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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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ECOWAS IMPLEMENTED SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD OF AUGUST - NOVEMBER 2023

COMMUNICATION FROM ECOWAS-USAID SENIOR SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY (SPS) STANDARDS ADVISOR

The following communication, received on 30 October 2023, is being circulated at the request of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its partners work to implement and address SPS-related issues at regional level that contribute to the vision to create an economic union and common market. In line with this objective, ECOWAS is implementing many agreements designed to support the free movement of goods and people throughout the region.

1.2. In view of improving and strengthening SPS activities in the ECOWAS and Sahel region, the following activities were implemented during the period of August to November 2023.

2 FOOD SAFETY

2.1 Validation workshop of the "Risk-based Harmonized Sanitary Inspection and Decision-Making Guide"

2.1. The purpose of this guide is to provide a harmonized risk-based sanitary inspection and decision-making procedure within ECOWAS and the Sahel region. Specific objectives include:

- to ensure safe food trade;
- to increase transparency in risk-based food inspection;
- to accelerate product release to reduce costs of border operations;
- to initiate acceptance of sanitary certificates and implementation of mutual recognition agreements;
- to share information on inspections and quality defects among regulators and the ECOWAS commission at the regional level;
- to encourage greater harmonization of sanitary inspection protocols to guarantee the quality requirements for compliance to standards;
- to facilitate market access of safe food.

2.2. A regional validation workshop of the risk-based harmonized sanitary inspection and decision-making guide was organized from 4-6 October 2023 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire with the support of partners. It is expected that this harmonized sanitary guide will be disseminated and training of sanitary inspectors and other food safety competent authorities at national level conducted in the coming months.

2.2 Establishing and operationalize technical working groups on SPS

2.3. In 2022, the SPS advisor in collaboration with other partners and countries established the West Africa and Sahel food safety convergence forum. Furthermore, there was effective coordination on food safety measures among countries to provide improved guidance and enhanced coordination for conformity assessments and food inspection regimes. This activity helped to achieve a high level

of coordination with systematic prioritization of food standards development based on their amenability to being more easily harmonized at regional level, using a scientific rationale.

2.4. Taking this further, in August 2023, the West Africa and Sahel technical working groups on data generation for Codex work has been established. Three (3) technical working groups (TWGs, pesticides and veterinary drugs residues, contaminants and microbiological and food hygiene) towards Codex work have been established with clear objectives including to:

- generate data to strengthen Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR), Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Food (CCRVDF), Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food (CCCF), Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA);
- promote national, regional and international cooperation and information sharing;
- promote access to accredited methods across the region; build and operationalize (strengthen) a network of experts;
- contribute to evidence policies and regulations at national, regional and international levels.

2.5. Thus, a regional meeting on TWGs was held from 28-30 August 2023 in Lomé, Togo and it was supported by USDA-FAS/UMAP/University of Missouri, WHO and FAO.

2.6. Next step: sub-committee-specific work plans will be developed annually to meet specific needs, however, the following general topics are envisioned to occur over the course of the subsequent months/years (up to three years) (2024-2026):

- Develop national and regional mechanism for food safety risk assessment with terms of reference;
- Develop a harmonized model risk assessment protocol and report (GEMS FOOD format);
- Support annual meetings of the risk assessment management body;
- Workshop on risk (re)-ranking, prioritization (held);
- Data collection for risk assessment food commodity: pathogen/hazard combination (e.g., prevalence, surveys, field trials, other);
- Risk assessment exercise and laboratory analysis.

3 PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FORA

3.1 Participation in the 1st inaugural meeting of the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF), 11-13 October 2023, Cairo, Egypt

3.1. This forum is a coordinating continental platform on matters related to food safety, and promoting collaborative African Food Regulatory Frameworks, in Support of the Implementation of the Food Safety Strategy for Africa 2022/2036, and the Operationalization of the African Food Safety Agency (AFSA) to be established by 2025. During this inaugural meeting, a draft declaration related to the Establishment of the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum is proposed. This draft is sent to countries and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) including ECOWAS for comment. It is expected to be finalized by December 2023. Further, the senior SPS lead of ECOWAS participated in two panel discussions on (i) vTPA use and potential scaling up in the member States of ECOWAS, (ii) review of current collaborative food safety regulatory agenda at continental and regional levels.

3.2 Participation in the USDA SPS and scientific exchange programme, Iowa State University, Mississippi, United States of America, and participation in the 2023 Norman E, Borlaug International Dialogue, World Food Prize, 22 October – 3 November 2023

3.2. A highly informative and engaging workshop organized to provide valuable insights and practical knowledge on Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) topics. The senior SPS lead of ECOWAS facilitated and led a session on the development of a strategy on food safety and climate smart agriculture for Africa. The draft strategy will be finalized in the coming weeks. Further, participation in the 2023 Norman E, Borlaug International Dialogue, World Food Prize. At this meeting contacts were made for potential collaboration with international organizations. Follow-ups will be implemented in the coming months.

4 GENERAL CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

4.1. The ECOWAS Commission takes this opportunity to thank all partners for their continuing support in advancing SPS-related issues in the ECOWAS and Sahel sub-region, and to call for more collaboration, technical assistance and support for future implementation.
