

TECHNICAL COOPERATION: AN OVERVIEW

Submission by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)

I. BACKGROUND

1. Most countries, lending institutions, and international cooperation agencies have traditionally sought to strengthen sanitary and phytosanitary systems. In addition, in order to foster comprehensive development in the agri-food sector, food safety was recently included among their priorities.

2. Projects to modernize the Sanitary, Phytosanitary and Food Safety Systems (SPFSS), however, have tended to be characterized by poor articulation among their elements, due to a lack of assessments and to an imbalance in the attention given to the regulatory, technological and institutional aspects. This has produced a fragmentation of the SPFSS and given rise to difficulties for identifying and prioritizing their needs.

3. In a document describing its strategy for agri-food development in Latin America and the Caribbean¹, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) acknowledges that during the past 15 years, adjustments implemented in the different fields of development have produced uncertain results. It can be deduced, then, that the results of investments made during this period to upgrade sanitary and phytosanitary systems were also limited.

During the 1961-1998 period, the IDB disbursed a little more than US\$16 billion (constant) on funding for agricultural projects. Of this, only 3% was used for agricultural health projects, revealing the little importance accorded by the countries to investment projects in this subject area.

4. Discussions on the subject of technical cooperation have taken place in the different forums of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other international organizations. Representatives of developed countries have expressed their concern over the low impact of the cooperation provided by themselves and by cooperation agencies on the advancement of developing and less developed countries. In addition, and despite the large amount of funds and actions executed to date, developing countries continue to call for more cooperation and for better implementation of the concept of technical cooperation. This shows that cooperation actions have not fully adjusted to the new functions of the SPFSS, nor have they always produced the expected impact or results.

¹ Echeverría, Rubén. 2000. Estrategia para el desarrollo agroalimentario de América Latina y el Caribe. Policies and Strategies Series of the Department for Sustainable Development. Inter-American Development (IDB).

II. NEW STRATEGY NEEDED

5. To begin with, new strategies need to be implemented in order to maximize the use of resources and change the traditional belief that isolated or relatively unplanned disease-control efforts, investments in technology, or quarantine measures can modernize the SPFSS.

6. Efforts to strengthen the bases of the SPFSS will depend on the priorities of each country, but **public-private sector articulation** must be the first aspect addressed in any modernization process. Such articulation can be understood as the existence of formal or informal mechanisms for inter-sectoral communication that facilitate dialogue, analysis and the prioritization of needs among different stakeholders. This requires transparency, institutional commitment, organized structures and/or permanent mechanisms for communication.

7. The first framework that should be strengthened is the **institutional framework**, in order to upgrade the country's official representation, the technical independence of its institutions, and the processes that ensure the sustainability of sanitary and phytosanitary systems.

8. The second is the **regulatory framework**, in order to harmonize national legislation with international standards and to establish the rights and obligations of stakeholders.

9. Last, but not least, is the **technological framework**, which is the tool that will increase the efficiency of the stakeholders and the processes identified earlier.

10. Table 1 lists the variables that make up the aforementioned frameworks and that must be taken into account when establishing technical cooperation or investment programs to upgrade SPFSS. Many countries have made considerable progress in some of these areas; others have significant gaps, indicating, in part, the need for more effective mechanisms for identifying and prioritizing needs, and for conducting monitoring and evaluation.

Table 1: Variables to be taken into account when implementing technical cooperation processes

Regulatory framework	Institutional framework	Technological framework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laws - Standards - Regulations <p>relative to plant protection, animal health, food safety and the safety of agricultural inputs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsiveness - Financial sustainability - Technical independence - Official representation (WTO, OIE, IPPC, CODEX) - Certification - Accreditation - Traceability - Technical sustainability (education, training, compensation) - Research - Public communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diagnostic capability - Surveillance - Quarantine - Risk analysis - Emerging issues - Regionalization - Information systems - Input records - Health campaigns - Risk factor campaigns (HACCP, GAP) - Emergency systems

Public-private sector articulation is necessary for achieving a balance and for fostering an effective development of the different frameworks comprising the SPFSS. It will determine the degree of effectiveness and the speed at which necessary changes take place.

11. Like any other tool supporting SPFSS, technical cooperation must be an integral part of any modernization model. Once the stakeholders have defined the model, the technical cooperation they request must take into account the stages of diagnosis, prioritization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

III. CONCLUSIONS

12. Technical cooperation is a tool that can help countries modernize their SPFSS; it can also upgrade the countries' capabilities to effectively implement the WTO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. However, a change in methodology is necessary in this technical cooperation to incorporate inter-sectoral articulation.

13. The private sector has probably been the stakeholder most overlooked in modernization processes, despite the fact that most sanitary or phytosanitary rules are implemented in that sector. Thus, mechanisms of articulation should ensure that the private sector participates actively in the stages of diagnosis, identification, prioritization and evaluation of technical cooperation.

14. Stakeholders in the SPFSS must become aware that the effectiveness of technical cooperation does not lie in being granted longer periods for complying with sanitary or phytosanitary regulations, and that financial resources are not a sufficient condition for effectively implementing said cooperation.

15. As in the case of any other component of the agri-food system, sanitary systems respond more efficiently to long-term planning policies. Accordingly, a comprehensive modernization model must be adopted, one that addresses animal health, plant protection and food safety, as well as the issues of the institutional, regulatory and technological frameworks.

16. Actions to modernize SPFSS should be characterized by a balanced and gradual process of implementation. In striving for balance, initial efforts should work to strengthen the frameworks (regulatory, institutional or technological) that have the greatest need. The process should be implemented gradually so that efforts can adjust to the real availability of resources, both in requesting countries and in countries offering the technical cooperation.

17. Human leadership and institutional strengthening are basic requirements for effectively developing technical cooperation programs on agricultural health, plant protection and food safety. They are, then, two fields that are opening up as new niches for cooperation in this area.

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