

**STDF POLICY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY REPORT**THURSDAY 6 APRIL 2023
VIRTUAL MEETING**1 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

1. The meeting was chaired by Jean-Marie Paugam, Deputy Director General of the WTO. He welcomed participants and highlighted the importance of the STDF's partnership to help farmers, producers, and governments, especially in the context of the post COVID-19 pandemic, climate change shocks and discussions about food security and food safety at the WTO. Members adopted the agenda without any amendments. A list of all participants (including observers) is provided in Annex 1.

2 EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE STDF

2. The Secretariat introduced the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the next external evaluation of the STDF. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the results and impacts achieved by the STDF based on the OECD-DAC criteria and to capture key lessons learned. Recommendations to inform the future of the STDF, including a new strategy for the coming years are expected from the evaluation. The evaluation will focus on the period from 2020 to present, though there may be a need to look at work carried out prior to 2020 to get a better view of impacts and results. The evaluation will be comprehensive and cover all three workstreams of the STDF.

3. The ToR were drafted with input from the STDF Working Group, which had identified four different objectives for this evaluation: (i) identify and compile evidence of results focused on the plausible and distinct contribution that STDF makes to increase and sustain SPS capacity in developing countries linked to safe trade facilitation; (ii) explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how this influenced operations, delivery and results; (iii) draw lessons on the follow up to the 2019 STDF evaluation, including in relation to monitoring, evaluation and learning, cross cutting issues and new mechanisms introduced such as practitioners groups; and (iv) identify strategic opportunities to strengthen the partnership, and the delivery and results linked to the current mandate and scope.

4. The ToR include provision for three project impact evaluations (with appropriate geographical representation), following suggestions from donor members. The ToR also provide for an Evaluation Steering Group, composed of Working Group members. This group is expected to leverage and facilitate the engagement of members and partners.

5. The Secretariat noted it would begin the WTO procurement process to select the company to carry out the evaluation soonest. The expectation is to complete this process by the end of August 2023. The evaluation would start in September and be completed by the end of February 2024. Following a presentation to the Policy Committee in April, the report would be finalized in May 2024.

6. Maria Helena Semedo (FAO) noted that the FAO was satisfied with the current ToR and that FAO's comments had been integrated into the final version. The budget was also in line with similar evaluations conducted at FAO.

7. Marie-Luise Rau (Germany) agreed that conducting three project impact evaluations was reasonable for this STDF evaluation and agreed with the increase from two to three projects in order to increase geographical representation.

8. Thomas Brisset (France) agreed with the ToR and acknowledged the importance of the case studies included in the evaluation to better measure the results of the STDF.

9. Unesu Ushewokunze-Obatolu (Developing Country Expert) suggested to maximize the number of projects being evaluated to extract further insights, where possible.

10. In response to questions by members, the Secretariat provided further clarification on the methodology, which will include desk work, document review and stakeholder interviews. The evaluation will include an assessment of the overall results and lessons of all STDF projects and PPGs carried out since 2020, as well as in-depth impact evaluations of three projects (selected based on clear criteria identified in the inception report) and guided by the existing STDF guidelines for external impact evaluations. Mission travel is foreseen as part of the evaluation, including to visit project stakeholders.

11. The Secretariat further clarified that the evaluation would provide lessons and recommendations to inform the development of a new strategy for the STDF covering 2025 and beyond. The evaluation would also benefit from other thematic evaluations carried out by the STDF since 2020, including the gender assessment, the ongoing evaluation on knowledge work (P-IMA) and the expected review on environmental impacts of STDF work (to be contracted in 2023).

12. The Policy Committee approved the ToR and the budget for the evaluation.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STDF STRATEGY, LOOKING AHEAD

13. The Secretariat provided an overview of the current Strategy (2020-2024) and reminded members of STDF's theory of change, its contribution to the SDGs and STDF's three workstreams (global coordination platform, knowledge work, and funding mechanism). Among ongoing STDF projects and PPGs, 59% of STDF's funds are supporting LDCs which is well above and beyond the 40% target in the STDF Operational Rules. Attention was also drawn to the steady increase in the number of grant applications received since 2020 (75 applications received for the November 2022 WG and 68 applications for the June 2023 meeting).

