

AID-FOR-TRADE: CASE STORY

CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

The Establishment of the Caribbean Agricultural Health
and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) and a Regional SPS Regime



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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN AGRICULTURAL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY AGENCY (CAHFSA) AND A REGIONAL SPS REGIME



Title: The Establishment of the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) and a Regional SPS Regime.

Region: Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

Countries: All Member States and Associate Members of the Caribbean Community: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago; Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Type: **Approach/process/programme**

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Case Story: The Establishment of the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) and a Regional SPS Regime

Executive Summary:

The flow of agricultural goods within the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) is being stymied by the non operationalisation of the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA). The primary remit of the Agency is to assist CARICOM Member States to coordinate and strengthen their infrastructure, institutional and human resource capacity to effectively deliver agricultural goods which achieve the international agricultural health and food safety standards, measures and guidelines in order to safeguard human health and to prevent the introduction of or minimise the incidence of transmission of agricultural pests across national borders.

Investment opportunities in agriculture envisioned in the creation of CARICOM's regional economic integration process has not yet been fully realized. The major constraint faced in the establishment and operationalisation of CAHFSA is one of resource mobilisation and arises from the global financial crisis and the incidence of frequently recurring severe natural disasters in the Region. Another challenge which impeded progress of establishment is the attempt to bring the diverse scientific disciplines involved in SPS under one umbrella Agency both at the national and regional levels given that there are several Government Ministries and Agencies which play a role in the implementation, regulation and formulation of policy regarding SPS measures. Much progress, nonetheless, has been made including *inter-alia*: the entry into force of a legal agreement establishing CAHFSA and a legal agreement establishing the Headquarters for CAHFSA in Suriname.

Several studies have been undertaken to guide the functional scope and priority work of CAHFSA from which a strategic plan and work programme are being developed and will be delivered in the first quarter of 2011.

However, efforts to make CAHFSA operational have been faced with several challenges and constraints in terms of timeliness of decision making and resources for implementation. CARICOM resolves to operationalise CAHFSA despite the setbacks faced since agriculture is viewed as one of the key drivers of the CSME. CAHFSA must therefore be viewed as a public good in the Community.

Case Story Template

The Establishment of the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) and a Regional SPS Regime

1. Issues Addressed

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture (1995) obliges States to address the protection of human, animal and plant health through internationally recognized agricultural health and food safety practices and systems (as guided by the Codex Commission, World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) and International Plant Protection Commission (IPPC). The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas Establishing the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (2001) in addition obliges Member States to create an efficient and effective Sanitary and Phyto-sanitary Regime which can be applied by all Members and to harmonise their laws and administrative processes to effect such a Regime (Articles 57 and 74). It is expected that such a regime will boost agricultural trade flows within CARICOM and increase the opportunities for competitive international trade.

2. Objectives Pursued

The major objectives being pursued are to (a) facilitate the flow of intra-regional and international agricultural trade; (b) strengthen and develop agricultural health and food safety systems with respect to institutional, infrastructural, legislative and coordination programmes and projects at the national and regional levels; and (c) to safeguard against the threat of and manage the incidence of plant, animal and human health risks inherent in the conduct of trade.

3. (For projects and programmes: Design and Implementation)

Established by the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) is an Organ of the Community with responsibility for, *inter-alia*, the promotion of trade and economic development, and the establishment and promotion of measures to accelerate structural diversification of industrial and agricultural production on a sustainable and regionally integrated basis.

COTED (Agriculture) at its Seventeenth Meeting in June 2004 agreed to the establishment of an autonomous body - the *Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency* (CAHFSA) to create the necessary SPS regime as mandated by the Treaty, to assist Member States in strengthening and coordinating their own agricultural health and food safety systems, and enabling the necessary harmonised approach required for effective implementation. The CARICOM Secretariat was tasked with the execution of the COTED mandate.

The Agricultural Development Unit of the CARICOM Secretariat, in its Annual Work Programme strategized on execution. Intensive collaboration and resource mobilisation were required. The establishment and start up of CAHFSA entailed:

- (i) Conduct of a feasibility study to, *inter alia*, identify the general and specific needs of the Community, develop proposals for the organisational and operational structure of CAHFSA, the role and responsibility of CAHFSA and to address sustainability issues;
- (ii) Conduct of studies related to assessment of the status of SPS (general and specific) requirements in the Region as supporting the proposals in (a) above, taking into consideration international obligations;
- (iii) Arriving at consensus among Community Member States on the technical and administrative proposals in (a) above;
- (iv) Development of and arriving at consensus on a Legal framework based on (c) above;
- (v) Projecting the cost of establishment and achieving consensus on a budget and contributions of Member States;
- (vi) Developing and arriving at consensus on a Strategic Plan and Programme of Work of CAHFSA;
- (vii) Mobilising financial and technical resources for generating the operations and execution of the functions of CAHFSA.
- (viii) Recruitment of staff.

