



Readiness of AU Member States to address SPS requirements for trading under the AfCFTA: Lessons on Capacity Building, Sensitisation and Public Policy Initiatives in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Uganda's ability to trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) depends on its ability to meet sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements. These measures define how food, plant, and animal products are produced, processed, tested, and certified. If Uganda fails to meet international standards, its exports risk rejection and its market access will remain limited. A national workshop assessed Uganda's readiness to implement SPS obligations under AfCFTA and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Participants included regulators, producers, exporters, academics, and civil society. The focus was on aligning policies, strengthening coordination, addressing enforcement gaps, building capacity, and increasing stakeholder awareness. Uganda has some established SPS policies. But enforcement is fragmented. Institutions often work in isolation. Compliance costs are high, especially for small producers and businesses. Testing infrastructure remains weak. Coordination across agencies is limited. These gaps reduce Uganda's ability to meet trade requirements. The workshop identified practical steps. Train producers on compliance. Expand access to certification. Strengthen coordination between agencies. Improve testing and inspection systems. Share timely data across institutions. Use digital platforms to track changes in SPS regulations. Uganda has started using the ePing platform to share trade-related alerts. It can support transparency and early action. But its reach is still limited. Wider participation is needed. More institutions and private sector actors must engage with the system. The AfCFTA Annex 7 outlines clear requirements. Uganda must align national systems, reduce duplication, and adopt mutual recognition arrangements to lower costs. Enacting a unified food safety law and setting up a national food authority are key next steps. Is Uganda prepared to meet these expectations? Are our institutions ready to support trade under one African market?

Keywords: AfCFTA Annex 7, Food Safety, International standards, Policy alignment, regulatory compliance, Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Trade facilitation, WTO SPS Agreement, Uganda

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RÉSUMÉ

La capacité de l'Ouganda à commercer dans le cadre de la Zone de libre-échange continentale africaine (ZLECAf) dépend de sa capacité à respecter les exigences sanitaires et phytosanitaires (SPS). Ces mesures définissent les modalités de production, de transformation, d'analyse et de certification des produits alimentaires, végétaux et animaux. Si l'Ouganda ne respecte pas les normes internationales, ses exportations risquent d'être rejetées et l'accès au marché demeurera limité. Un atelier national a évalué l'état de préparation de l'Ouganda à mettre en œuvre les obligations SPS au titre de la ZLECAf et de l'Organisation mondiale du commerce (OMC). Les participants comprenaient des régulateurs, des producteurs, des exportateurs, des universitaires et la société civile. L'accent a été mis sur l'alignement des politiques, le renforcement de la coordination, la résolution des lacunes dans l'application, le renforcement des capacités et l'augmentation de la sensibilisation des parties prenantes. L'Ouganda dispose de certaines politiques SPS établies. Toutefois, l'application est fragmentée. Les institutions travaillent souvent de manière isolée. Les coûts de conformité sont élevés, en particulier pour les petits producteurs et entreprises. Les infrastructures d'analyse restent faibles. La coordination entre les agences est limitée. Ces lacunes réduisent la capacité de l'Ouganda à satisfaire aux exigences commerciales. L'atelier a identifié des mesures pratiques : former les producteurs à la conformité ; élargir l'accès à la certification ; renforcer la coordination entre les agences ; améliorer les systèmes d'analyse et d'inspection ; partager les données en temps utile entre les institutions ; utiliser des plateformes numériques pour suivre les changements de réglementations SPS. L'Ouganda a commencé à utiliser la plateforme ePing pour partager les alertes liées au commerce. Elle peut favoriser la transparence et l'action précoce. Mais sa portée reste limitée. Une participation plus large est nécessaire. Davantage d'institutions et d'acteurs du secteur privé doivent s'engager dans le système. L'annexe 7 de la ZLECAf énonce des exigences claires. L'Ouganda doit aligner ses systèmes nationaux, réduire les duplications et adopter des accords de reconnaissance mutuelle afin de réduire les coûts. L'adoption d'une loi unifiée sur la sécurité alimentaire et la mise en place d'une autorité nationale de l'alimentation sont les prochaines étapes essentielles. L'Ouganda est-il prêt à répondre à ces attentes ? Nos institutions sont-elles prêtes à soutenir le commerce dans un marché africain unique ?