14. The Secretariat highlighted the prominence gained by STDF's knowledge work and STDF's increased focus on results and learning, while referring to STDF's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework, which was developed to accompany the Strategy. The Secretariat also referred to the Communications Plan to extend STDF's reach and impact while using different channels and products to reach different audiences.

15. The Secretariat recalled that the Policy Committee has accepted 16 recommendations (out of 20 recommendations) made by the 2019 external evaluation. Of these, 10 have fully been implemented, while implementation of the following six recommendations is still underway: (i) improve lesson learning from thematic work, project/PPGs; (ii) embed learning into good practices and guidance; (iii) partners/donors make better use of lessons and good practice; (iv) build STDF's operational capacity (staffing); (v) strengthen accessibility of knowledge platform/STDF website; and (vi) allocate staff/resources in partners to work with STDF. The Working Group, at its next meeting on 14-15 June 2023, will further discuss implementation of these outstanding recommendations.

16. The Secretariat also presented STDF's financial situation and thanked donors for their generous contributions over the years. The contributions have been stable since 2020, at around US\$6 million per year. While expenses in 2020 and 2021 were lower than the contributions received, due to the pandemic, the trust fund showed a slight negative balance by the end of 2022 because of the high number of applications that were approved last year. While the funding situation in 2023 looks good, additional resources will be required to implement the current and future strategy in 2024 and beyond.

17. Chris Brett (World Bank) reflected on whether the STDF should explore a more efficient way of approving PPGs, by allowing the Secretariat to approve them rather than going through the Working Group process. He suggested to increase the maximum amount available for project grants to US\$2 million (instead of US\$1 million). He also raised the issue of bringing other types of standards, such as sustainability or environmental standards, into STDF's work, which would make sense from a trade and development perspective.

18. Marie-Luise Rau (Germany) expressed the desire to keep the approval process of PPGs at the Working Group level. She also highlighted work already done on other type of standards, while acknowledging the World Bank's point of view, and was interested in hearing about the recent World Bank projects mentioned, notably in view of a new wave of due diligence requirements.

19. Maria Helena Semedo (FAO) expressed some concern over STDF's financial situation in view of the global economic situation. She suggested to explore targeting other donors, especially non-governmental organizations. She welcomed the discussion on expansion of STDF's work to other types of standards but flagged that FAO continues to see SPS capacity development as the core mission of the STDF. She concluded by stating that future work should also focus on priorities put forward in the WTO SPS Ministerial Declaration (MC12).

20. Edwini Kessie (WTO) noted that the STDF Secretariat is currently overstretched and that taking on new responsibilities or areas of work would require more resources. He added that going beyond food safety, animal and plant health would require careful consideration of the available resources. He invited partners and donors to support the STDF in this direction.

21. Thomas Brisset (France) expressed France's support for the STDF and highlighted a few points to consider in developing STDF's future strategy. Among these, he encouraged the STDF to be aligned with current discussions on SPS compliance and sustainable development and with Aid for Trade and development. He highlighted the importance of leveraging other resources which could be further prioritized in a future strategy. Dirk Klaasen (The Netherlands) concurred with his view.

22. The Secretariat thanked members for their contributions and acknowledged the scope to further improve on efficiency and effectiveness in terms of STDF's operations. It also acknowledged concerns about the financial situation and reminded members that some projects do benefit directly from other contributions (private sector, NGOs, etc.). The Secretariat also reminded members that information on a recent STDF workshop, linked to implementation of the MC12 Declaration, is available online.¹

23. No items were raised under other business.

24. The chairperson thanked participants for their active participation. The meeting was adjourned at 15:25.

¹ "Thematic Group 5 Workshop for the MC-12 SPS Declaration" Recording available [here](#).

ANNEX 1**STDF POLICY COMMITTEE****6 APRIL 2023**

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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