

**SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES  
TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

Proposal by Mexico

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. As part of the activities of the WTO's Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, it was decided to develop a cooperation and technical assistance programme designed to meet specific priorities, more particularly of the developing country Members.

2. As a first step in achieving this objective, the Committee's Secretariat asked for the experience or the comments of Member countries, so as to supplement the analysis and guide actions in this field, to secure higher calibre technical assistance and training and to make efficient use both of human and of financial resources.

3. In this connection, Mexico wishes to cooperate with the Committee and presents its experience, along with a number of proposals on this important topic.

**II. MEXICO'S EXPERIENCE**

4. Mexico has some degree of experience in technical assistance, since it has shared technical know-how both in animal health and plant health and in matters pertaining to the implementation of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement), and has also benefited from technical assistance provided by other countries and international or regional organizations. This has enabled it to observe and closely experience the problems that mainly confront the developing countries in endeavouring to effectively apply the provisions of the SPS Agreement.

5. An initial analysis, based on Mexico's experience, shows that, in order of importance, the causes preventing many countries from properly implementing the SPS Agreement are:

- (a) Lack of competent or trained human resources;
- (b) lack of legislation, material resources and technical infrastructure; and
- (c) lack of participation by the sectors concerned.

6. It is important to note that, traditionally, the developing countries express the need to obtain technical assistance in the form of seminars, internships, workshops, visits, and so forth, all of which are traditional human resources training activities. Nevertheless, **so far practically all developing countries have received considerable technical assistance in this traditional form**, although the impact **has been minor, or at any rate not a lasting one**, since countries continue to ask for

seminars or workshops that are frequently identical (in terms of subject-matter) to those already held for them in the past.

7. Accordingly, Mexico is making the following proposal designed to promote the sustainability of technical assistance in the SPS field by strengthening the institutions responsible for implementing the SPS Agreement.

### III. PROPOSAL BY MEXICO

#### A. SUSTAINABILITY OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

8. In Mexico's view, the most critical problem in terms of the effectiveness of technical assistance in capacity-building (especially for human resources) has been **the high turnover of staff in departments responsible for implementing the SPS Agreement in the various developing countries, which has led to a permanent shortage in those departments of technical capacity to ensure effective implementation of the Agreement.**

9. Indeed, the tasks of preparing and implementing sanitary and phytosanitary measures in both the technical and the trade fields, have always required highly specialized staff with knowledge and skills normally found only in government departments responsible for implementing the SPS Agreement. As is so often the case, government officials who have received technical assistance from the various donor countries or organizations become attractive to and are usually enticed into joining the private sector, because of the economic advantages it can offer.

10. Hence, technical assistance to developing countries in the form of seminars, workshops, etc., **has had the obvious disadvantage of enhancing solely human resources capability, without permanently strengthening the technical capacity of the institutions responsible for applying the SPS Agreement**, while the experience and knowledge acquired follow the officials who move away, and hardly any trace is left in those institutions.

11. Mexico considers that one alternative for cutting down the impact of the high turnover of staff lies in systematizing and documenting the various responsibilities of government offices, so as to properly implement the rights and obligations set out in the SPS Agreement. In this way, the characteristics, and the procedures and principles to be observed stay with the institutions, regardless of the staff applying them.

12. **Mexico therefore proposes that one of the components of the SPS technical assistance programme and specifically in regard to human resources training, is that assistance to developing countries be directed at advising them on the creation of a quality assurance system (based on the relevant international standards)<sup>1</sup> for government departments in charge of applying the SPS Agreement.**

13. This will enable developing countries to document their procedures and, as part of that process, clearly specify the rights and obligations under the SPS Agreement for the direct benefit of the institutions concerned, regardless of how long these staff members remain. By certifying such systems it would be possible, moreover, to check periodically on the degree of implementation of the SPS Agreement in developing countries, thereby facilitating an objective assessment of related problems and possibilities for improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> It would be appropriate in this connection to consider whether the SPS Committee might recommend that the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) develop a standard relating to quality management in government departments.

14. In Mexico's opinion, this proposal, if accepted, could be implemented in the following stages:
- (i) Exchange of information with the departments in charge of implementing the SPS Agreement in the various Members that have certified quality assurance systems;
  - (ii) preparation of guides or guidelines for the adoption of quality assurance systems in government departments of developing countries (for which ISO assistance might be useful);
  - (iii) financing of advisory services for departments responsible for implementing the SPS Agreement in developing countries in order to help them document their procedures and prepare for certification in due course;
  - (iv) financing of the certification of quality management systems.

15. Mexico takes the view that this proposal offers the following advantages over traditional forms of technical assistance directed at human resources training:

- It promotes the strengthening of institutions (permanent benefit), in addition to providing staff training (temporary benefit);
- it optimises resources by establishing a common objective (one type of advisory service instead of a whole series of seminars on the same topic);
- it makes it easier to benefit from experience gained in documenting quality management systems, by enabling the countries involved to exchange manuals, instructions and so forth; and
- it facilitates evaluation of the effectiveness of the technical assistance supplied, by means of a certification procedure that encourages continuing improvement.

#### B. PRIORITIZATION AND PERMEABILITY OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

16. In addition, in requesting technical assistance many countries present a very extensive list of items, which reflects a lack of prioritization and makes it difficult for the donor country to select the ones that might have the greatest impact for the development of the sanitary and phytosanitary systems of the applicant countries.

17. Valuable contributions have been made for the purpose of improving technical assistance. It is for this reason that Mexico joins in the proposals submitted by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) on this matter. But, apart from the institution capacity-building mentioned earlier, we would like to make the important suggestion that all technical or training assistance received must actually have a multiplier effect; in other words, the officials or experts should, in their field of competence, transmit the knowledge acquired, through internal training programmes, which will entail strengthening the institutional bodies. It should be emphasized that this supplementary activity will not require additional financial resources or new applications for technical assistance to other countries or reference international organizations. If this proposal was put into practice, we would move ahead more efficiently and effectively on a matter that is of such importance to our countries.

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