

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE INFORMATION AND COOPERATION (AITIC)

Note by the Secretariat

The WTO Secretariat has received a communication from AITIC. In the context of the SPS Committee's discussions on technical assistance and cooperation, the text of their communication is reproduced in this document for the information of Members and Observers.

AITIC SPS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

1. AITIC was established in Geneva in 1998 as an association and transformed into an intergovernmental organisation in 2004. AITIC's objective is to assist the less-advantaged countries (i.e. resource-constrained developing countries and economies in transition, with a priority to the least-developed countries and countries without permanent representation in Geneva) to effectively participate in the WTO negotiations and in the multilateral trading system (MTS). AITIC currently has 61 Participating Members who are provided trade-related technical assistance, for a better understanding of trade policy issues and the MTS.

2. AITIC has been receiving requests from its members for specific assistance programmes on the SPS Agreement and the notification requirements. AITIC started providing rigorous tailor-made assistance on SPS issues since 2008. In July 2009, AITIC and DFID entered into formal agreement to collaborate on projects aimed at providing technical assistance to LDCs and non-resident countries (without permanent representation in Geneva). One of the purposes of this two year (2009 and 2010) project is to strengthen the capacity of these countries to implement the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement. It is likely that the DFID would continue to provide funding to AITIC for these activities.

3. AITIC has so far conducted four national workshops on SPS related issues – twice in the Gambia, Nepal and Togo. In 2010, AITIC is scheduled to conduct two more in Africa, one a follow-up in Togo and another in a country yet to be confirmed. In addition, documents on SPS have also been published.

4. In the national workshops mentioned above, AITIC collaborated with SPS experts and local authorities to deliver tailor-made sessions. The workshops lasted two days in the capital. The nodal ministries of Agriculture and/or Trade, had been requested to ensure the participation of officials from other ministries and departments such as health, animal welfare, trade, chemicals and fertilizers, food safety, small-scale industries dealing with package, business houses, chambers of commerce, standards, fisheries, plant protection, customs, Committees on Codex, packaging companies, etc. and also the private sector for proper dissemination of information to the different SPS stakeholders. The workshops also informed the participants of the role of the STDF and its activities.

The Gambia

5. AITIC's SPS activities began in The Gambia in 2008, with a request for a tailored programme. In consultation with the Gambian authorities, the workshop was designed not only to explain the different issues in the SPS Agreements but also to give a hands-on training on the notification process. The exercise was done on how to notify their "Food Safety Act", which was then being enacted. The importance of setting up enquiry points was also adequately emphasised.

6. In the Gambia, Mrs. Fatim Njie, Director of Trade, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Employment, informed that following AITIC workshop held in August 2008, the Ministry had, in consultations with stakeholders, established Enquiry Points for both SPS and TBT in the Gambia. AITIC has also been now informed that on 4 March 2010, the Gambia notified to the WTO its new Food Safety and Quality Bill. In this specific case AITIC's technical assistance efforts have helped The Gambia to fulfil its notification obligation to the WTO.

7. The activity was followed up in 2009 with another workshop that focused the detailed understanding of the SPS Agreement and training on the process of notifications. The workshop highlighted the following recommendations:

- (i) The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Employment needs to immediately inform the WTO of the existence of the Enquiry Points.
- (ii) To promote the use of standard methods and certification to increase Gambia's ability to have access to certain niche markets.
- (iii) To explore the possibilities of establishing a Permanent Mission in Geneva to effectively follow up and participate in all WTO Committee meetings, including SPS and TBT. AITIC has informed the authorities on the availability of its Non-Resident Unit to assist them establish a mission in Geneva.
- (iv) The need to increase and maintain its share in the international markets by addressing non-trade measures affecting its exports, and to fully maximize the preferential access to its current main overseas markets.

Nepal

8. The workshop in Nepal was organised on their specific request to brief the officials on the SPS Agreement and in particular to clarify the process of notification. Forty government officials and specialists participated in the workshop. The main topics covered included: Transparency, Harmonisation, Equivalence, S&D, Traceability, Certification, Emergency Preparedness and Early Warning Systems for Prevention of Pests, Risk Analysis and Management and Regional Cooperation. The participants emphasised the need for similar workshops and the assistance that the AITIC could provide to Nepal as well as other LDCs, with regard to the WTO SPS Agreement. This was later confirmed by the Permanent Mission in Geneva in a request to consider additional training to rectify problems with notifications.

Togo

9. The National Workshop in Togo was organised in collaboration with the Ministry for Trade and Promotion of Private Sector. The Minister, H.E. Mr. Guy Madjé Lorenzo, opened the event which drew close to 60 participants from different ministries, private sector, civil society and international organisations. The format of the workshop was the same, with practical exercises on case studies and notification process. Officials requested for further capacity building activities on the SPS Agreement.

10. During the workshop it emerged that the national concern was that the implementation of the SPS Agreement was very low, or non-existent, due to structural, institutional and human constraints. The consequence was lack of access to European and American markets.

11. It also became apparent that there was lack of information amongst the different government departments on the existence of the necessary regulatory provisions at the national level.

12. The workshop closed with the following recommendations, which will be followed up in the upcoming workshop:

- The designation of a national authority responsible for all notifications;
- The establishment of a national standards body;
- The establishment of a national SPS Committee;
- The addition in the general budget of a specific line item for the implementation of SPS measures;

- The creation of a focal point for the management of information pertaining to SPS measures; and
- The review and distribution of texts related to the application of SPS measures.

2010

13. AITIC's 2010 SPS activities are being finalised. Activities similar to those in 2009 are foreseen in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Rwanda or Togo, which have all expressed an interest in continuing with tailored technical assistance from AITIC. It is the Agency's aim to provide consistent SPS technical assistance, with repeat workshops in capital to ensure that the knowledge base is strengthened over time. AITIC consults the WTO Secretariat to remain informed of important and ongoing developments in the SPS Committee and to ensure inter-agency coordination.

14. AITIC is also planning on organising mini-courses on the SPS Agreement for the Geneva-based delegates, to give them a basic understanding of the Agreement and its relationship with other areas of negotiations at the WTO.

15. For the reasons listed above, an observer status for AITIC in the SPS Committee would greatly facilitate AITIC to follow the developments in the Committee and thereby constantly update the Agency's technical assistance activities and programmes.

TABLE ON 2009 SPS ACTIVITIES

AITIC NATIONAL WORKSHOPS		
Title	Venue	Date
Notifications under the WTO SPS Agreement	Kathmandu, Nepal	27 – 28 April 2009
The SPS Agreement and Notification Training	Banjul, The Gambia	23 – 24 September 2009
The SPS Agreement and Notification Training	Lomé, Togo	1 – 2 October 2009
AITIC RESOURCE DOCUMENTS ON SPS		
Title	Date	
Trade and Development Brief - The WTO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures: <i>SPS Part 1 of 3</i> http://www.acici.org/aitic/documents/T&DBriefs/T&DSPS1_eng.htm	May 2009	
Trade and Development Brief - The Implementation Record of the SPS Agreement – the Third Review: <i>SPS Part 2 of 3</i> http://www.acici.org/aitic/documents/T&DBriefs/T&DSPS2_eng.htm	May 2009	
Trade and Development Brief - Dispute settlement under the SPS Agreement: <i>SPS Part 3 of 3</i> http://www.acici.org/aitic/documents/T&DBriefs/T&DSPS3_eng.htm	May 2009	