4. Problems Encountered

Conduct of the activities outlined in the preceding section depended primarily on mobilisation of resources for Meetings and consultations in Member States with stakeholders. It is to be noted that only a limited number of activities related to the conduct of studies was projectised and eventually received funding from partners such as the European Union and the WTO/Standards and Trade Development Fund (STDF). Funding for the feasibility study and some of the technical meetings and consultations was garnered over time from development partners such as the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Mobilisation of resources was therefore a key constraint to the accomplishment of the targeted outputs and continues to be the major obstacle in delivering a functional and resourced CAHFSA. Exacerbating this was the cognisance that SPS initiatives must occur concurrent with the establishment and operationalising of CAHFSA since the introduction of pests and diseases, food safety/human health issues and trade disputes are without regard to national or regional coffers and borders, time or severity of impact.

The CARICOM Secretariat therefore continued to initiate actions to ensure that when CAHFSA comes into operation there would be already some foundation laid with regard to the creation of networks for collaboration, policy development, drafting specific legislation, creation of protocols for facilitating agricultural trade and training of human resources to strengthen Member States capacity regarding SPS. Capacity constraints of the Agriculture Unit at the CARICOM Secretariat did not always allow favourable impact on the execution of the COTED mandate.

Other problems encountered were:

- (i) The lack of agreement on the scope of the Agency and the roles and responsibilities of the major stakeholders in the organisational framework of CAHFSA proved to be major hurdles. SPS issues are by nature multidisciplinary and the scope of each discipline is enormous. Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Environment and Organisations involved in technical barriers to trade all have a role and function in the coordination and execution of SPS measures. Hence, the issue of which entity becomes the focal or line Ministry managing the input into an Agency such as CAHFSA took some time to be resolved before the issues could be aired and debated towards conclusion.
- (ii) The development of and agreement on a legal framework depended on the agreement on the scope and function of CAHFSA. The drafting of the Legal Framework was undertaken by the CARICOM Secretariat.
- (iii) Delays in the allocation of donor resources often resulted in studies and reports after the agreed deadlines. Nonetheless, use of the reports and conclusions influenced subsequent decisions.
- (iv) The financial constraints of Member States remain the major impediment to the full realisation of an enabled CAHFSA. The global financial and economic crisis, the impact of hurricane Tomas on the Region and the horrific earthquake in Haiti further contributed to the delay in the operation of the Agency. CAHFSA requires approximately **US\$700,000** to become operational, inclusive of the engagement of technical experts.

5. **Factors for Success/Failure**

- ❖ Mobilisation of resources for start up of CAHFSA;
- ❖ Selection of appropriate human resource base;
- ❖ Sustainability of programmes and project output; and
- ❖ Member States implementation of the SPS regime.

6. Results Achieved

- (i) A feasibility study was completed; the organisational structure, budget and specific activities were outlined. The feasibility study was made possible by intensive collaboration among CARICOM Secretariat, FAO, IICA, and PAHO. Funding and technical assistance was provided primarily by these organisations. The CARICOM Secretariat conducted several consultations among CARICOM Member States and other stakeholders, which led to agreement on an acceptable framework and establishment cost for CAHFSA.
- (ii) With funds from the European Union an SPS assessment study was partially completed. Two other consultancies were also completed, one on Laboratory infrastructure assessment and the other on Food Safety Policy and Legislation for CARICOM Member States utilising funds from the 9th EDF under the Caribbean Integration Support Programme (CISP).
- (iii) With funds from the EU funded CISP, a Strategic Plan for CAHFSA is being developed along with a Programme of Work. SPS trade protocols for trade facilitation are also being developed. The Region's officials are in the process of developing several other specific protocols for import and export of intra-regional agricultural goods, all with a view to harmonisation of the technical and administrative procedures for agricultural trade.
- (iv) In collaboration with other regional and international organisations several training initiatives have been undertaken in specific disciplines in agricultural health and food safety, in an effort to increase/strengthen capacity and create a cadre of expertise which can be utilised in the SPS regime being sought. Agencies and Organisations such as the United States Department of Agriculture/Animal and Plant Health Inspections Service (USDA/APHIS), FAO and IICA, in close collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat have conducted training in specific pest surveillance, identification and diagnostics (e.g. in Lepidopteran, Hemipteran, fruit flies, red palm mites...and pest risk analyses) with more than 100 technicians being trained over the last five years. Collaboration between USDA/APHIS and the University of the West Indies (UWI) is expected to result in the introduction of a Plant Quarantine/border inspection training course for new and practicing officials.
- (v) These partner agencies together with the Center for International Research and Development (CIRAD) and PAHO have also supported training activities in animal health and surveillance for animal pest and diseases (such as Avian Influenza, Swine Fever, *Leptospirosis*, *Newcastle Disease...risk assessments etc*). The University of Florida has also assisted in setting up rudimentary plant distance diagnostic equipment and networking. The CARICOM Secretariat is currently collaborating with the USDA to engage in food safety activities in the Region.

