

## Public-Private Dialogues, 7 September 2017 Highlights

### 1. Public-Private Dialogue

Mr. Ramesh Subramain (Director General, Southeast Asia Department, ADB) highlighted the importance of the AMM-2 in light of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ADB, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GMS, and 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the GMS WGA.

Ms. Nicola Bonnefoy (Food Safety Manager, Food Industry Asia) delivered the opening remarks on behalf of the private sector. She thanked the Government of Cambodia for hosting the AMM-2 and the GMS WGA and ADB for initiating the dialogue between government and the private sector. She then introduced FIA as a trade association representing major food companies in the region with the mission of “promoting a climate for sustainable growth and serving as a regional knowledge hub for science-based advocacy”. Food safety is one of its 3 strategic pillars of FIA, the remaining 2 being health and nutrition and harmonization. Partnership is the foundation of its 3 pillars. She identified proposed initiatives by FIA members for scalable and sustainable capacity building in support of the SEAP strategy as follows: (i) traceability, (ii) laboratory capacity building, (iii) food safety risk communications, (iv) strengthen national legislation, and (v) supporting harmonization of food safety standards.

Mr. Patrik Jonasson (Director, Public Policy Asia-Pacific, GS1) explained that GSI is a neutral, non-profit, global organization that develops and maintains the most widely used supply chain standards system in the world. It manages the barcode standards used by retailers, manufacturers, and suppliers. Traceability is a low hanging fruit that can be explored as a public-private partnership project in the GMS through a pilot project on barcoding in select supply chains in relevant economies, including capacity building and training. Traceability is a key factor in strengthening value chains and in building trust in the value chain and product by ensuring regulatory compliance with industry requirements. GS1 believes that barcoding is a first step in the identification of products in the supply chain and allows data sharing throughout the supply chain. Barcoding is simple, scalable, and cost effective and could be linked to agriculture producers.

Dr. Paul Young (Senior Director, Government Affairs, Waters Corporation) highlighted the need for laboratories to carry out appropriate testing. The primary role of lab testing is to support food safety management systems to ensure that they effective and employed properly. He elaborated on the uses and benefits of lab testing (e.g., its role as a first line of defense in responding to a food safety crisis, certification, building trust on the safety of products and the overall system, consumer protection, and opens access to high value markets) from which the GMS can benefit from by developing lab capacity.

According to Dr. Young, the key to lab capacity building is sustainability and scalability. He cited their experience in lab capacity building in the People’s Republic of China and India by developing programs to train the trainors. He made a proposal to the WGA to pilot a lab capacity building program in the GMS. He also elaborated on other possible medium to longer term public-private partnership initiatives with the FIA, such as the harmonization of the GMS food safety standards with international standards using existing platforms and risk communications.

H.E. Mr. Veng Sakhon (Minister of Agriculture, Cambodia) highlighted the need for collaboration with the private sector in moving ahead with the implementation of the SEAP strategy. He responded positively to the proposed initiatives by FIA but also highlighted the need for details on the proposed capacity building arrangements. The first step in this process is to make an assessment of the capacity of member countries on barcoding and lab testing as well as the available infrastructure to carry out these initiatives. Cambodia requested ADB’s assistance in moving forward with the proposals.

H.E. Dr. Phouang Parisak Pravongviengkham (Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR) stated that he is very open to the offers proposed by FIA. He mentioned that efforts on traceability have been started in his country but that a standardized system has yet to come to fruition. Currently, the private sector is unable to export meat products to Viet Nam because of the lack of a barcode system. Lao PDR is also working on GI, where barcoding is also important.

He also stated his willingness to work with the private sector on a standardized system in agricultural products. He cited their initiatives with PRC on rice and the need for improved lab capacity to accelerate the provision of data requirements. He also stressed the importance of harmonizing standards and asked if the private sector can help speed up the process in this regard. Risk communications is another area where he showed interest.

Mr. Subramaniam lauded FIA's proposals and their work in PRC, India, and other countries. He pointed out that the GMS has made a lot of progress in physical infrastructure and transport connectivity but lags in the hardware-software nexus. To carry the proposals forward, Mr. Subramaniam recommended further discussions with GMS counterpart to see if these proposals can be started as pilot projects. This will require an assessment of gaps and tailoring the capacity building programs based on country needs. He also mentioned efforts by the Mekong Business Initiative to bring together government and the private sector over the past 3 years.

