



Establishing and Harmonizing Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Regulatory Regimes across the Eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) of the African Union (AU)

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ABSTRACT

Mississippi State University (MSU) with support from the United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA-FAS) collaborated with the African Union (AU), the eight AU regional economic communities (RECs), and eight AU member states to implement a Fellowship Exchange Program whose goal was to establish and harmonize Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) regulatory regimes across the eight AU-RECs. Sixteen AU and RECs officials and 11 SPS officials from AU member states were trained at MSU and other SPS institutions in the US to establish and harmonize SPS regulatory regimes in Africa. Following return of the fellows to their respective countries, MSU faculty who participated in the fellowship paid reciprocal visits to the fellows' institutions in Africa to support them in implementing research projects developed while in the US and explore sustainable collaborations. Also, several sensitization and training workshops were organized in Africa (specifically in The Gambia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia) to support capacity development for implementing SPS regulatory regimes. Additional outputs of the program included a grant to the Nigerian National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and two special issue publications by the East African Community Journal of Science and Technology and Innovation (EAJSTI) and the African Journal of Rural Development (AFJRD). Between the two journals twenty-one papers on SPS related topics were published on platforms that disseminate information widely in Africa. This AFJRD issue comprises of 13 papers grouped into an Introduction, Conclusion and six themes of 1) Perspectives on the SPS Policy Framework for Africa and the African Continental Free Trade Area 2) Food Safety 3) Plant Health 4) Animal Health 5) General SPS Policy/Management, and 6) Other Barriers to Trade and development in Africa.

Keywords: African Union; African Continental Free Trade Area, Regional Economic Communities; Fellowship; Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures; USDA-FAS

RÉSUMÉ

L'Université d'État du Mississippi (MSU), avec le soutien du Département de l'Agriculture des États-Unis, Service de l'Agriculture Étrangère (USDA-FAS), a collaboré avec l'Union Africaine (UA), les huit communautés économiques régionales (CER) de l'UA, et huit États membres de l'UA pour mettre en œuvre un programme d'échange de bourses visant à établir et à harmoniser les régimes réglementaires sanitaires et phytosanitaires (SPS) à travers les huit CER de l'UA. Seize fonctionnaires de l'UA et des CER ainsi que 11 fonctionnaires SPS des États membres de l'UA ont été formés à la MSU et dans d'autres institutions SPS aux États-Unis pour établir et harmoniser les régimes réglementaires SPS en Afrique. Après leur retour dans leurs pays respectifs, les professeurs de la MSU ayant participé au programme de bourses ont effectué des visites réciproques dans les institutions des boursiers en

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Afrique pour les soutenir dans la mise en œuvre des projets de recherche développés aux États-Unis et explorer des collaborations durables. De plus, plusieurs ateliers de sensibilisation et de formation ont été organisés en Afrique (notamment en Gambie, au Mozambique, au Nigéria, en Ouganda et en Zambie) pour soutenir le développement des capacités à mettre en œuvre les régimes réglementaires SPS. D'autres résultats du programme incluent une subvention à l'Agence Nationale de l'Alimentation et du Médicament du Nigéria (NAFDAC), ainsi que deux numéros spéciaux publiés par le Journal de la Communauté de l'Afrique de l'Est sur la Science, la Technologie et l'Innovation (EAJSTI) et le Journal Africain du Développement Rural (AFJRD). Ensemble, ces deux revues ont publié vingt et un articles sur des sujets liés aux SPS sur des plateformes qui diffusent largement l'information en Afrique. Ce numéro de l'AFJRD comprend 13 articles regroupés en une introduction, une conclusion et six thèmes : 1) Perspectives sur le cadre politique SPS pour l'Afrique et la Zone de Libre-Échange Continentale Africaine, 2) Sécurité alimentaire, 3) Santé des plantes, 4) Santé animale, 5) Politique/Gestion générale des SPS, et 6) Autres obstacles au commerce et au développement en Afrique.