Mots clés : Annexe 7 de la ZLECAf, Sécurité alimentaire, Normes internationales, Alignement politique, Conformité réglementaire, Mesures sanitaires et phytosanitaires (SPS), Facilitation du commerce, Accord SPS de l'OMC, Ouganda

INTRODUCTION

Uganda's agricultural sector is central to its economy and trade, necessitating strong sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures to ensure food safety, animal and plant health, and market access (World Bank, 2018). Effective SPS regulation is critical for protecting public health and ensuring compliance with international trade standards. Uganda has made efforts to align its national regulatory framework with provisions of the WTO TBT/SPS Agreements and Annex 7 on SPS of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (Uganda National Bureau of Standards, n.d.). However, challenges persist in institutional coordination, regulatory enforcement, and stakeholder engagement, requiring targeted

interventions to improve compliance and trade facilitation. Hence, a stakeholder's workshop was organized in Uganda with specific objectives aimed at improving stakeholders' understanding of international SPS standards and requirements, fostering regulatory alignment, and promoting best practices. The following section outlines these key objectives in detail.

METHODOLOGY

The workshop adopted a structured format that comprised: SPS experts' content presentations on critical topics, panel discussions, In-depth exchanges among participants, question and answer sessions and informal discussions and coffee breaks which facilitated stakeholder

connections. To ensure a comprehensive discussion of SPS standards and public policy, the workshop brought together a diverse group of stakeholders from government, industry, academia, and civil society. The SPS workshop held in Kampala on 16–17 January 2025 brought together a wide range of participants involved in Uganda’s food safety and trade systems.

Government institutions included the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, the Uganda National Bureau of Standards, and the National Drug Authority. These agencies are responsible for setting regulations, enforcing SPS measures, and supporting compliance across sectors. Private sector associations took part through the Uganda Fruits and Vegetable Exporters and Producers Association and the Uganda Fish Processors and Exporters Association. These groups represent exporters whose operations are directly affected by SPS requirements. Their input is important for aligning policy with real trade challenges.

Development partners and international organisations were present, including the African Continental Free Trade Area and SPS consultants working in Uganda. They help support national efforts to align with AfCFTA standards and improve regional coordination. Academic and research institutions joined through representatives from Makerere University and Kyambogo University. These institutions contribute by providing technical knowledge, conducting research, and training future professionals in agriculture, veterinary medicine, and food science. Non-governmental organisations and civil society groups also participated. These included consumer advocacy organisations, the Food Rights Alliance, and media representatives. Their role is to promote awareness, protect consumer interests, and inform the public about the importance of SPS measures.

The workshop brought together all these actors to discuss Uganda’s readiness for trade under AfCFTA. Their diverse perspectives helped identify gaps, share practical experiences, and propose actions to improve SPS compliance

across the country. With a diverse group of 36 participants (20 men and 16 women in attendance) the workshop focused on key thematic areas essential for SPS compliance and trade facilitation. Of the workshop attendees, 22% provided feedback on the workshop by completing a workshop evaluation form that was shared online after the workshop. The summary of their feedback is outlined below.

RESULTS

Workshop feedback analysis. The feedback from the evaluation was very positive. Overall satisfaction with the workshop was high; all respondents indicated they were either satisfied or very satisfied, with a majority (5 out of 8) being very satisfied. Regarding whether the workshop’s objectives were met, half of the respondents reported that the objectives were fully met, while the other half said they were mostly met, indicating that every participant felt the goals were at least largely achieved. In terms of relevance, every respondent found the workshop content pertinent to their professional needs – most rated it very relevant, and several even said it was extremely relevant. Participants also gave high marks to the effectiveness and expertise of the facilitators: six of the eight respondents rated the facilitators as excellent, and the remaining two rated them good. When asked about the usefulness of the panel discussion segment, six respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the panel enhanced their understanding of SPS issues (with two people neutral on this point). The organisation of the workshop (venue, schedule, materials) was generally regarded well– four attendees rated the organisation excellent, three rated it good, and one offered a fair rating. Finally, on the open-ended question of which session was most valuable and why, the panel discussions emerged as a clear favourite. A majority of respondents cited the panel sessions as particularly valuable, noting that hearing real world experiences from the panellists deepened their understanding of SPS implementation challenges and solutions in Uganda. Some participants highlighted that all sessions were valuable due to their practical implications for AfCFTA implementation. Others pointed to specific elements – for example, one respondent

mentioned that the demonstration of the ePing SPS and TBT alert platform was especially useful but overall, the panel discussions were praised for being engaging and covering real issues. This feedback underlines the importance of interactive and practice-oriented components in capacity building workshops.