- (vi) With funds from the CISP (9th EDF) some of the furniture and equipment required for establishment of CAHFSA are being purchased.

- (vii) The legal instrument '*Establishing the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency*' entered into force on 12 March, 2010 upon signature by the CARICOM Heads of Government. Additionally, based on collaborative work among the FAO, IICA, PAHO and the CARICOM Secretariat (CCS), draft model legislation governing plant and animal health and food safety are in the final stages for agreement and adoption by CARICOM Member States. However, supporting regulations have not progressed much and a lot still needs to be done in this area.

It is anticipated that with a Legal Agreement in place, a Headquarters building being prepared for occupancy in Suriname, a Strategic Plan, Work Programme and budget near completion that the Donor Community and international development partners will express interest in assisting the Caribbean Community with a final injection of funds to actualise CAHFSA. Some interest in providing only technical assistance has been expressed by agencies such as the FAO and IICA.

7. Conclusion (applicability to other programs)

The establishment of CAHFSA for the coordination of SPS measures and the strengthening of the agricultural health and food safety systems and infrastructure related to agricultural trade in CARICOM is critical to the Region's vision for achieving high levels of food security. Food and Nutrition Security is a national and regional focus of CARICOM. The work of CAHFSA will directly impact the safeguarding against harmful pest and diseases inimical to the economic well being of Member States of the Community, and increase the availability of reasonably priced safe food to consumers. In this context, the work of CAHFSA is critical to the current Project – CARICOM/CARIFORUM Food and Nutrition Security funded by the Government of Italy and implemented by the FAO. At each step along the value chain of 'farm to fork', the work of CAHFSA is critical.

The integral function of CAHFSA is one of the key elements of the programme for regional integration through the creation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). Agriculture is considered to be a key driver towards the success of industry and commercial opportunities through increased cross border activities in the context of economies of scale, input supplies, competitive advantage and specialisation. The success of the CSME is dependent on the creation of and ease of access to and utilisation of the investment opportunities of the CSME. Increased opportunities in agricultural trade for input suppliers, shippers and distributors, food suppliers, tourism stakeholders are impacted by the international and regional standards governing sanitary and phytosanitary measures. The work of CAHFSA in creating a transparent regime in this complicated area of SPS measures towards trade facilitation cannot be over-emphasised.

Annexes and/or References

1. Caribbean and Latin America SPS assessment IICA/WTO-STDF (Standards and Trade Development Facility).
 2. Caribbean Invasive Species Surveillance and Information Program (CISSIP).
 3. Caribbean Veterinary Epidemiologist/para epidemiologist Project IICA/USDA/CIRAD Programme.
 4. CARICOM Laboratory Infrastructure Assessment - CISP/CCS/2.2.2/SER. 07/08.
 5. Consultancy for Strengthening the Agricultural Food Safety Component of the Agriculture/Food Policy of CARICOM Member States, CISP/CCS/R1/2.2.1/SER 08/09/
 6. Consultancy for the Development of the CAHFSA Strategic Plan (Road Map), Medium Term Work Plan and SPS Protocols for Trade in Agricultural Products (CISP/CCS/1.2.2/Ser 10.11)
 7. Development and implementation of early warning, bio-surveillance, and pest information systems for hitchhiker pests. USDA/APHIS.
 8. Mitigating the threats of invasive Alien Species in the Insular Caribbean. (UNEP/GEF project). CABI implementation agency.
 9. Plant Health Scientific Exchange Programme (CCS/USDA/APHIS)
 10. Promoting CARICOM/CARIFORUM Food and Nutrition Security. FAO Trust Fund for Food Security and Food Safety. Government of Italy Contribution)GTFS/RLA/141/ITA.
 11. Protocols for Animal Risk Assessment (CCS/UWI/USDA/APHIS).
 12. Study for the Support for the Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific states (CARIFORUM) in implementation of commitments undertaken to be under the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Charter of the CARIFORUM-European Community Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) CISP/R2/3.3/02.
 13. The Twenty Second Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government (2001). *The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas Establishing the Caribbean Community including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy*. The Bahamas.
 14. Various Meetings of COTED - Summary of Conclusions 2004-2010.
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