

AID-FOR-TRADE CASE STORY

INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE (IICA)

Strengthening the national agricultural health and food safety services via the application of IICA's *Performance, Vision and Strategy (PVS)* tool

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Date of submission:

Region: Latin America and Caribbean

Country:

Type: approach/process/project or program

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Summary

1. Issues addressed

The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures reaffirms the right of member countries to protect animal and human health, and demands that the countries base their sanitary measures on scientific principles.

Despite the importance of agriculture in their economies, many countries of the Americas do not have in place the policies and institutional programs they need to meet current challenges in the area of animal and plant health and food safety, and to comply fully with the guidelines established in the aforementioned agreement.

The IICA "*Performance, Vision and Strategy*" (PVS) tool helps countries to determine and improve the level of performance of their national agricultural health and food safety services (AHFS), and of national SPS measures coordination mechanisms, to create a common vision between the public and private sectors regarding that performance and how to improve it, as well as to establish priorities and facilitate strategic planning to achieve institutional objectives, tap opportunities in international trade, and protect the health of humans, animals and plants.

2. Objectives

- To assess the performance of national agricultural health, food safety services or systems and SPS coordination mechanisms services of the member states.
- To identify priority actions that must be taken to improve such performance.

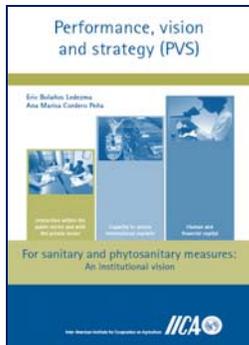
- To create a common vision between the public and private sectors.
- To set priorities for investing technical and financial resources on SPS issues.
- To facilitate strategic planning.
- To formulate investment projects aimed at the gradual and continual improvement of the national services.
- To compare the performance of the national AHFS services with those of other countries in the region and the world, for the purpose of identifying areas for cooperation and technical assistance.
- To determine the costs and benefits of investing in the national AHFS services, and to collaborate in securing technical and financial assistance from cooperation organizations.
- To serve as a first step in monitoring and following up on the relative performance of the national AHFS services over time.

3. Design and implementation

Development of the PVS tool began in 2002. The tool initially designed was intended to assess the animal and plant health and food safety services as a whole. This tool, entitled Common Vision, Evaluation and Action (CVEA) Tool, was applied in a pilot experience in Mexico and Central America in 2003-2004.

Drawing on this experience and considering how the official AHFS services operated at the time—and still operate today—the need to develop tools that could be used to characterize the performance of each service (plant health, animal health, and food safety) individually and from a broader and more strategic viewpoint was identified. Thus began the development of the *Performance, Vision and Strategy* (PVS) tool. IICA and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) worked together on the first PVS instrument, to be applied to national veterinary services. IICA created the tool and the OIE supported the process.

In 2005, with support from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the PVS for the national food safety services was developed (updated in 2008). The PVS for national plant health organizations was finalized in 2007.



At present, IICA has four PVS instruments:

- PVS for national plant protection organizations
- PVS for national food safety systems (prepared jointly with PAHO)
- PVS for sanitary and phytosanitary measures
- PVS for national veterinary services

The PVSs for national veterinary services and for national plant protection organizations have four fundamental components:

- Technical capacity
- Human and financial resources
- Interaction with the private sector
- Access to markets

The PVS for national food safety services has four fundamental components:

- Technical capacity
- Human and financial resources
- Interaction with the private sector
- Access to markets and protection of public health

The PVS for sanitary and phytosanitary measures has three fundamental components:

- Interaction among public-sector institutions and between them and the private sector
- Capability to promote access to international markets
- Human and financial resources

Each of the fundamental components of the PVS comprises four to eight critical competencies which have been classified by level of development, ranging from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 100%. These levels, considered together, provide an accurate assessment of the capabilities and sustainability of the AHFS services.

The PVS application begins with the gathering of information from stakeholders, who must grade the service's performance for each competency. The PVS can be applied PASSIVELY or ACTIVELY. When applied passively, the instrument is intended to raise awareness among political leaders, government officials, and representatives of the private sector regarding the components and competencies which are essential for the successful operation of the national AHFS services or SPS system. When applied actively, the public and private sectors actively assess the performance of the service's or system's fundamental components, based on the grading (in percent) given to each critical competency.

The value added derived from the PVS is obtained when—upon conclusion of the active application of the tool—representatives of public and private institutions and of all the sectors affected by AHFS: agriculture, tourism, health, trade and foreign relations, etc., come together to adopt a common vision. This common vision session is a meeting in which the results of the application are presented in graphic form; this is followed by an analysis of the reasons for a component or competency to show a low level of development and an identification of actions that need to be taken to improve the performance of the service in the future. This intersectoral dialogue not only validates the results, but is also an opportunity for the parties to assume commitments for action and to identify the leaders who will be responsible for ensuring that the process continues.

In addition, inasmuch as the PVS contrasts current levels of performance with the vision of the future, it is used to define priorities for investment (resources and time), to establish commitments between the parties, and to identify the leaders responsible for each action—thus ensuring that the process continues— and establishing specific deadlines.

4. Problems encountered

In 2000, IICA conducted an analysis of the general capacity of the national AHFS services of 31 developing countries of the Americas,¹ divided into three components: regulatory mechanisms, technical capacity, and institutional sustainability.