Cambodia and Lao PDR elaborated on their problem in accessing markets and the need for capacity building in barcoding and lab testing to meet international standards. Both cited the importance of this dialogue in moving forward with the SEAP Strategy.

## **2. Public-Private Roundtable**

Mr. Ng Kim Keat (Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, FIA) provided a brief introduction on FIA. FIA aims to become the trusted voice of the food industry and a trusted partner by both government and the private sector. He expressed FIA's interest in collaborating with the GMS WGA and ADB on future activities.

Mr. John Jeong (Investment Specialist, Private Sector Operations Department, Asian Development Bank) presented an overview of the SEAP Strategy as a common ground in promoting quality and safe food in the GMS. His presentation identified key areas, where public-private partnership are needed, and proposed several low hanging fruit to initiate public-private collaboration as follows: (i) traceability through the pilot of GS1 barcode-based systems for facilitating and monitoring cross-border trade and the establishment of Government-to-Government, B2G and G2B data sharing; (ii) strengthening national legislation/regulations through public-private dialogue; (iii) promoting harmonization of food safety standards that will enhance trade through public-private dialogue; (iv) establishing mechanisms for laboratory capacity building on leadership, management and technical aspects; (v) food safety risk communication through the development of the the AINS 2.0 platform's utility as a GMS food safety communication tool and knowledge repository; and (vi) work with MATCh to identify where technological solutions could help to address key food safety issues.

### **Panel Discussion**

The panel responded to the first set of questions on What capacity building initiatives need to be prioritized? What is the role of the public sector and the private sector and synergy of public-private partnerships?

Dr. Paul Young (Senior Director, Government Affairs, Waters Corporation) stressed the importance of lab capacity as a mechanism for delivering safe food. He elaborated on the benefits and uses of lab testing as a mechanism to verify and ensure that food safety systems are in place, effective, and being employed; and as a means to address a crisis. According to

Verification of the food safety systems is about building trust in the food safety systems that are being employed. Trust can only be built if there is confidence in the lab system. This implies that lab tests give the right results which are the basis for decision-making.

He cited their experience in PRC and India, where FIA supported a capacity building pilot project involving a few skilled scientists, who were trained on food safety standards in Maryland or Singapore through a training of trainers program. The program has been proven effective, sustainable, and scalable.

Dr. Young made a proposal to the GMS WGA on lab capacity building. This involves the identification of skilled scientist by the countries, who will then be brought to Singapore to teach them how to be trainers. This is a concrete action that can be rolled out before the end of 2017 (i.e., trainers are trained in 2017 and are supported in the delivery/rollout of training in their respective countries by 2018).

Mr. Patrik Jonasson (Director, Public Policy Asia-Pacific, GS1) stressed the need to build trust in the international supply chains in agri foods and the role of wider application of the barcoding system and supply standards in instilling trust and a food safety culture. He cited the case of New Zealand, where efforts are being exerted towards the creation of a food safety culture within the companies. In Malaysia, GS1 worked with the durian association on exporting durian to Chinese market using barcoding. As a result, consumers can check on product quality. Farmers also benefit since they are able to command a higher price for safe and quality produce. Within the GMS, GS1 has an MOU with 13 government agencies in Thailand and 11 local governments in the PRC on the use of the barcoding system for traceability.

Mr. Jonasson made a proposal to the GMS WGA to pilot a capacity building project on GS1 barcode-based systems involving domestic or cross border supply chains.

## **Government Response**

H.E. Mr. San Vanty (Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, WGA Coordinator, Cambodia) inquired on the time frame and number of trainees involved.

Dr. Young stated that his proposal on lab capacity building can be initiated by December 2017 and its roll out to countries by 2018. Dr. Young has already secured the facility for the training and have discussed with trainers in Maryland. Given the intensive nature of the training, he proposed starting the pilot with 2 scientists per country or a total of 12 for the GMS.

Mr. Jonasson stated the pilot project on barcoding can be started in November or December 2017 and can be carried out in the local language. One training batch involves 50–60 people and each training session has a duration of 2-3 days. Training is done in their office in Bangkok but they have the capacity and local offices to carry out the training in country except for Myanmar, where they do not have an office and where the Thai office is handing training.

H.E. San Vanty instructed the WGA Secretariat to coordinate and facilitate the process.