Mots clés : Union Africaine ; Zone de Libre-Échange Continentale Africaine ; Communautés Économiques Régionales ; Bourse d'échange ; Mesures Sanitaires et Phytosanitaires ; USDA-FAS

INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) was developed and commissioned by member states through the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) on 10th June 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique (AU/NEPAD, 2003). The CAADP looked at the African Agriculture crisis then and provided a vision of African Agriculture to maximise contribution of Africa's largest economic sector in order to achieve self-reliant and productive Africa that can play its full part on the world stage (AUC, 2015). The ingredients of that vision among others are: to attain food security in terms of both availability and accessibility, improve production with particular attention given to small holder farmers, especially women; have dynamic agricultural markets between nations and regions; and integrate farmers into market economy, including better access to markets within Africa and for Africa to become a net exporter of agricultural products. (AU/NEPAD, 2003). Under section 1.9.4 of CAADP document, the vision was to be realised through partnerships at all levels including governments, private sector, civil society, farmer groups, large scale and small-scale farmers, and donors and other development partners.

The Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods of 27th June 2014 reviewed the progress of CAADP implementation and reaffirmed AU member states' commitment to CAADP including commitment to boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services, among others (AU, 2014). In the CAADP implementation strategy and action plan for 2025-2036 launched in January 2025 in Kampala, Uganda under Strategic Objective 1: Intensifying Sustainable Food Production, Agro-Industrialisation and Trade: the member states committed to stimulate growth, competitiveness, and sustainable agro-industrial enterprises, with focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs); integrate small holder farmers, women and youth into value chains and regional markets; enhance compliance with sustainable requirements; and strengthen market access and trade facilitation; among others (AU,2025).

On 21st March 2018, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was established to create a single market for goods and services, facilitated by movement of persons in order to deepen the economic integration of the African continent and in accordance with the Pan

African Vision of “An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa” enshrined in Agenda 2063 (AfCFTA, 2018). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was to create a liberalised market for goods and services through successive rounds of negotiations (AfCFTA, 2018). To ensure realisation of CAADP vision and facilitate trading of agricultural products under the AfCFTA, the African Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Policy Framework was developed by the African Union Commission in 2019 to enable implementation and harmonisation of SPS systems, which are critical to ensure any agriculture products traded protect human, animal and plant health and life (AU, 2019). The African SPS Policy framework covered Food safety, Animal health and Plant health measures which are critical to accelerated trade under the AfCFTA as they are key among major trading obstacles for trade in agriculture products (Magalhães, 2010; Humphrey, 2017; Babatunde, 2018; FAO/AUC, 2021; AU-IAPSC, 2022). Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) compliance is considered a key investment issue as there are associated expenses needed to facilitate agriculture trade (Nzomoi *et al*, 2019; World Bank, 2019; Heher and Steen bergen, 2020). It is estimated that 13% of prices of commodities exported by countries in Africa is attributed to SPS, rendering the products uncompetitive compared to those produced in other continents (FAO/AUC, IAPSC, 2021). Therefore, the SPS laws and regulations within the AU member states must be updated and meet the World Trade Organization (WTO) SPS Agreement provisions and be based on international standards that ensure the safe trade of agricultural products with minimal trade disruptions (AU, 2019).

The AU working with RECs, member states and other partners have developed the strategies for harmonising food safety, animal health and plant health in Africa with their respective implementation plans for guiding member states on actions for complying with the international best practices (AU-IBAR, 2021; FAO/AUC, IAPSC, 2021; AU, 2022).

It is therefore with this background that the Mississippi State University (MSU) with support from the United States Department for Agriculture through the Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA-FAS) partnered with the African Union Commission (AUC) to implement a fellowship Exchange Programme - Establishing and Harmonizing Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Regulatory Regimes Across the Eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) of the African Union (AU). The objectives of the fellowship program were to: create synergies among agricultural policy practitioners in the U.S. and AU-RECs, formulate a road map for the implementation of an Africa SPS policy framework, develop research and or implementation agendas for Fellows with assistance of MSU faculty mentors and experts on the African continent.

