

**INFORMATION ON SPS ACTIVITIES OF THE AFRICAN UNION**

SPS Committee Meeting, 18 - 19 October 2012

The following communication, received on 12 October 2012, is being circulated at the request of the African Union Commission.

**I. GENERALITIES**

1. The Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Committee), at its July 2012 meeting, granted the African Union observer status on an ad hoc meeting-by-meeting basis. This indeed is a landmark decision and the African Union (AU) appreciates the privilege of the status granted it by the SPS Committee and to the Secretariat for this trust and for the opportunity given to participate in the meetings of the SPS Committee. The observer status granted the African Union Commission (AUC) will further strengthen the continent-wide coordination of Africa's position on global trade-related issues as well as providing effective support and guidance to the participation of AU member States and the African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the affairs of the Committee.

2. Various AU personnel will be represented in the SPS meetings in their respective capacities. The role of the Commission in the SPS arena focuses mainly on policy aspects and aims at harmonizing SPS regulatory frameworks on the continent and ensuring compliance with international standards. With a Central SPS-Cluster coordination unit based at the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture of the Commission, the African Union Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) and the Interafrican Phytosanitary Council (AU-IAPSC) are two AUC specialized technical offices with direct regulatory roles in the SPS domain.

3. AU-IBAR is responsible for animal health and food safety while AU-IAPSC is responsible for plant health. Since 2010, these two technical offices, with support from the AUC, have focused their activities in the sector on support to member States to improve their participation in the standard setting processes in the Three Sisters' organizations (OIE, IPPC and CAC), and in the WTO SPS.

4. African delegates have increasingly become more effective in their participation in the activities of the "Three Sisters" in terms of providing sound comments on the proposed draft standards and this can be considered as a valuable contribution of the AUC to the implementation of the SPS Agreement and the activities of the SPS Committee.

5. Currently, the African Union is the Lead Institution in the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa as part of the over-arching SPS framework. In addition, the African Union also coordinates the Africa-wide SPS Working Group with a view to having a coherent central coordination mechanism on continent-wide SPS initiatives.

## II. CAPACITY BUILDING

6. Following the training of trainers' workshops held in July 2009 on improving the efficiency of participation of African nations in the activities of the WTO-SPS Committee and of the international standards setting organizations, the African Union has conducted a series of regional and national workshops on the same in 2011 and in 2012, including but not limited to, the following:

- 51 trainers trained;
- 267 participants trained at regional level (Regional Economic Communities);
- More than 571 participants trained at country level.

7. Beneficiaries of the trainings were officials from the three sub-sectors (animal health, plant health and food safety), from the private sector (producers associations, exporters, importers, etc.) as well as the SPS focal points or notification authorities.

8. The trainings focused on risk analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and negotiation skills.

## III. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

9. In order to foster the inter-sectoral coordination at country level with regard to SPS matters, the African Union has supported the member States to establish national SPS committees where they do not exist or to strengthen them where they do exist. The table below shows the countries where national SPS committees have been supported.

National SPS Committees created or strengthened\*

<b>CENSAD</b>	<b>COMESA</b>	<b>EAC</b>	<b>ECCAS</b>	<b>ECOWAS</b>	<b>IGAD</b>	<b>SADC</b>
<i>Burkina Faso</i>	Comoros	<i>Burundi</i>	<i>Cameroon</i>	<i>Benin</i>	<i>Djibouti</i>	Angola
<i>Senegal</i>	Madagascar	<i>Kenya*</i>	<i>Central African Rep.</i>	<i>Cape Verde</i>	<i>Sudan</i>	<i>Botswana</i>
<i>Mauritania</i>	<i>Mauritius</i>	<i>Rwanda</i>	<i>Chad</i>	<i>Cote d'Ivoire</i>	Ethiopia	<i>Lesotho</i>
<i>Mali</i>	<i>Malawi</i>	<i>Tanzania</i>	<i>Congo</i>	<i>The Gambia</i>	Somalia	Mozambique
<i>Niger</i>	Seychelles	<i>Uganda*</i>	<i>Equatorial Guinea</i>	<i>Ghana</i>		Namibia
	<i>Zambia*</i>		<i>Gabon</i>	<i>Guinea</i>		<i>Swaziland*</i>
	<i>Congo Dem. Rep.</i>		Sao Tome & Principe	<i>Guinea Bissau</i>		<i>Zimbabwe*</i>
	Eritrea			<i>Liberia</i>		
				<i>Nigeria</i>		
				<i>Sierra Leone</i>		
				<i>Togo</i>		
<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>
						<b>TOTAL: 47</b>

10. Further to the creation of national SPS committees, the African Union funded countries (in italics in the table) to organize national meetings for sensitizations on SPS matters.

11. The AUC, through its two technical offices, has also encouraged African RECs and member States who were not members of WTO or the Three Sisters' organisations, to seek observer status or full membership in the SPS Committee and the Three Sisters.

#### **IV. COORDINATION OF SPS-RELATED ACTIVITIES**

12. AUC has established a SPS Cluster under the Directorate for Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) to coordinate SPS matters with the technical offices. The DREA-led cluster will eventually have representatives from the RECs as and when necessary.

13. The AU is in the process of creating a Continental SPS Working Group to mainstream SPS into the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) implementation.

14. The establishment of a Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) is in the pipeline and will be based at, and integrated into, the IBAR structure.

15. A Food Safety Authority under the AUC will be discussed from 29 - 30 October 2012 in Kigali, Rwanda, for approval by member States.

- **Coordination of continental common positions for animal health, plant health and food safety since 2009**

16. Activity initiated under PANSPSO:

- Animal health: common positions for OIE General Sessions since 2009, and common written comments for September and February Code Commission meetings since 2011;
- Food safety: focus on nine selected thematic committees (CCCF, CCFH, CCFA, CCFL, CCPR, CCRVDF, CCNFSDU, CCFFP and CCFFV);
- Plant health: continental consultations on draft ISPMs by national plant protection officers with the coordination of AU-IAPSC.

- **Support to RECs for coordination of regional common positions**

17. AU will financially support RECs in that process and provide expertise if required.

- **Strengthening consultation processes at national level for articulation of national positions**

18. The objective is to bring countries to provide comments and national positions with regards to proposed draft standards from ISSOs.

- **Facilitation of attendance to ISSO meetings for RECs and member States**

19. Support RECs delegates or member States delegates to attend the international meetings.

- **Facilitating obtaining of observer status for RECs at the OIE, at the IPPC, at the CAC, and at the SPS Committee**

20. Sensitize RECs/member States and facilitate the process of gaining observer status.
21. A number of AU recognized RECs obtained observer status in various ISSOs and the WTO SPS Committee.
22. The AUC was granted observer status in the WTO SPS Committee.
  - **Publication of handbooks and leaflets that provide guidelines for participation in the standard-setting process and analyse the most relevant articles of the OIE, IPPC and CAC Codes (on-going)**

#### **V. SUPPORT TO COMPLIANCE WITH SPS STANDARDS**

- **Developed a risk based animal health certification system for Somalia**
  - **Harmonized animal health regulations in the Greater Horn of Africa region to promote improved trade: on-going through a project**
  - **Identification and traceability systems for pastoral areas:**
    - On-going consultation process with countries and RECs;
    - Consultation;
    - Pilot activities in selected countries.
  - **Honey compliance with standards:**
    - New project with a component on compliance with international standards on honey.
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