

**IMPLEMENTATION: MANAGEMENT OF QUARANTINE SYSTEMS BY
COMPETENT REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

Communication from RIOPPAH

Introduction

1. The Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) established the reference framework for the design, development, adoption and adaptation of such measures by means of general compliance principles and the development of approaches aimed at harmonizing the current situation of Members in this respect.
2. However, the efficient management of quarantine systems - which now have the dual role of protecting the life and health of humans, animals and plants and facilitating trade - requires the design and implementation of new administrative structures which are in keeping with Article 13 of the SPS Agreement, permit the involvement of non-central-government institutions and overcome the inflexibility of governmental institutions.
3. RIOPPAH has been managing some elements of the quarantine system in its member countries since the 1970s, in particular those relating to quarantine treatments (International Fumigation Service - SIF) and, as of 1998, has extended its operations in two member countries to include inspection, control and certification procedures by creating the Agricultural Protection Services (SEPA). This paper aims to present the experience gained in setting up and operating these services.

Background

4. In the framework of the readaptation of the role and involvement of the State, the timely and adequate resource endowments for the central government bodies responsible for agricultural protection are revealing the first signs of inefficiency and inflexibility in the operation of the quarantine system. This, in its turn, poses a challenge when it comes to improving the quality of such services and ensuring that they are financially sustainable.
5. In most RIOPPAH member countries, the services crisis began with the implementation of quarantine treatments¹ and has resulted in the outsourcing of their operations and setting up of the International Fumigation Service (SIF).
6. This first experience in operating outsourced services has resulted in a qualitative change in the view of how quarantine treatments should be implemented, from the traditional protection of agricultural heritage to the added dimensions of trade facilitation and market access through measures at ports, borders and airports.

¹Treatment of goods (fumigation, immersion, etc.) and means of transport (spraying and disinfection) and the destruction of waste and rubbish from ports and airports.

7. Since 1996, a series of initiatives has been undertaken in the region for sanitary and phytosanitary services to be outsourced to non-governmental organizations. The related programmes include assistance in training, the drafting of legislation and increased involvement of independent professionals in the field of agricultural health and food safety.

8. RIOPPAH came to play a much greater role in the administration of quarantine systems firstly in Guatemala (1998) and subsequently in Honduras (2000), as a result of central government decisions in the wake of the administrative and technical crises faced by these services.

Description of the model

9. The creation of the Agricultural Protection Services (SEPA) has also involved the management of the components of the system that are included in the Inspection and Control Procedures. Inspection authority at border posts, ports, airports and cargo terminals has been delegated to RIOPPAH officials, who also check licences and produce product import and export statistics. Added to this is the application of prior quarantine treatments.

10. The development of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, elaboration of standards and quality control with regard to inspections, treatments and services in general are not outsourced and continue to be carried out by the government institutions responsible.

11. Outsourcing is subject to the basic principle that the quality being delegated is the executory authority and not responsibility for fulfilling international commitments and dealing with incidents in the field of dispute settlement, which still rests with the official body.

12. The short-term advantages with respect to the operation of the system can be seen both in the technical aspects (professionalization of staff, development of methods, production of operating manuals and supplying border posts with technological equipment to boost capacity and thus meet the demand for the services) and the administrative aspects (sustainable and self-sufficient financial operations, management practices used in resource management, transparent and reliable statistics and historical records, *inter alia*).

13. Steps taken to develop the quarantine systems of members in the region currently focus on animal and plant health; the task of designing the methods and technical support for developing outsourced operations is made considerably easier by the fact that RIOPPAH is a specialized regional organization dealing in both areas.

Conclusions

14. The role of regional organizations and their competence with regard to the implementation of sanitary and phytosanitary measures warrants consideration and reflection, precisely to help to resolve potential inflexibility and inefficiency in members' systems.

15. The benefits of an outsourced operation and consequent efficiency of inspection and control measures and procedures go beyond the goal of protecting the life and health of humans, animals and plants, and are reflected in improved trade facilitation as well.

16. Trade facilitation, in this particular case between two bordering countries, relies on the standardization of inspection and control procedures, and can be developed in geographical areas where there are regional organizations specializing in sanitary and phytosanitary matters.

17. Although the experiences described here concern the operation of quarantine systems, extending outsourcing to cover surveillance (including diagnosis) and input control systems as well as pest and disease control programmes should also be considered and would provide an opportunity to strengthen the exchange of experience and create fresh possibilities for technical co-operation between members.

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