H.E. Dr. Phouang Parisak Pravongviengkham (Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR) stated that quality food production is not only about agriculture. Food safety that ensures long term development of quality food chain system that is competitive has to be dealt with at the interministerial level and should be reflected in the national agenda. Lao PDR's national interministerial committee is chaired by the Deputy Minister and includes representatives from industry and commerce (e.g., producers, financial institutions, etc.). He also stated that Lao PDR is developing a number of national programs that is focused on specific niche products (aroma rice; quality tea; coffee; organic fruits, vegetable, and cattle) to serve as a springboard for exports. He also stated that Lao PDR has been working on GI because of their focus on niche products over the last 10 years. He reiterated the need to harmonize food standards in the region through traceability and lab capacity building.

## Panel Discussion

The panel responded to the second set of questions on What investments will be required? What is the role of the public sector and the private sector and synergy of public-private partnerships?

Mr. Johanson mentioned investments in hardware and software, such as barcode readers, basic software that can be used with google chrome; plug and play.

Mr. Young stated that there is clear need for investment in facilities where people will be trained. However, in the case of the pilot program on lab testing capacity building, FIA can offer access to its lab in Singapore that can deliver the training to GMS participants and bring in trainers from the University of Maryland to conduct the training. Counterpart funding will be needed to bring in participants from the GMS who will be trained in lab testing. In the long-term, the establishment of a dedicated facility to deliver training may be considered to support the roll-out of the program, as in the case of India.

Mr. Yu Xiaodong (Deputy Director, Department of Supervision on Animal and Plant Quarantine, General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, People's Republic of China) inquired on who can ensure food safety for the product once the barcode is given?

According to Mr. Jonasson, traceability is a small part of the system and does not guarantee that food is processed in a safe and quality way. However, in the case of contaminated food for example, the traceability system makes it easier to track and withdraw contaminated food.

Mr. Jiangfeng Zhang (Director, Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Division, Southeast Asia Department, ADB) recognized the importance of traceability and infrastructure investment in delivering the SEAP Strategy. He inquired on priority infrastructure investments for safe and environment-friendly agrifood.

Mr. Ng stated that the private sector will invest in areas where there is resource opportunity. He reiterated the interest of the private sector want to contribute to the development of counties and support business interest in the national agenda.

Mr. Arrut Navaraj (Managing Director, Sampran Riverside) shared the experience of Sampran Riverside as a model that creates trust between organic farmers and consumers through PGS system. This is something that can be adopted throughout the GMS.

Mr. Young added that the value of the training of trainers program on lab capacity is on the network piece (i.e., trainers in each of the GMS are able to exchange information). He also suggested a possible public-private partnership initiative on strengthening national legislation by developing a cadre of food safety professionals in the GMS. This may be modelled after their project in India where Indian scientists earn their MS in Food Safety through distance learning. Another option is to bring a group from the GMS to undergo their MS in Food Safety in a university in Belfast.

Viet Nam shared their experience under a Canadian funded project that involved sharing of analysis from different laboratories. The Viet Nam representative raised the issue on the application of traceability in the GMS, which is characterized by small farms and the importance of cross-border in harmonizing standards.

H.E. Parisak shared that Thailand has been generous in sharing their lab resources with Lao PDR. He stressed the importance of South-South cooperation.

Mr. Stephen Passeri (Project Coordinator, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) stated that countries will need time in identifying the right candidate for the proposed

pilot projects. He also shared FAO experience in training through monthly coaching through skype, etc. without the need for training abroad.

R. Subramaniam identified the following 3 takeaway message from the Public-Private Dialogues:

- (i) Training will have value as long we identify for each country what is it that we want to look at, identify the critical needs, undertake gap analysis, and tailor the program based on the conditions and needs of the respective country. It would also be beneficial to focus on areas that within the purview of Ministry of Agriculture unless there is a national interministerial committee such as the case of Lao PDR.
- (ii) Traceability is an area that the GMS countries is interested in pursuing with the private sector, possibly on GI.
- (iii) Macro piece. There is value for the GMS WGA Secretariat to develop a paper prior to the Viet Nam Summit on food safety culture in the GMS (What food safety approaches have been adopted? What has been accomplished in food safety?)

H.E. Sakhon posed the question of how can we coordinate and promote food safety?