For purposes of the analysis, regulatory mechanisms referred to the legal framework of codes, laws, regulations and norms, as well the ability of national AHFS institutions to comply consistently with international norms and standards. Technical capacity referred to the level of development and to the operating capacity required to carry out key tasks such as surveillance

¹ Published by the Secretariat of the WTO/SPS Committee. Document **G/SPS/GEN/213**, November 7, 2000. *Technical cooperation: the status of the agricultural health systems in the Americas*. GENEVA-SWITZERLAND.

and quarantine, conduct diagnoses, and respond to emergencies. The component of institutional sustainability referred to the ability of the national AHFS organizations to move forward and improve over time as conditions and opportunities change. Examples of critical functions in the latter field include achieving relatively low levels of turnover of technical personnel, establishing the scientific independence of the institution to carry out risk analyses, and participating in the international standard-setting bodies.

For the 31 countries examined, the general level of development was placed at 40%. Also, there was a substantial difference in the level of development vis-à-vis the three components, especially as regards institutional sustainability.

Based on this information and as part of a process of innovation of its technical cooperation, IICA focused its efforts on the preparation of a tool that would help strengthen and modernize the national agricultural health and food safety (AHFS) services. The basic idea was that the tool should serve as a model for the member states to make adjustments in their national AHFS services and systems, as a means of successfully meeting the challenges of globalization. These experiences provided the basis for the preparation of the *Performance, Vision and Strategy* (PVS) tool.

5. Factors for success/failure

The experience gained as a result of the applications of the PVS in Mexico and Central America was fundamental in identifying the best ways IICA could collaborate with the countries in improving their official AHFS services. These included:

- The inadvisability of conducting evaluations of the official services, something that provided little value added. Representatives of the official services stated that various financial and technical cooperation organizations had conducted many such evaluations, which resulted in reports that offered little benefits.
- On many occasions, the above-mentioned reports indicated what actions the country should take, but without taking into account the realities of and the situation in the country or the opinions of government officials or representatives of the productive sector itself.
- The need to create—rather than an evaluation tool—a tool aimed at promoting the continual improvement of the official AHFS service, and dynamic, simple and easy-to-use so that officials in the service could apply it themselves periodically to monitor such improvement.

- The importance of involving representatives of the agricultural sector and the technical personnel of the official services.
- The importance of ensuring that the process promotes dialogue between the public and private sectors, and, accordingly, the adoption of a common vision, helping to chart, by consensus, the course for the AHFS services.
- IICA acts as a facilitator of the process. Actions for improvement are proposed by the representatives of the official services and its users.
- If the process is to be successful, leadership and responsibility must be assumed by the director of the official service.
- Because the PVS is flexible and simple, it can be applied to the AHFS service in general, to a particular sector or even to an agri-food chain, and can also be used to compare the level of development of the different sectors within a service or between services.

6. Results achieved

To date, all four PVS tools have been applied in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and Paraguay. The PVS for national food safety services has been applied in Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and some states in Brazil. The PVS for national plant protection organizations has been applied in Bahamas, Paraguay, Suriname, and Uruguay, whereas the PVS for veterinary services has been applied in Paraguay, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and some states of Brazil. The newest PVS on sanitary and phytosanitary measures, in turn, was applied in 2008-2009 in 26 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

In all cases, the results have been beneficial, not only because the countries have become aware of the need to modernize their services, but also because specific action plans have been designed to address the need. Some of these plans—such as those prepared in Jamaica, Costa Rica and Paraguay—included the preparation by IICA of project proposals for funding by international financial organizations or by the national government itself, based on the results of the PVS application, to modernize their AHFS services and to improve them gradually and continuously.

7. Lessons learned

- The PVS is a process of continual improvement of the official AHFS services and SPS systems, not an evaluation tool.
- The person responsible for applying the PVS must have a thorough knowledge of the country's AHFS and SPS services, be experienced in the management of groups and the application of strategic planning techniques, and be skilled at negotiating and reaching

agreements. Thus, it must be capable of promoting dialogue and discussion between the participants and understand clearly that his/her main role is that of facilitator.

- Leadership of the process must be assumed by the person in charge of the official service. In all cases, the application of the instrument and the process of improvement undertaken subsequently must be in response to a direct request from the interested country. IICA is a facilitator of the process, but the initiative must come from the government or from the official service.
- Private sector participation in the active application of the PVS is very important to achieve the proposed goals.
- The financial resources required to improve the performance of the service are important, but it must be clear that very often a large part of the needs identified can be addressed with economic resources that already exist or with contributions and technical support from the private sector or the different users.
- The results of the process can be used to work on the preparation of an investment project aimed at the continual improvement of the official AHFS services and SPS systems.

8. Conclusion (applicability to other programs)

The PVS is an instrument that determines the capabilities and sustainability of the AHFS and SPS services of countries. It determines their level of performance and facilitates the creation of a strategic plan for their continuous improvement based on a common vision shared by the public and private sectors.

The support the PVS provides in raising awareness about SPS and in the process of improving the AHFS institutions can play a strategic role in ensuring the competitiveness of the countries, preserving and maintaining their sanitary status, protecting public health, and allowing access to international markets.