

African Union 2023 Year of Accelerated Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Learning Event to Promote Harmonized SPS Policies and Capacities in Africa

30-31 March 2023 | Kigali, Rwanda

Key Messages and Call to Action

INTRODUCTION

1. AKADMEMIYA2063 and Texas A&M University, in partnership with the African Union Commission, Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment (AUC-DARBE) and with the support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), organized a 2-day learning event to promote harmonized sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) policies and capacities in Africa which attracted a wide range of both state and non-state actors including national and regional SPS competent authorities, policymakers, farmers' organizations, trade associations, research and non-profit organizations, the private sector, and development agencies.
2. In support of the African Union (AU) 2023 year of accelerated African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) implementation and to help contribute to strengthened SPS capacities and the effective implementation of SPS policies and strategies in Africa, the learning event sought to 1. raise awareness on AU SPS policy initiatives, SPS challenges and opportunities, and SPS tools for strengthening Africa's SPS systems, 2. strengthen the technical capacity of participants on SPS tools and the analysis of SPS investment gaps, needs, and priorities, and 3. share experiences, lessons learned, and best practices in implementing SPS measures, harmonization and equivalence of SPS measures, and SPS regulatory cooperation.
3. The first day of the learning event, March 30, 2023, focused on raising awareness on the AU SPS agenda including the AU SPS Policy Framework, the Food Safety Strategy for Africa, and the Plant Health Strategy for Africa as well as their implementation plans. The day also provided participants with insights into the SPS regulatory cooperation in the context of the AfCFTA and delved into the technical aspects of harmonization and equivalence of SPS measures. In addition, selected AU Member States shared their experiences on harmonization and equivalence of SPS measures and engaged non-state actors on their role in improving SPS systems in Africa.
4. In her opening remarks, Ms. Beatrice Uwumukiza, Director General of the Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA) noted that the event was timely and aligned very well with the African Union 2023 Year of accelerated implementation of the AfCFTA. "A successful implementation of the AfCFTA agreement and particularly Annex 7 of the agreement will be critical to 1. safeguarding

human, animal, and plant health; 2. enhancing cooperation and transparency in the development and implementation of SPS measures and ensuring that they do not become unjustifiable barriers to trade; and 3. strengthening technical capacity of AU Member States for implementing and monitoring of SPS measures while encouraging the use of international standards in the elimination of barriers to trade,” she added.

5. The second day, March 31, offered interactive technical sessions to train participants on using the Standards and Trade Development Facility’s (STDF’s) P-IMA tool to evaluate priority SPS investments, with participants having hands-on experience using the tool and learning from the experiences of other countries and RECs that have used the P-IMA tool. In addition, the second day provided insights into the AU SPS Index which focuses on food, plant, and animal health aspects of SPS systems and is essential for monitoring SPS systems in Africa at the country, regional and continental levels. It also delved into the analysis of the cost of SPS compliance and SPS investment needs, gaps, and priorities.
6. In his closing remarks Dr. Ousmane Badiane, Executive Chairperson of AKADEMIYA2063, emphasized the importance of translating SPS measures as opportunities for accelerating intra-regional trade. “A harmonized and effective SPS system allows countries to participate in trade and access new markets, he added. Ms. Diana Akullo Ogwal, Principal Officer for SPS Measures at the AfCFTA Secretariat also delivered closing remarks and noted that the learning event had achieved its objectives while calling for the need to build institutional capacities and multi-stakeholder engagement to ensure an enhanced continental SPS system in Africa.

SUMMARY, KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is strong political will to ensure a strong and effective continental SPS system in Africa, which is evidenced by the development and endorsement of various AU SPS agendas including the AU SPS Policy Framework, Plant Health Strategy for Africa, Food Safety Strategy for Africa, and the Animal Health Strategy for Africa and their respective implementation plans. What is important and needed now is to raise awareness on these agendas and concerted effort to implement the activities defined in the aforementioned frameworks and strategies by working all key stakeholders including regional economic communities (RECs), AU Member States, the private sector, civil society, the academic community, farmers, seed and trade associations, and development partners. In addition, a group exercise with event participants underscored the fourth objective of the AU SPS Policy Framework on increasing political support and public and private sector investment in SPS systems as the most critical objective that underpins the achievement of all the objectives.
2. Mr. John Oppong-Otto of the African Union – Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) noted progress in advancing the continent’s SPS systems and that the AU SPS Policy Framework builds on a 70-year history of implementing SPS measures. Nonetheless, he also noted the need for improvement, particularly relating to the enforcement of the SPS measures, quality of SPS infrastructure and investments, and the ability of the informal sector to comply with SPS measures, as well as SPS related data and data sharing among Member States and SPS agencies for a policy implementation.