THE FELLOWSHIP EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Overall, the fellowship facilitated twenty-seven fellows from the AU (8), AU-RECs (8) and eleven (11) from eight AU member states namely Botswana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, The Gambia, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. The fellows were supported to travel to the US to be mentored in supporting and improving SPS management and control by the faculty at MSU and other US SPS institutions and agencies relevant to their work. The mentors were supported by Africa based experts to ensure that the fellowship was consistent with the local African contexts (Bagumire, 2025a; Bagumire 2025b). The program utilized keynote speeches, panel discussions, field and industry visits covering various SPS-related topics in food safety, animal health, and plant health. The fellows attended the World Food Prize conference in Des Moines, Iowa, and worked closely with USDA and MSU faculty researchers, academicians, and industry practitioners to build and streamline efforts within the AU-RECs toward adoption of a unified African sanitary and phytosanitary framework. At MSU, eleven fellows worked with faculty

mentors to develop research and development projects for implementation on return home. The MSU faculty conducted reciprocal visits to the fellows' institutions and countries in Africa in May to July 2024.

OUTCOMES OF THE FELLOWSHIP EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Following return of the fellows to the continent, they implemented individual research and development projects that were developed while in the US and contributed to the establishment and implementation of harmonization of SPS regulatory regimes to support trading under the AfCFTA. To facilitate information sharing and dissemination of the relevant information among the African SPS practitioners, the fellowship program through the AUC and relevant agencies in selected member states organized a continental and national SPS sensitization and dissemination workshop. The continental workshop was held in Gabarone, Botswana and a series of national workshops and other training events were conducted in Africa, specifically in The Gambia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia. Further to these workshops, the fellowship collaborated with the East African Journal of Science Technology and Innovation (EAJSTI, 2025) and the African Journal of Rural Development to publish two special issue journals with twenty-one articles produced by fellows, mentors, experts and researchers in Africa and elsewhere. The goal of the special issue journals was to publicize available data and relevant information that is vital to facilitate AUC, RECs, member states, farmers, agri-businesses and related service providers, development partners and other stakeholders in implementation of the African SPS Policy Framework to enable seamless trading under AfCFTA.

What the African Journal of Rural Development Special Issue contains

This special issue of the African Journal of Rural Development, Volume 10 Issue No3 contains thirteen articles that fall in six

categories in the following respective themes as indicated below:

Theme 1: Perspectives on the SPS Policy Framework for Africa and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA); covers three articles that provide insights to the framework for establishing and harmonizing SPS regulatory regimes as required to facilitate trade under the AfCFTA. The three papers include:

- Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) barriers for Agro-food trade under AfCFTA with case examples for EAC and SADC Regions. This paper uses available data and information for EAC and SADC to investigate the major non-compliances for food safety, animal health and plant health requirements in the agri-food value chains of commonly traded commodities that lead to cross-border trade restrictions or rejections in the regions. It broadens analysis to identify the specific weaknesses in the SPS system at national and regional level in Africa. These weaknesses undermine capacities of agri-food business operators to implement adequate SPS measures and sustain compliance, and responsible regulatory government agencies and other relevant stakeholders to guarantee the safety of agro-food products to the consumers and markets; which are conditions for effective trading under the AfCFTA. The paper is authored by Bagumire, A.
- Overcoming Sanitary and Phytosanitary barriers to Agro-food trade under African Continental Free Trade Area. This paper builds on the paper on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) barriers for Agro-food trade under AfCFTA with case examples for EAC and SADC Regions, mentioned above. It provides solutions for addressing the weaknesses in the SPS system so as to enable member states effectively trade under the rule-based AfCFTA. It is authored by Bagumire, A.

- Leveraging data to enhance Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Compliance in Kenya and Other Developing Countries. The paper discusses importance of appropriate SPS data and information in SPS managements and uses a case study of Kenya to propose ways on how data can be utilized to facilitate implementation of SPS measures and complying requirements for trade. It is authored by Gitau, K.G. and Omondi, G.P.

Theme II. Food Safety. The Issue contains two papers highlighting the food safety concerns for fresh vegetables sold in some markets in Kampala, Uganda and aflatoxin contamination of the maize processed by the hammer mills in some regions in Uganda. The two papers are:

- Vegetable Consumption Predictors in Three Markets, Kampala, Uganda by Tamale, A., Atuheire, C., Kasozi, K.I., Zirintunda, G., Kiguli, J., Sente, C. and Khaita, M.
- Post-harvest handling practices, moisture content and aflatoxin status in maize samples from selected hammer milling centers in Uganda by Muzoora, S., Lukanga, Nakavuma, J., Vuzi, P., Nandutu Masawi, A., Khaita, M.L. and Bailey, H.

