addition, Liberia is particularly vulnerable to increased pests and diseases, including food-borne illnesses, due to its porous borders, high levels of imported food, and extensive movement of people, goods and animals to and from the neighbouring countries.

Therefore, Liberia must urgently strengthen its food safety, animal and plant health system to protect domestic consumers (and domestic animal and plant health) and also to expand opportunities for exports. A strategic plan to strengthen this system has been developed (included in the full biosecurity assessment report), as well as a project proposal to address key items of the plan. Some key recommendations, in addition to implementing the strategic plan, to strengthen this system are as follows:

- A coordinating mechanism for food safety, animal and plant health matters, such as a standards body, should be created and provided adequate resources to have long-term effectiveness.
- The roles of various agencies in certification and other functions, such as the competent authority for fisheries exports need to be clarified.
- The National Codex Committee must be strengthened, and could also serve as the national SPS committee; many members of the current WAQP national steering committee should be involved in the Codex committee.
- Other projects and agencies should concentrate on strengthening existing functioning laboratories in the country (such as the Standards Lab once completed), rather than building, equipping, and staffing additional laboratories. The standards lab must continue to be strengthened through allocation of government funds for its long-term maintenance.
- The government must, as a matter of urgency, continue in their efforts to harmonize and strengthen inspections conducted in Liberia, and ensure that this allocation of inspection duties is actually carried out by the inspectors. Inspectors also need continued training.
- Liberia should become a member of OIE so that they can benefit from an OIE assessment and receive support from OIE in strengthening their veterinary services

- **Persons met during mission** (5-23 July 2010)

- Londa Vanderwal- Liberia- STDF/PPG/324

- *Note that unless indicated, the phone numbers are in Liberia (country code +231). The leading 0 in the listed in Liberian phone numbers should be removed when dialing these numbers internationally.

- Consultative Meeting participants (9 July 2010)

Name	Organization	Role	Phone	Email	Address/ URL
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Nimley	and Economic Affairs	of Economic Cooperation and Integration			
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- Others met during mission

Name/ Date met (all in 2010)	Organization	Role	Phone	Email	Adress/URL
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7 July	bottling company				Monrovia
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