



Economic Commission for Europe**Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards****Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards****Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce****Sixty-seventh session**

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Results of the impact assessment survey in Central Asia**Report - Impact Assessment Survey *****Submitted by the secretariat**

The following impact assessment report is submitted by the secretariat.

This document is submitted according to ECE/CTCS/2019/10 section IV, ECE/CTCS/2019/2 Decision 2019-8.6, and A/74/6 (Sect.20) and supplementary information.

Background

At its sixty-sixth session, held in Geneva on 24-26 June 2019, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce requested the secretariat to conduct, jointly with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Uzbekistan and the collaborating donor agencies (Hilfswerk International and GIZ), an impact assessment of their quality standards training work achieved in Central Asia in recent years. At this 2019 session, the Specialized Section highlighted that the outcome of the assessment of the impact achieved in the nut and dried fruit industry (as well as the fresh fruit and vegetable industry) could also be very important for governments.

In the months following the 2019 Specialized Section session, the representative from UNDP Uzbekistan provided a first draft for comments by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the other development partners, after which the survey questionnaire was finalized and sent to all beneficiaries (government agencies, standardization agencies and the private sector). The results of the survey were analysed by the UNECE secretariat and shared with all organizations involved with the aim to prepare a consolidated report for publication.

* Submitted on the above dates to include latest survey results.

Introduction

For the past five years, UNECE, UNDP, GIZ (German Development Agency) and Hilfswerk International (HWI) contributed through their capacity-building to Central Asia's transition to more sustainable production patterns and food supply chains for better quality products, increased incomes and new markets access. Particular focus was given to the most vulnerable – women in informal employment, young entrepreneurs and local communities. On the UNECE side, these activities were funded by two United Nations Development Account Funds (Tranches 9 and 11). While all agencies participating in the survey had reported significant changes as a result of the coordinated efforts, the joint agency impact assessment provided more than just survey results – it demonstrated important milestones reached and their impact on people's lives.

Results

The survey results highlighted significantly improved quality of the produce and greater competitiveness for small and medium enterprises (SME) as an immediate result of the inter-agency sponsored training and interventions. The following impact was recorded in the results of the survey:

- *Impact on knowledge:* more than 90% of respondents reported improved knowledge and capacities of public and private sectors of Central Asia to improve quality along the entire value chain and increased sustainability of agricultural production and trade. Moreover, it was emphasized that greater consideration of produce quality is now given to capacity building in government programs for industry and export promotion. Finally, it was suggested that an assessment of existing and upcoming needs be conducted with the goal to design targeted training for farmers in the remote areas, for example.
- *Impact on awareness:* for over 90% of the survey respondents, gained knowledge of quality standard, food safety and produce trainings was extensively used in their work after the inter-agency training program. For example, one respondent shared that knowledge gained at trainings was applied for holding his government agency's information campaigns in rural areas. Others shared that knowledge gained was used to prepare the Presentation on Food Standards for the information seminar on the occasion of the First World Food Safety Day, which was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and attended by high-level government officials. Furthermore, participants in the interagency training raised awareness and, themselves, trained further producers and exporters in their respective countries.
- *Impact on quality:* a majority of respondents reported their organizations' and companies' active contribution to the promotion of UNECE quality standards at the national and regional levels. Furthermore, participants trained producers, exporters, commodity specialists and farmers in their respective countries, focusing on enhanced food quality and safety. Moreover, they contributed to improving national quality standards and developed guidance posters demonstrating potential defects of agro-products. The quality of produce significantly improved, following also the installation of new equipment.
- *Impact on sales:* over 80% of participants reported significantly increased sales opportunities. More specifically, participants highlighted the more diversified destination markets and expanded export reach and the increased customers' network, including through the Central Asian Working Group. Increased export volume was observed as a consequence of improved product quality and larger export volumes both to European Union countries and the Russian Federation. Another participant shared about doubled production compared to the same period five years ago.
- *Impact on employment and women:* a large majority of participants stressed the greater employment opportunities created as well as increasing participation of women in the formal agriculture economy. The latter are otherwise likely to be either informally employed or dependent on their male household members' income.

Moreover, the business sector increased its cross-border networks in the entire Central Asian region. For the public sector, UNECE with its partners at country levels fostered the implementation and use of international standards, aided in the preparation of training material in national languages, helped multiply national and regional cooperation and supported the countries' export diversification destinations.

Insights

The survey highlighted that trainings conducted by the UNECE, UNDP, GIZ and HWI positively contributed to the development of sustainable food and food trade systems in Central Asia and created real, tangible and measurable impact. The newly established Central Asian Working Group jointly supported by agencies and consisting of stakeholders in the private and public sector proved very efficient in experience sharing and expanded networks. The impact assessment has also proved essential to understanding the areas where the interagency efforts of the past years made a real difference to the livelihoods and reforms in one of Central Asia's most important sectors – agriculture.

It also helped identify longer-term needs to pave the way ahead. One of the most efficient vehicles highlighted by nearly 80% of respondents was the aforementioned Central Asian Working Group, and its valuable role in building sustainable regional trade relations and indirectly contributing to peacebuilding and recovery efforts in the region.