3. Mr. Chiluba Mwape, a Senior SPS Advisor with AUC-DARBE, noted that Africa faces several SPS challenges that include inadequate information sharing and coordination, the lack of sufficient incentives for the private sector to engage in formal regulated trade and comply with SPS measures; inadequate budgetary allocation to regulatory agencies; limited capacity and capability of competent authorities to carry out credible SPS official controls; and inadequate capacity for science based systems for SPS data collection and analysis including conducting risk assessments. He also highlighted several opportunities that can be leveraged to strengthen SPS systems on the continent including the existence of SPS business member organizations and bilateral and multilateral agreements; the availability of online SPS training courses, databases and webinars; political will of African leaders; and the availability of capacity evaluation tools.

4. According to Ms. Diana Akullo Ogwal of the AfCFTA Secretariat, the secretariat is moving forward with implementing the AfCFTA SPS Annex working closely with the business sector, RECs, Member States, and the African Union’s SPS Coordination Forum. The work has included developing Terms of Reference for the development of SPS and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) portals, conducting baselines studies on SPS import and export procedures and inspection fees, and holding consultations with business leaders. More deliberations are expected at the upcoming AfCFTA Business Forum that will take place on April 16-18 in Cape Town, South Africa. Ms. Ogwal also noted the importance of National SPS Committees and SPS and TBT notification platforms for a successful implementation of the AfCFTA.

5. Event participants called for the establishment of National SPS Committees where they do not exist and their strengthening where they already exist to facilitate public-private cooperation on SPS measures for AfCFTA implementation. They also suggested that under the AfCFTA countries should not be required to adopt new SPS notification reporting requirements, but that they should utilize the existing WTO e-ping system.

6. Ms. Kelly McCormick from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) virtually offered an international perspective on food safety, highlighting the FDA’s decade long rollout of the Food Safety Modernization Act as well as many new innovative digital food safety technologies under the FDA’s Modern Era for Food Safety Initiative.

7. A panel discussion on the *Harmonization and Equivalence of SPS Measures* featured a panel of dynamic women speakers representing SPS standards organizations, and farmers’ organizations who shared examples of public-private sector cooperation on SPS harmonization but also noted the need to adopt SPS standards at regional and country levels and to ensure smallholder farmers with market access to fully realize the benefits of trade.

The panelists highlighted significant efforts that are ongoing to ensure harmonization and equivalence of SPS rules. For instance, it was noted that the African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) now works with AU Member States and collaborates with RECs in their process to identify priority areas to harmonize. The collaboration successfully led to 12 harmonized standards being published by AUC-IBAR. Another success story was

Botswana's implementation of CBT as an equivalent measure to foot and mouth disease free zone requirement. However, Ms. Uwumukiza, of the Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition Consumer Protection Authority (RICA) noted that limited SPS expertise, resources, awareness, and exchange of information about SPS issues as well as the lack of transparency of SPS measures were some of the challenges limiting the implementation of harmonization and equivalence of SPS measures in Rwanda. Participants called for an SPS information system at the national level that is publicly accessible to consumers, farmers, and exporters and for countries to do more to ensure food safety in all agricultural value chains in line with the notion of shared responsibility as contained in the AU Food Safety Strategy for Africa (FSSA).

8. A panel discussion on the role of non-state actors in improving SPS systems in Africa featured speakers from the Eastern Africa Grain Council, the Pan-African Farmers' Organisation (PAFO), Land O'Lakes, and the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA). The panelists gave examples of how their organizations were helping to improve Africa's SPS systems. For example, in Rwanda, Land O' Lakes has supported efforts to improve SPS coordination by strengthening the SPS National Committee, build the capacity of different institutions to have notification response plans, provide technical assistance to address gaps in SPS regulations, and support harmonization of imports. The Eastern Africa Grain Council noted its efforts to help safeguard the safety of grains by ensuring that grain is sampled, tested, and certified before it can be traded, supporting policy advocacy and working with the East African Community (EAC) to harmonize policies in the region. The African Seed Trade Association noted two initiatives aimed at ensuring plant health and food safety: the International Seed Health initiative that provides a forum for exchanging information on new seed testing by different seed companies, and the Regulated Pest Risk initiative that provides a database on pests. Meanwhile, PAFO called for the need to build capacities of farmers to comply with SPS measures and simplified procedures that farmers can understand and the dissemination of information on SPS issues among farmers. In addition, the Panelists also called for the need improve coordination of SPS measures, build capacities of farmers and traders on SPS issues, increase consumer awareness on their right to safe food, and the need to incorporate food safety awareness in education curricula and increase investment in high-quality SPS infrastructure.
9. Ms. Marlynn Hopper, Deputy Head of the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) Secretariat facilitated an interactive session on the Prioritizing SPS Investments for Market Access (P-IMA) tool. Ms. Hopper noted that P-IMA is as an evidenced-based SPS investment decision tool that can help in prioritizing SPS investments by Member States, RECs, and other SPS stakeholders in the face of scarce resources. The session was enriched by the participation of four Panelists who shared their experience in using the P-IMA tool at the project, country, and regional levels. Event participants participated in small group exercises to better understand the multi-criteria decision-making process utilized by P-IMA.
10. An overview of the AU SPS index, its objectives, composition, and uses was given by Dr. Luiza Munyuwa, Senior Scientific Officer at the Inter-African Phytosanitary Council (AU-IAPSC). The SPS index comprises health aspects (human, animal, and plant life or health) and international trade aspects as well as SPS system aspects which cover SPS laws and