The following section provides an overview of the major topics discussed, including international SPS agreements, Uganda's regulatory framework, and best practices in enforcement.

Significance of WTO SPS Agreement. The WTO Agreement on the application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures serves a significant function in safeguarding human, animal, and plant health. At the same time, it also takes into account preventing cross border trade protection measures from being used as barriers to international trade (World Trade Organisation, 1995). By balancing the desire for free-flowing international trade with the need for health protection, the agreement fosters a safer, more efficient world trading environment among nations.

Obligations. In the agreement, there are several important commitments that signatory nations have to undertake. They have to first refrain from the practice of taking measures resulting in unjustifiable discrimination against foreign products (World Trade Organization, 1995). It means that they should treat fairly products originating from other countries and not apply higher standards to imports without proper scientific justification. Secondly, they have to ensure that measures taken by them as sanitary or phytosanitary are science based. This involves conducting thorough risk assessment to identify the potential risks involved in some products or practices (World Trade Organization, 1995).

Furthermore, the agreement encourages countries to harmonise their food safety, animal and plant health standards and regulations with those developed by international organisations, ensuring a harmonised SPS compliance approach. (World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), 2020, 39 (1). This not only facilitates easier trade but also strengthens the global commitment to

health and safety by ensuring that countries adopt and use common safety standards.

Trade Implications. Compliance complications with different SPS regulations increase operational expenses for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, creating market disadvantages (Kamara *et al.*, 2019, P.14049). Additionally, restrictive SPS measures hinder innovation by discouraging the emergence of new approaches, technologies, techniques and practices in agrifood value chains which undermines growth, especially in under resourced nations. Adherence to SPS regulations enhances food safety, boosts public health, and increases export market opportunities.

However, in Uganda, there are still challenges inhibiting the full implementation of SPS measures and standards, which are exacerbated by excessively high compliance costs for SMEs and smallholder farmers, regulatory inefficiency, and limited regulatory enforcement capability (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2005). The SPS standards also, on occasion, act as non-tariff barriers (NTBs), restricting Uganda's exports when compliance gaps exist. For instance, Uganda has been subject to regional and international export rejections due to aflatoxin contamination of maize and pesticide residue violations in horticultural crops, which necessitates enhancing testing infrastructure, institutional coordination, and stakeholder sensitisation (Standards and Trade Development Facility, n.d., p. 2). Addressing these issues will be critical in unlocking the full potential of SPS standards and Ugandan competitiveness in regional and global markets. The WTO SPS Agreement sets up a basic framework for managing SPS measures, but for it to boost trade, regional integration is key. There is a need for Uganda and other African countries to take advantage of the AfCFTA. It creates a unified market with simpler SPS rules across Africa. By implementing the provisions of AfCFTA's Annex 7, countries like Uganda can cut down on trade barriers and improve compliance, making it easier for them to trade. The provisions of the SPS Annex of the AfCFTA treaty will look at AfCFTA's SPS provisions and what they mean

for trade, both regionally and internationally are explained below.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA) ANNEX 7 ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY (SPS) MEASURES IN AFRICA. Significance of AfCFTA.

Anchored as one of the most critical pillars of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) the SPS Measures set food safety standards as well as animal and plant health standards on the continent. Its objective is to promote trade by minimising unjustified barriers while making SPS measures science based and proportionate to the risks.

Expected Benefits of AfCFTA. AfCFTA is likely to have major economic gains. By 2035, trade within Africa is likely to increase by almost 29%, guaranteeing more trade between countries (World Bank, 2020). The agreement is also likely to result in a decrease in poverty and an increase in welfare of the African Communities, with the economic gains put at \$16 billion to \$24 billion. In addition, the huge market created by the AfCFTA will serve to benefit small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which account for over 90% of African businesses, by reducing trade barriers and expanding their market access and competitiveness (African Union, 2022).

Progress on SPS Measures. Implementation activities for SPS measures under the AfCFTA have focused on the following areas:

Improved Transparency. through Notification Systems. For example, the AU and Member States are promoting the use of tools like the WTO's SPS Information Management System and the ePing SPS&TBT Platform to share regulatory updates. Notably, WTO members now notify over 6,000 new or changed SPS/TBT regulations annually, underscoring the importance of notification platforms (Standards and Trade Development Facility [STDF], 2023).

