

**General Council
Special Session on Implementation**

**ACTIONS TO INCREASE THE PARTICIPATION OF DEVELOPING
COUNTRY MEMBERS IN THE WORK OF RELEVANT SANITARY AND
PHYTOSANITARY INTERNATIONAL STANDARD-SETTING ORGANIZATIONS**

Third Report by the Director-General

1. Following-up on my efforts to explore with the relevant international standard-setting organizations and relevant intergovernmental organizations financial and technical mechanisms to assist the participation of developing countries in standard-setting activities and to coordinate efforts to identify SPS-related technical assistance needs and how best to address these, I invited the FAO, OIE, World Bank and WHO to participate in a second informal meeting at the level of Deputy Directors-General, to address these issues.¹
2. Participants from the five organizations provided an overview of actions they have taken since the last meeting. One initiative is the joint development by the FAO, WHO, OIE, World Bank and WTO of a "Conceptual Framework Paper" on the capacity-building needs of LDCs on food safety/SPS issues.
3. The OIE reported on several ongoing technical assistance activities and, in particular, the financial assistance for the participation of Chief Veterinary Officers in the OIE General Sessions and in several scientific and technical consultations, as well the decision by the OIE Member countries to decrease the contribution of least-developed countries by 50 per cent and increase the contributions by other Members by 25 per cent, effective 2002. The OIE has also concluded an agreement of cooperation with the World Bank to improve support to veterinary services in developing countries, particularly in areas relevant to implementation of the SPS Agreement on animal disease control.
4. The World Bank provided background information on its food safety and SPS projects for FY2001 focusing on the organization of workshops in developing countries. The Bank also outlined the work under way on policy aspects of trade-related capacity building and technical assistance involving a framework for complementary assistance to developing countries, including in standards, and a standards development facility to coordinate technical assistance in SPS and related areas. The Bank also reported several initiatives relating to standards development, capacity-building, including in the context of the Integrated Framework, and trade.
5. The FAO/WHO Codex Secretariat indicated that the competence for technical assistance with regard to food safety issues rested with the Codex parent organizations, FAO and WHO. However, the Codex Alimentarius Commission had agreed in principle on the establishment of a FAO/WHO Trust Fund (or Codex Participation Trust Fund) to facilitate effective participation of developing countries in the work of Codex, including capacity building in this area. The Codex Commission had also agreed that coordination with the "Food Safety and Quality Facility for Least Developed Countries" initiated by FAO and supported by WHO would be considered in the process, although

¹ See WT/GC/45 for the report of the first informal meeting. The second report, WT/GC/46, summarized information provided by the relevant financial and technical organizations.

these were separate entities. The Codex Secretariat stressed that the participation of developing countries in the work of Codex had significantly increased in recent years, especially following the conclusion of the SPS and TBT Agreements.

6. WHO reported that food safety was one of WHO's top eleven budget priorities. WHO was in the process of developing a Global WHO Food Safety Strategy comprising the overarching principle that health-based international food safety standards and their adoption by governments will improve the safety of food and also facilitate food trade, thereby promoting sustainable development. The WHO Regions had been adopting Regional Food safety strategies that stressed the importance of comprehensive risk-based legislative food safety frameworks reflecting Codex standards and other international obligations such as the SPS Agreement. WHO had extensive experience in technical assistance activities, including to facilitate the participation of developing countries in the Codex standard-setting activities and to increase understanding of the SPS Agreement and other multilateral trade agreements related to health. FAO and WHO were planning to organize a Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators to get developing country officials together with the experts from developed countries (the meeting, initially scheduled for 22-24 October 2001, was postponed to early 2002). WHO is also working jointly with WTO on a handbook on trade and health issues, and has recently concluded a policy training course in cooperation with WTO.

7. Discussions among the five organizations identified the following specific difficulties which need to be addressed: identification and development of sufficient expertise in many developing countries to permit their active and effective participation in expert groups which frequently represent the first step in the development of international standards; the need to develop the capacity of these countries to implement the standards within their own territories, recognizing that implementation capacity of developing countries varies considerably from country-to-country as well as between standard-setting organizations; the need to identify the type of actions required taking into account these differences. It was also noted that capacity-building requires investment in infrastructure, human capital, and other building blocks of modern standards systems.

8. The five organizations agreed on the need to establish a mechanism to ensure coordination of the resources available to the relevant international organizations and to avoid potential overlap. It was also noted that several regional organizations had significant experience with regard to capacity building in developing countries and that such experience should be taken into account in the coordination effort.

9. In light of these considerations, the representatives of the five organizations agreed to develop a joint, formal statement of common objectives relating to the participation of developing countries in the development and application of sanitary and phytosanitary measures. This joint statement may be made at the Doha Ministerial Conference.
