



# African Union 2023 Year of Accelerated Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Learning Event to Promote Harmonized SPS Policies and Capacities in Africa



**March  
30-31  
2023**

**Kigali  
Rwanda**

# Concept Note

## Introduction

Africa is saddled with high rates of food-borne diseases and hazards which have arisen from various challenges that include the inability of countries to comply with sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the cost of complying with SPS measures is enormous and can inhibit market access to extra- and intra-African trade. More so, non-compliance results in high incidences of food and health hazards.

However, the continent has ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement which has provisions to foster the equivalence of SPS measures and the harmonization of African Union (AU) Member States' SPS measures with international standards, while ensuring international best practices. The AU's declaration of 2023 as the year for accelerated implementation of the AfCFTA is expected to enhance dialogue and collaboration, as well as mobilize solutions and support among state and non-state actors in order to accelerate the boosting of intra-African trade through trade liberalization, regulatory harmonization, and coordination.

In addition, an AU SPS Policy Framework was developed by the African Union Commission – Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment (AUC-DARBE) to ensure SPS measures are harmonized among the Member States with international norms based on national conditions. An important step to supporting these SPS agendas are continental and regional dialogues as well as the training of experts, Member States, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to enable knowledge sharing and the acquisition of technical capacity for effective SPS policy formulation and implementation on the continent. In support of the AU theme year of accelerated AfCFTA implementation, AKADMEMIYA2063 and Texas A&M University, in partnership with AUC-DARBE and with the support of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), will contribute to the achievement of this objective by organizing a two-day continental learning event to facilitate awareness raising and knowledge sharing on SPS issues, challenges, opportunities, lessons learned, and best practices that are germane to the strengthening of Africa's SPS systems. The event will take place on 30-31 March in Kigali, Rwanda following the AU SPS Coordination Forum.



## Learning Event Objectives

The learning event aims to promote dialogue in support of an accelerated implementation of the AfCFTA and contribute to addressing SPS-related challenges and SPS knowledge gaps in Africa by building the capacity of state and non-state actors, including policymakers and practitioners working on SPS issues.

Furthermore, it is expected that the learning event will help build technical capacities of AU Member States in SPS investment decisions and measuring and reporting progress on their implementation of SPS policies and initiatives.

The event will help to enable an efficient implementation of harmonized SPS policies that align with the AU SPS Policy Framework, the AU Food Safety Strategy for Africa, the Annex 7 of the AfCFTA agreement, and other related initiatives.

It will also help strengthen the implementation of existing SPS policies and SPS agendas of AU Member States and RECs as well as their enforcement capacities.

## Scope and Structure of Learning Event

The learning event will provide an opportunity to raise awareness on various AU SPS frameworks and strategies, including the AU SPS Policy Framework, the Food Safety Strategy, and the Plant Health Strategy for Africa. The event will also train individuals working on SPS issues at the country and regional levels on SPS tools and issues, such as the Prioritizing SPS Investments for Market Access (P-IMA) tool and share knowledge and best practices on (1) the AU SPS Index, its objectives, composition, and use; (2) harmonization and equivalence of SPS measures; and (3) regulatory cooperation within the context of the AfCFTA.

The learning event will take place over two days, with the first day focusing on raising awareness on the AU SPS agenda including the AU SPS Policy Framework, the Food Safety Strategy for Africa, and the Plant Health Strategy for Africa as well as their implementation plans. The first day will provide insights into the SPS regulatory cooperation in the context of the AfCFTA and will also delve into the technical aspects of harmonization and equivalence of SPS measures. Selected AU Member States will share their experiences on harmonization and equivalence of SPS measures and SPS authorities from other continents will also share their experiences in implementing SPS measures. In addition, the event will provide an opportunity to engage with the private sectors and civil society on their roles in improving SPS systems in Africa.

The second day will offer interactive technical sessions to train participants on using the Standards and Trade Development Facility's P-IMA tool to evaluate priority SPS investments, with participants having hands-on experience using the tool. In addition, the second day will provide insights into the AU SPS Index which focuses on food, plant, and animal health aspects of SPS systems and is essential for monitoring SPS systems in Africa at the country, regional and continental levels. It will also delve into the analysis of SPS investment needs, gaps, and priorities.

## Target Participants

The SPS learning event will target SPS experts, middle to high-level technical experts and decision-makers as well as non-technical SPS stakeholders. Non-technical participants will include those that are directly implementing SPS measures including representatives from the private sector, farmers' organizations, consumer and trade associations, and exporters. Furthermore, civil society will also be invited to participate given the powerful role they can play in helping to drive SPS investments and political commitment to SPS issues. The mix of these audiences is in line with the AU Food Safety Strategy which advocates for shared responsibilities and vibrant public-private partnerships in the implementation of Africa's SPS agenda.

## Expected Outcomes

This learning event is germane given that its planned activities will support the implementation and realization of the third objective of the AU SPS Policy Framework – “building technical capacity” and it is expected to help build technical capacities for efficient SPS systems in Africa. The training activities will support the AUC-DARBE in strengthening the technical capacities of Member States in formulating investment policies and making investments to enhance SPS systems in their respective countries to improve, food safety, plant and animal health while facilitating both regional and international trade in line with the objectives of Annex 7 of the AfCFTA agreement as training participants transmit the knowledge gained into action.