Harmonisation and Risk Assessment. Current SPS interventions along priority agri value chains, i.e., grains, fish and beef have been identified and

mapped to reveal and address unwarranted protectionism.

Mutual Recognition Arrangements - The establishment of a mutual recognition arrangement seeks to avoid duplicated testing and certification procedures, lower costs, and enhance efficiency.

Training workshops have been initiated to improve compliance with international food safety standards for policymakers and private sector stakeholders, focusing on best practices and cross-border trade facilitation.

The AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol. Electronic certification and digital solutions to enhance trade transparency and lower transaction costs have been established.

Challenges. There are challenges in AfCFTA implementation amidst progress. Some countries are unable to harmonise sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) systems with international standards, and therefore, regulatory gaps exist. Conformity assessment costs are equally a very heavy expense that can negatively impact the involvement of SMEs in trading under the AfCFTA, whereby they cannot even afford to certify and be compliant.

Although AfCFTA Annex 7 on SPS Measures establishes a regional pact for African harmonisation of food safety, animal health, and plant health requirements, its effectiveness is dependent on robust national regulatory systems. To be functional at the national level, there needs to be effective policy, well-coordinated institutions, and compliance machinery in harmony with both regional and international SPS commitments.

In Uganda, the current SPS regulatory framework plays a vital role in facilitating trade and protecting public health. The state of Uganda's SPS policy and institutional frameworks, as well as major challenges that need to be tackled to increase compliance and competitiveness in regional and international markets are analysed below.

SPS REGULATORY FRAMEWORK IN UGANDA

A Sanitary and Phytosanitary regulatory framework is essential for protecting consumers, ensuring compliance with regional and international standards, and fostering fair trade. A robust framework should encompass policies and regulations that address food safety, animal health, and plant health.

Policies Supporting SPS. Uganda's SPS regulatory foundation is built upon key policy areas where national policies have been developed and are being implemented. They are: [The Food and Nutrition Policy \(2003\)](#), which aims to promote food security and nutrition, [National Agriculture Policy](#), which provides a framework for sustainable agricultural development and the [National Standards and Quality Policy](#), which focuses on enhancing product quality and adherence to standards. These policies collectively establish the institutional framework necessary for effective SPS regulation.

Institutional and Operational Challenges. Despite the existing policies, Uganda faces several challenges in implementing an effective SPS framework typical of developing countries ([Wood et al., 2017](#)). These are; fragmented Food Safety Controls where there is absence of a unified food safety law leading to overlapping and inefficient enforcement; limited technical capacity characterized by shortage of skilled personnel; inadequate logistics; insufficient resources such as inadequate laboratory and inspection equipment eg not all border points have well equipped labs or trained inspectors for rapid testing which limit efficiency in inspection, certification, and other conformity assessment processes; and lack of risk analysis where the current conformity assessments do not integrate risk-based approaches, reducing their effectiveness in mitigating food safety threats. A detailed description of challenges and barriers to implementing an effective SPS framework is provided in [Bagumire \(2025 in press - EAJFST\)](#).

An effective Sanitary and Phytosanitary regulatory regime must be supported by well

capacitated institutions that play a central role in ensuring public health, safety and trade facilitation. One of the key institutions in Uganda is the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS). The current roles and contributions of UNBS and other institutions toward compliance with Uganda's SPS landscape are described and analysed below.

THE ROLE OF UGANDA NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS (UNBS) AND LEAD SPS AGENCIES IN UGANDA'S SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY LANDSCAPE: Mandate and Functions. The Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) develops, promotes, and enforces national standards in line with international SPS requirements, certifies food products, and conducts laboratory testing for contaminants to ensure food safety. It also inspects and clears imports to prevent substandard goods from entering the market and runs consumer education campaigns on food safety ([UNBS Act, 1983](#)).

Aside from its key mandates above, UNBS plays a role in spearheading the implementation of the provisions of the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) as the mandated national body responsible for the development of standards, establishing a robust technical regulatory system, administration of the mandatory standards and development and implementation of conformity assessment procedures. The UNBS also plays a significant role in supporting the implementation of the key provisions of the WTO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, to the extent that it is responsible for the development and implementation of conformity procedures that relate to compliance approval of locally processed/manufactured goods including exports, and imports for processed/manufactured goods including for foodstuffs.