regulations in Member States. Dr. Munyuwa noted that the index is being used as part of the CAADP Biennial Review process in reporting and monitoring the progress made by AU Member States in achieving operational and functional SPS systems that meet international best practices in terms of food safety, plant health and animal health and replaced the African Food Safety Index which only captured the food safety part of SPS.

11. As a follow-up to the P-IMA exercise, AKADEMIYA2063 presented its analytical work on SPS investment needs, gaps, and priorities. A key message noted by Dr. Getaw Tadesse is the increase in trade border rejections due to non-compliance with standards, noting that the cost of implementing SPS measures are both the responsibilities of both private and public actors. In addition, Dr. Fatima Kareem presented the challenges faced by some of the public and private authorities and noted that missing facilities and infrastructure made some actors to go outside the continent to access such facilities which raises costs and reduce their profits. The discussion concluded with a call for public-private partnerships and increased investments in SPS systems in Africa for an efficient transformation of the continent's SPS system. Participants also raised the need to invest on data and analytics in areas which are critical for understanding the impacts and compliance of SPS regulations, generating credible and reliable data, and assessing risks, investments, and capacities.

CALL TO ACTION

The event ended with a call to action by the participants to advance Africa's SPS agenda while engaging all key stakeholders. To this end, the participants:

1. Declared that the learning event was successful in achieving its expected outcomes of raising awareness and creating shared understanding of the various AU SPS Frameworks and strategies, SPS challenges and opportunities, and SPS lessons, best practices, and experiences at the regional and country levels and from other continents in implementing SPS measures and on SPS harmonization and equivalence. This made participants eager to collaborate in the implementation of these strategies at regional and national levels. It is expected that participants will return home to engage in and share what they learned.
2. Call for further domestication and raising awareness on the AU SPS Policy Framework and strategies by engaging all key stakeholders (private sector, farmers, traders, researchers, etc.) at the regional and national levels.
3. State that it is imperative that the AU, RECs, and AU Member State SPS related platforms and processes at regional and national levels be inclusive by embracing a high participation of private sector and civil society groups, in particular farmer, seed, and trade associations. In addition, it is important to mainstream gender into SPS activities in order to capture the high rate of women participation in African food systems.
4. Note the need to establish and strengthen national SPS committees and to ensure that they are inclusive of all key stakeholders (e.g. farmers and civil society) as they play an important role in increasing public-private cooperation on SPS measures, particularly within the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

5. Urge that an increased investment in data collection and reporting efforts such as the AU's SPS Index activity are essential to monitoring the strength of SPS systems at national level, to inform decision-makers, and drive investment as part of the CAADP/Malabo Declaration and other development commitments. Thus, the ongoing data collection and reporting using the newly developed AUSPS Index is highly supported. Moreover, countries need continued assistance in data collection, analysis, and reporting while more applied and demand driven research is needed to inform SPS knowledge gaps.
6. Ask for the building of technical and institutional capacities including of farmers, processors, traders, and other key stakeholders on SPS and food safety issues.
7. Request that the AUC, working closely with RECs and the AfCFTA Secretariate, to continue to organize learning events in 2023 "AU year of accelerated AfCFTA implementation" with the private sector and civil society. Such events would help to raise awareness and ensure coordination and collaboration on SPS strategies and implementation plans at regional and national levels and to build capacity on digital tools such as P-IMA and other technical SPS issues. Learning from the SPS practices of various stakeholders in the continent as an important way of mutual learning and sharing best practices.
8. Declare that the need for concerted effort to raise awareness of consumers, farmers, informal food businesses on SPS issues and the right of consumers to demand safe food as this is important for food systems transformation on the continent.
9. Call for the establishment of a non-state actor coordination mechanism or platform around SPS matters and for facilitating information exchange and well-structured coordination on SPS issues.