Theme III. Plant Health. This theme also included one paper highlighting plant health with one proposing modalities for streamlining the controls for plant protection products and the other enhancing the controls for imported plants and plant products in Africa. They include:

- Towards harmonizing the registration and management of plant protection products in Africa, by Niassy, S., Bayendi Loudit, S., Gnonlonfin, B., Malecha, L., Munyua, L., Oronje, M., Shirley, K., Vanderberg, R., Chiatoh, M., Simiyu, S., Ndolo, D., Maiga, I., Ngaruiya, P., Moore, S., Akutse, K. and Bateman, M.

Theme IV. Animal Health. This theme has two papers, one focusing on control of fish health in aquaria and use of one health approach to managing animal diseases. The papers are:

- Bacteriophage action against Tilapia fish Aeromonas in Aquarium tanks in Uganda by Tamale, A., Labalpin, L. D., Ssenfuma, R., Walakira, J.W., Wamala, S.P., Kamya, D., Alafi, S., Lwesya, R.H., Nalweyiso, M., Mugasa, M.C., Mayanja, M., Ejobi, F. and Nakavuma, J.
- One Health Review of Carbapenem-Resistant Enterobacteriales in the Tropical East Africa to West Asia Belt by Ferdous, K., Khaita, M.L., Park, J.Y., Seo K.S. and Brookshire, C.

Theme V: General SPS Policy/Management. This theme contains two papers that highlights some of the steps being taken by some Africa countries to implement adequate SPS measures to establish and harmonize effective SPS regulatory regimes and enhance SPS capacity to tap into existing and potential markets. The paper is:

- Readiness of AU member States to address SPS requirements for trading under the AfCFTA: Lessons on Capacity Building, Sensitization and public policy initiatives in Uganda by Agonzibwa, C., Othieno, A., Okuyo, C. A. and Khaita, M.L.
- Incorporating beneficial nematodes-based Biocontrol Agents into an Integrated Pest management Strategy of Rwanda: A policy brief by Waithira, W. B., Kajuga, J.N., Hategekimana, A., Toepfer, S. and Taremwa, N.K.

Theme VI. Other Barriers to Trade and development in Africa. The last category of the papers covers cross-cutting issues of gender and indigenous knowledge which play a part in ensuring effective SPS regulatory regimes for enabling trade and integration of African market for agri-food commodities. They include:

- Evaluating Gender Responsiveness of the African Union sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) Policy Framework for Africa by Akinyi, O., Euzobia, B.M., Agonzibwa, C. and Khaita, M.
- Theory of Change for Tusome Model: Achieving Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Schools by Khaita, M. and Lumutenga, Auma Namubiru
- Indigenous Knowledge and the Excluded Public Sphere: A Communication Studies Perspective on Africa's Decolonization by Namubiru-Auma, R. H 1

CONCLUSION

The African Union (AU) Member States have significant opportunities to boost agricultural trade and benefit from regional integration, particularly under the AfCFTA. The USDA-FAS fellowship exchange program has played a catalytic role in enabling AU, REC and African Union member states officials gain understanding of the technical, scientific, social, political and economic issues underpinning the establishment and harmonization of SPS regulatory regimes in Africa, which has empowered them to play a role in facilitating trade under the AfCFTA. Considering that a lot of data and information that could be utilized in planning and implementing a harmonized SPS regime in Africa is available among different stakeholders, this special issue has provided a forum/platform for exchanging such data and information between active players in the integration of agri-food markets in Africa. The special issue has enabled researchers, academicians, member states, RECs and AU officials, and other players outside the continent to share information that is vital to planning and implementation of the SPS regulatory regime. It is expected to enable farmers, processors, and government to obtain critical information to enhance compliance so as to access better market opportunities provided through AfCFTA.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this paper.

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