Other Institutions with SPS Mandates in Uganda. In addition to UNBS, several other agencies play essential roles in enforcing SPS measures:

Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries (MAAIF) oversees plant and animal health policies to control diseases and manage pests, Issues phytosanitary certificates and enforces Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and conducts capacity-building programs for farmers to enhance SPS compliance.

The **National Drug Authority (NDA)** regulates veterinary drugs to prevent drug residues and antimicrobial resistance in food production and regulates human medicines.

Ministry of Health (MOH) monitors food safety and zoonotic diseases, conducts public education campaigns on safe food handling and enforces food safety regulations in line with public health standards.

Strengthening SPS Coordination and Collaboration. Effective SPS management requires a cohesive and well-coordinated regulatory framework. Key aspects of interagency collaboration include data sharing which strengthens enforcement and risk based SPS decision making; Harmonisation of Policies supports regional trade compliance under the East African Community (EAC) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and stakeholder engagement as public awareness campaigns help improve compliance, especially among small-scale producers.

Analysis of the effectiveness of Uganda's Institutional framework in SPS Control. Uganda's enforcement agencies, particularly the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries (MAAIF), play a crucial role in ensuring food safety and regulatory compliance. However, their effectiveness is hindered by weak enforcement mechanisms, limited technical capacity, inadequate funding and bureaucratic inefficiencies. While UNBS has made progress in aligning Uganda's standards with international benchmarks, enforcement gaps at border points and informal markets allow non-compliant products to circulate on the local market, undermining food safety efforts. Additionally, overlapping mandates and poor inter-agency

coordination often create trade bottlenecks, leading to delays in certification, increased compliance costs, and lost export opportunities.

Lead agencies are central to the implementation of food safety and phytosanitary measures in Uganda. The success of the SPS system relies on the implementation of transparent, science-based, and internationally accepted standards. Such standards not only improve compliance but also improve Uganda's competitiveness in regional and international markets.

REGULATORY PRACTICE IN UGANDA'S SPS SYSTEM AGAINST INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS Uganda's SPS system faces multiple challenges that hinder compliance and limit the country's potential in global markets. Addressing these challenges through good standardization and regulatory practices is essential for ensuring food safety, enhancing market access, and strengthening Uganda's economic competitiveness.

Good Regulatory and Standardisation Practice (GSRP). The GSRP emphasises open, consensus-driven standard development, incorporating periodic reviews to maintain relevance and effectiveness.

Uganda's SPS measures must align with global frameworks to ensure food safety, animal health, and plant protection. Key international bodies include Codex Alimentarius, which sets food safety standards, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) for animal health guidelines, and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) for phytosanitary measures. Aligning with these standards helps facilitate trade, reduce technical barriers, and ensure consistent SPS implementation. While Uganda has adopted many such standards on paper, effective implementation remains a challenge.

Major regulatory practice issues include: A lack of coordination between standards and enforcement mechanisms, which results in some regulatory gaps. It has been observed that Uganda sometimes develops standards (through UNBS or other bodies), but enforcement lags due to a lack of

awareness or capacity among implementing agencies. This results in regulatory gaps – certain products might have standards established, but producers and inspectors may not fully enforce them due to poor communication between standard setters and frontline regulators ([Diagnostic Mapping of the SPS System in Uganda, 2018](#))

As noted, compliance is costly for many Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and they find it hard to meet international standards as there are high costs involved (testing fees, certification charges etc). There are limited participatory processes, which are reflected in weak regulation and weak stakeholder engagement. In the past, some SPS regulations or standards in Uganda have been developed with minimal input from those who must comply (farmers, food businesses) or consumers. This can lead to rules that are not pragmatic or not well understood by stakeholders, weakening compliance. A 2018 diagnostic mapping report by Uganda's SPS authorities noted that the draft National SPS Policy, which was presented for validation by stakeholders in June 2018, reflected persistent weaknesses in stakeholder engagement. It highlighted that regulatory enforcement mechanisms were weak, and “public awareness of SPS requirements” was low, signaling that key groups had not been meaningfully included in policy development. ([Diagnostic Mapping of the SPS System in Uganda, 2018](#))

