

AID-FOR-TRADE: CASE STORY

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)

Strengthening the Official Sanitary System of Agricultural Goods for Export Markets in CARICOM Member States

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BACKGROUND

Caribbean countries face a double challenge in the important area of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures: i) modernization of their legislation and their regulatory system to ensure that domestic and imported products comply with health and safety requirements, and ii) strengthening of the systems supporting Caribbean exporters so they can meet the SPS regulations in export markets.

The Government of Chile offered, through the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS), to share with CARICOM countries its well known expertise in the management of SPS rules and best practices to support agricultural exports. Chile's high SPS standards have positioned the country as one of the largest exporters of fresh fruits. Chile has also developed a flourishing and competitive food and forestry industry. Horizontal cooperation provided a platform for the exchange of lessons learned in support of national and regional efforts in CARICOM countries aimed at strengthening institutional capacities in the SPS area

OBJECTIVE

To contribute to strengthening the technical capabilities of officials responsible for the design and management of SPS systems in CARICOM countries based on best practices and lessons learned in priority areas of these countries.

DESCRIPTION

The key activities are summarized under each of the expected results.

Outcome 1: Design of a Capacity Building Program Based on the Identification of Priority Needs for a Modern SPS System

The design of the training program and exchange of best practices was done with the participation of Chile's Agricultural and Livestock Service (SAG), the CARICOM Secretariat, the Secretariat of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and in consultation with officials of the SPS area in CARICOM countries.

The process began with a workshop on "Managing a Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) System: The Chilean Experience" held in St. Lucia on October 27-28, 2008. On the recommendation of the CARICOM and OECS Secretariats, the workshop was designed with two objectives: (i) to identify priority needs of the OECS countries in the SPS area as an input for the development of the training program, and (ii) to use the presence of experts from the Agricultural and Livestock Service of Chile to exchange experiences with colleagues in the OECS countries as a first step in the training program.

After consultations with all CARICOM countries, a Capacity Building Plan was developed. It included the following study tours to Chile:

- i. Study Tour I "Border Inspection Systems: Border inspections of agricultural products, techniques and protocols used." (January 19-23, 2009)
- ii. Study Tour II "Laboratory Systems: Operations, efficiencies in the system, and maintenance of equipment." (June 22-26, 2009)
- iii. Study Tour III "Procedures and systems for collaboration among the agencies involved in animal health, plant health and food safety." (November 30-December 4, 2009).

Outcome 2: Capacity Building Program Implemented in Consultation with Recipient Countries

Study Tour I "Border Inspection Systems: Border inspections of agricultural products, techniques and protocols used." (January 19-23, 2009)

The SAG prepared an intensive program of presentations and site visits. Officials of agencies responsible for SPS systems in six CARICOM countries (Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) participated in this first study visit. The interest in the issues covered in the study tour led one of the countries to cover the expenses of an additional staff member for this first study visit.

SAG officials and their CARICOM colleagues shared their experiences with systems, techniques and protocols of border SPS inspections that are critical to ensuring access to markets for Chilean exports. Visits to the following facilities took place: the Airport Arturo Merino Benitez, Pudahuel Commune, Zone Logistics Support Extension (ZEAL) of Valparaiso and Los Libertadores Border Complex.

Study Tour II "Laboratory Systems: Operations, efficiencies in the system, and maintenance of equipment." (June 22-26, 2009)

Taking into account the specific needs of each CARICOM country, the SAG organized visits to various laboratories where CARICOM officials had the opportunity to learn in detail about the equipment, the procedures and methods in each of their areas of greatest interest. For example, St. Lucia's visit focused on the Biotechnology Laboratory while the SPS expert from Grenada participated in the activities of the Agricultural Laboratory.

Study Tour III "Procedures and systems for collaboration among the agencies involved in animal health, plant health and food safety." (November 30-December 4, 2009)

Participants included officials from Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, and St. Lucia. The Dominican Republic expressed interest in sending an officer with responsibility for SPS issues with a view to learning from the Chilean experience. The Chilean authorities authorized the participation of the Dominican SPS official who had the opportunity to visit the laboratories along with his CARICOM colleagues.

The visit addressed the issue of inter-institutional management among entities responsible for the SPS regime of Chile with particular attention to methods of control of the Mediterranean fruit fly and the food safety area.

RESULTS

As a result of the program, the technical capacity of CARICOM officials responsible for SPS issues was strengthened by learning from the best practices developed by Chile, particularly with respect to its successful agricultural export policy. Beneficiary countries expressed their satisfaction with the way their Chilean colleagues shared their extensive experience on SPS issues. The Program allowed for a very useful exchange between SPS officials, with a view to continuing the exchange of experiences and lessons learned in the future.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Program demonstrated that horizontal cooperation between Latin American and CARICOM countries makes possible the exchange of acquired knowledge and the design of well-adapted and long-lasting technical assistance and capacity building. It also highlights that South-South cooperation constitutes an approach that favors stronger ownership and buy-in, while contributing to enhanced regional capacity.

The study tours were very effective in providing an opportunity for CARICOM officials to see on site facilities, operations and methods used in a country like Chile and consider the possibilities of adapting the Chilean experience to their own reality..

The program has showed the important role played by the OAS in facilitating the exchange of best practices between a donor and beneficiaries countries, while ensuring timely execution and compliance with agreed targets. Coordination among the OAS, CARICOM and the OECS was equally critical. The involvement of CARICOM and OECS officials responsible for SPS issues led to the preparation of a Capacity Building Plan very tailored to the needs of CARICOM countries. It also facilitated the consultation with governments to identify the officials who could benefit most from the study tours and training programs. Finally, this helped to coordinate efforts among international organizations, avoid duplication and ensure better use of available resources.

Status of the Program: Completed

For more information: <http://www.sedi.oas.org/DTTC/SPS/>