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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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## SIXTH REVIEW OF THE OPERATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE APPLICATION OF SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

### MONITORING THE USE OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CCFICS GUIDELINE ON THE USE OF VOLUNTARY THIRD-PARTY ASSURANCE PROGRAMMES (CXG 93-2021)

#### PROPOSAL FROM BELIZE

The following proposal, received on 16 March 2024, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Belize.

## 1 BACKGROUND

1.1. In 2020, the Standards and Trade Development Facility approved two pilot projects: one in East Africa ([STDF/PG/665](#)) and another in Central America ([STDF/PG/682](#)). Belize and Honduras are both beneficiaries of the pilot project approved by the Standards and Trade Development Facility: STDF/PG/682: "Piloting the use of Third-Party Assurance (TPA) Programme in Central America (Belize and Honduras) to improve food safety outcomes for public health and trade".

1.2. In summary, the pilot contains three main areas:

1. **A regulatory component:** focusing on the competent authorities (increasing knowledge on vTPAs; looking at the legislative framework; capacity building efforts and possible public/private partnership opportunities that would facilitate strategic changes to strengthen the food control management system based on Codex principles and guidelines);
2. **Food Business Operators (FBO):** engaging the FBOs to improve food safety compliance in the selected value chains. This component is expected to foster growth and promotion of the selected value chains and open new opportunities which will also benefit consumers; and
3. **Dissemination and Learning component:** which will enable the beneficiary countries to receive mentoring from other stakeholders and especially food safety regulators who have used vTPA as part of their risk management strategies in their national food control system. It will also allow for the beneficiary countries to share experiences, challenges and lessons learnt regionally and globally.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

2.1. The pilot project in Central America experienced some delays in implementation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is now coming to a close and should be completed before the end of 2024.

2.2. In line with the project objectives to disseminate and share learning experiences and best practices, both Belize and Honduras believe that one of the most effective means of doing so would be through a thematic session or workshop held at the margins of the SPS Committee meeting.

2.3. Both countries have benefited tremendously from experiences and best practices shared by other WTO Members inclusive of information shared by a few of the certification programme owners.

In addition, the capacity building initiatives in the area of risk-based inspection and use of tools for the evaluation of third-party assurance programmes have been extremely useful to both countries.

2.4. Holding a thematic session on Members' experience in the implementation of a guideline produced by one of the three sisters, we believe, would help to highlight several important elements:

1. The voluntary nature of standards, guidelines and recommendations produced by the international standard setting bodies;
2. the importance of ensuring that these standards, guidelines and recommendations are risk-based;
3. the effectiveness of capacity building initiatives in enhancing developing countries' ability to comply with international standards, guidelines and recommendations;
4. the role of public/private partnerships; and
5. the significant contributions that organizations such as the STDF and UNIDO play in capacity building initiatives.

### **3 PROPOSAL**

3.1. Belize would like to propose that a thematic session be held on the Implementation of the Codex Guideline: Principles and Guidelines for the Assessment and Use of Voluntary Third-Party Assurance Programmes (CXG 93-2021), which was adopted in 2021.

3.2. The thematic session will:

- Explore the different approaches used by Members in the implementation of the Codex Guideline;
- Provide an opportunity for Members to share experiences and best practices;
- Explore the variety of tools available to Members to assist in the evaluation of third-party assurance programmes;
- Receive updates on pilot projects on Data Sharing; and
- Identify capacity building opportunities to assist developing countries in enhancing their risk-based inspection and auditing frameworks.

3.3. The thematic session will also provide the beneficiary countries of the STDF Pilot projects to report on their experience in establishing a roadmap for the implementation of the guideline at the national level.

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