Good regulatory and standardisation practices ought to form the basis of strengthening Uganda's SPS system. The effectiveness of these practices, nevertheless, requires the cooperation and coordination of concerned stakeholders, such as government agencies, private sector entities, farmers, exporters, and consumer interest groups. In the absence of strong stakeholder engagement, the introduction of SPS measures and regulatory reforms can be resisted or inefficient. The next section deals with how to construct an effective stakeholder engagement mechanism that encourages cooperation, raises the level of compliance, and makes SPS policies a reflection of the needs and realities of all stakeholders along the value chain.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FOR SPS COMPLIANCE. To build a stakeholder engagement framework in Uganda would require a structured way of communicating with and engaging stakeholders to share information, build capacity, and increase awareness of priority issues. There has to be a lead organisation that triggers the process of good engagement, with a definite purpose for the engagement and the necessity it aims to fulfil. Stakeholder mapping is crucial in determining pertinent participants whose contribution or collaboration is vital to achieving the international norms in SPS management and control. Furthermore, choosing the most efficient mode of engagement, either through face-to-face interaction, online forums, or voice communication, will increase efficiency in communication and stakeholder involvement. Effective engagement also demands access to timely and relevant information on trade-related SPS and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) measures.

Online platforms, such as the [ePing SPS & TBT Platform – Home](#) that is currently being used in Uganda is significant in facilitating information exchange, keeping stakeholders informed of regulatory changes, and addressing trade concerns in real time. This online platform (developed by WTO/ITC/UN) notifies subscribers about SPS and TBT notifications issued by WTO members. In Uganda, ePing is being leveraged to keep regulators and businesses informed of changes in trading partner requirements in real time. The platform allows users to set alerts for products or markets of interest so that, for example, a Ugandan grain exporter can be alerted if Kenya notifies a new phytosanitary requirement for maize. By sharing such regulatory updates, ePing facilitates transparency and helps stakeholders anticipate and address trade issues before they escalate.

OVERVIEW OF THE ePING SPS and TBT PLATFORM. The ePing SPS&TBT Platform facilitates international trade by assisting stakeholders, such as regulatory bodies and enterprises, in dealing with SPS and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). The platform offers real time information sharing on trade regulation,

alerting users on compliance requirements and possible prohibitions. Through the provision of tools for tracking SPS and TBT notifications, ePing promotes transparency and simplifies trade, thereby enabling safe and fair international trade.

Globally, the ePing system has over 23,000 registered users - roughly half from governments and half from the private sector, academia, and other organisations (standardsfacility.org) – and virtually all WTO SPS/TBT notifications are now directed through this platform. By facilitating timely access to regulatory information and stakeholder discussions, tools like ePing can help reduce trade costs and frictions and facilitate safe trade.

The contribution of ePing in Uganda has been significant in enabling notifications of trade barriers and technical regulations for users, promoting transparency and compliance with international standards. The platform offers real time SPS and TBT notices from different nations, notifying businesses and regulators of changes that impact trade. The ePing allows coordination among national agencies, industry stakeholders, and regulatory bodies for improved communication and alignment on trade matters.

Being a platform for negotiation and solution of trade issues, ePing enables stakeholders to solve regulatory issues upfront before their escalation. It also facilitates international cooperation by directly engaging WTO member states in the process, promoting dialogue and enhancing world trade relations. While the ePing has benefits, Uganda is limited by budget constraints, which limit national coordination committees in generating data and information, as well as consensus regarding responses to information shared on the platform. Not all relevant stakeholders (especially smaller businesses and producers) are yet on the platform or even aware of it.

To address this, an ePing SPS and TBT national forum has been established virtually to allow ongoing dialogue under budget limitations. Uganda is also currently a beneficiary of the STDF Project Grant STDF/PG/1000, “Improving

the Use of the ePing SPS & TBT Platform to Enhance Transparency for Market Access,” which aims to increase national uptake of the platform in five countries.

STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING UGANDA’S SPS FRAMEWORK. A robust SPS framework is essential for Uganda to enhance food safety, improve trade facilitation, and foster economic growth. The key strategies recommended by the stakeholders to boost the national SPS control system fall into six categories: Strengthening Institutional and Regulatory Frameworks; Trade Facilitation through Standardisation and Harmonisation; Institutional Capacity and Coordination; Strengthening the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS); and dealing with Sector-Specific compliance Issues.

To strengthen institutional and regulatory frameworks there is need to: Enact a consolidated national food safety control law to streamline food safety management along the entire food chain; Establish a food and agriculture authority to control and coordinate SPS measures and ensure regulatory efficiency and expedite key legislation, including the livestock identification and traceability bill and the meat development bill, to facilitate enforcement measures.

To support trade facilitation through standardisation and harmonisation there is a need for harmonisation through the adoption of international standards to reduce trade gaps; Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) to eliminate redundant testing and certification; reducing business compliance costs; to promote transparency and equivalence in regulations to provide confidence and reduce trade disputes by transparent and consistent regulatory processes; and regionalisation of SPS measures to develop solutions not only appropriate to global structures but also address local issues.

To ensure institutional capacity and coordination, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries by allocating adequate resources to support fisheries, plant health, and animal products regulation; improve inter-agency

cooperation through institutionalised coordination systems among the regulatory agencies to minimise duplication; and harmonisation of conformity assessment activities for regulatory process minimisation and improved efficiency in compliance verification.

To strengthen Uganda National Bureau of Standards, there will be a need for scaling up certification programs to support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in SPS compliance, strengthening the National Codex committee to increase Uganda's engagement in international food safety standard-setting and modernising food testing laboratories with modern equipment to increase food quality analysis.

To address the sector specific SPS compliance issues, especially for value chains that are significant for regional and international trade sector specific interventions will be required to enhance food safety and improve Uganda's competitiveness in international markets. Specifically for the fisheries sector, there is a need to strengthen risk analysis and regulatory controls for fish products and improve e-certification systems to support trade and compliance. For the animal resources, there is a need to develop monitoring schemes for chemical residues in animal commodities and implement livestock traceability systems and improve abattoir hygiene and operation standards. For crop inspection, there is a need to develop residue monitoring schemes to ensure food safety, improve laboratory facilities at the border points for improved surveillance and assess national pest and pesticide profiles to address emerging risks.

There is also need to build the capacity of public and private sectors by training regulatory authorities, food manufacturers, and exporters on SPS requirements; support MSMEs in meeting export standards for market access; foster Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for infrastructure and compliance and improve food safety monitoring in informal markets using risk based approaches. The stakeholders should harness technology for SPS management by utilising digital platforms for SPS notifications, such as the ePing SPS and TBT Platform, to provide real time

data and facilitate stakeholder coordination, modernising electronic certification systems to facilitate automated SPS compliance and facilitate international trade.

The above interventions should seek stakeholder engagements to strengthen the national SPS coordination forum to facilitate dialogue between regulatory agencies, private sector actors, and development partners; strengthen communication and data sharing for real time information exchange to improve regulatory compliance and decision making and enhance public awareness campaigns to educate stakeholders on the importance of SPS measures and how they help facilitate trade.

There is need to maximise regional and international trade opportunities by improving regional integration through the harmonisation of SPS measures; advancing trade facilitation support through negotiation with international organisations to acquire technical and financial assistance for SPS implementation and encouraging Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) at regional and bilateral levels to simplify compliance and reduce trade barriers.

Comparative Perspective: Ghana's SPS Readiness. Uganda is following in the footsteps of Ghana, albeit very slowly - Ghana has prioritised aligning its SPS systems with WTO and AfCFTA obligations. Ghana established the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) as a centralised agency to oversee food safety, animal health, and imports. It has implemented a traceability system for horticultural exports and invested in certified laboratories ([Ghana FDA, 2023](#)). To the contrary, Uganda's SPS responsibilities are split across multiple agencies, contributing to enforcement inefficiencies. Ghana's model may provide valuable lessons for Uganda in terms of institutional integration.

CONCLUSION

The workshop increased awareness of diverse SPS stakeholders in Uganda and enhanced understanding of international standards, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)/SPS Agreement, and

regulatory and standardisation best practices. It was a valuable chance to develop SPS capacity by addressing SPS implementation issues, thereby promoting the overall aim of building a safer and sustainable food system. By bringing different stakeholders together and providing them with the necessary knowledge and tools, the workshop provided a platform to analyse the existing state of the SPS management and control framework and determine the interventions needed to bring Uganda's food system in compliance with international SPS requirements.

Moving forward, it is important to identify resources and implement the critical interventions that were identified as key to achieving SPS compliance in Uganda. Although Uganda has made some progress, especially by establishing the enabling policies and institutional frameworks for SPS implementation and facilitating information sharing through operating the ePing platform. There are still major gaps exhibited by a lack of a comprehensive food law and consolidated food safety regulatory system, as well as weak coordination, cooperation and collaboration of the SPS regulatory stakeholders. By addressing the interventions identified by the stakeholders, the above gaps in SPS frameworks will be filled to enable the Country to participate effectively in trading under the AfCFTA.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this paper

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