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Successes and Challenges of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

Executive Summary

Plants are essential for life. Healthy plants feed people and animals, contributing to food security for nations and communities; and any surplus can be traded to generate income.

Healthy plants are critical to achieving the core FAO objectives of food security, zero hunger and poverty alleviation.

The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) provides a framework to protect the world's plant resources from the harm caused by pests and diseases. As such, the IPPC is the leader in the global effort to promote and maintain plant health. Through the development of international standards and programs that enable their implementation, the IPPC creates a fairer trading system for all countries, whether they trade a little or a lot, and helps countries less able to protect themselves from the impacts of plant pests to produce food, protect valuable natural ecosystems and increase their ability to trade.

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I. Background

1. The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)¹ is an international plant health agreement, aiming at protecting global plant resources from pests by securing coordinated, effective action to prevent their introduction and spread. The IPPC, together with the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), are the international standard setting bodies (“Three Sisters”) recognized by WTO-SPS Agreement.
2. The IPPC operates as an Article XIV body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). With 183 Contracting Parties, it has the largest membership of all these bodies within the FAO, which attests to the importance placed on the Convention by FAO members.
3. The current IPPC Strategic Framework² reflects the IPPC contribution to food security, trade facilitation, environmental protection and capacity development. In April 2018, the 13th Session of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures³ (CPM-13) unanimously agreed that the work of the IPPC is critical to FAO’s work and highlighted that adequate food security is not possible without plant health and without plants there will be no life on earth.
4. Consequently, the 159th Session of the Council in June 2018 called on FAO to “adjust activities, where necessary, so that results could make greater contribution to the achievement of SDGs”. The Council also “emphasized the importance of international standard setting work such as the IPPC and stressed the need for sustainable funding for FAO’s work and activities relating to scientific advice for food safety”.
5. Plant pests are responsible for the loss of 40 percent of global food crops and trade losses exceeding \$220 billion in agricultural products annually. They leave millions without food to eat, and can negatively impact the livelihood, source of income of rural poor communities and national economies.
6. The global efforts of the IPPC to promote and protect plant health it is at the core of FAO’s mandate and fundamental work, contributing directly to achieving FAO’s Strategic Objectives 2 (Make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable) and Strategic Objective 4 (Enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems).
7. The IPPC also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015-2030, and particularly to the SDGs 1, 2, 8, 13, 15 and 17.⁴

II. Major Achievements

Standard setting

8. Developing international standards for plant health is a core activity for the IPPC. Harmonizing phytosanitary measures facilitates safe trade of plants and plant products. Applying internationally agreed standards, guidelines or recommendations diminishes or excludes the arbitrary or unjustified discrimination of trading partners because everyone will ultimately use the same measures. Over 100 IPPC standards have been adopted by the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM), including 41 International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs), 24 diagnostic protocols, and 31 phytosanitary treatments.

¹ Ref. IPPC text: <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/governance/convention-text/>

² Ref. Current IPPC Strategic Framework:

<https://www.ippc.int/static/media/files/mediakit/IPPCStrategicFramework-en.pdf>

³ Ref to CPM 2018 report: CPM-13 Report

⁴ Ref. IPPC contributions to UN SDGs: <https://www.ippc.int/en/news/the-contribution-of-the-ippc-to-achieving-un-sdgs-for-2030-agenda/>

9. These standards capture and apply the principles in the SPS Agreement that underpin fair and safe trade, including transparency, non-discrimination, harmonization, equivalence and technical justification of phytosanitary measures to the extent necessary to protect plant health and life.

10. These fundamental principles and the application of ISPMs have significantly facilitated market access and subsequent trade.

Yemen secured access for coffee products to the lucrative US market using an international treatment standard to meet US requirements for pest management; and, market access for fresh mangoes to Jordan and Lebanon through application of an international vapor heat treatment for economically damaging fruit flies.

Implementation Facilitation and Capacity Development

11. The IPPC supports the implementation of the ISPMs and capacity development of contracting parties. Directed by the IPPC Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) tool, projects in 114 countries between 1999 and 2016 have enhanced the ability of Contracting Parties to identify strengths and gaps in their national phytosanitary systems. Annual IPPC Regional Workshops have provided training and forums to identify and resolve issues impacting the effective management of plant pests. Since 2003, 2303 participants from 153 countries in seven regions have benefitted from 91 workshops.

Trade Facilitation

12. The IPPC is a natural partner in the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and is driving solutions to challenges to safe trade in the face of ongoing globalization.

13. The IPPC has successfully piloted and launched a system for the international electronic exchange of phytosanitary certificates (ePhyto) and will soon test a generic national system to generate electronic certificates. These systems will enable countries to exchange certificates quickly through a secure global hub, accurately, with multiple countries and at a low cost.

14. The implementation of ISPM-15 (Regulation of wood packaging material in international trade), has allowed wooden pallets to travel around the world with assurance that they are free from many significant timber pests. To date, the ISPM-15 symbol has been registered in 119 countries.

15. Sea containers move large volumes of internationally traded goods and personal effects, as well as posing a phytosanitary risk in their own right when contaminated with soil, snails and other invasive organisms. The IPPC is developing global guidance on managing pest risks associated with the international movement of sea containers.⁵

III. Increasing Challenges and Demands

16. A majority of countries depend on trading large quantities of plants and plant products, such as grain, fruit and vegetables or timber to sustain their economies. Yet trade can introduce and spread plant pests that threaten natural plant resources, managed crops, biodiversity and forest production. Facilitating safe trade in a way that prevents the spread of plant pests and avoids unjustifiable technical barriers is central to the objectives of the Convention.

The annual value to Mexico from exports of fresh avocados to the USA exceeds \$1 billion. From the initial application of pest free areas in 5,000 ha in 1997, to the subsequent establishment of a systems approach program in over 125,000 ha today, 23,000 owners of orchards (80 percent with

⁵ More on IPPC work related to sea containers: <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/capacity-development/sea-containers/>

average of 5ha) have overcome the poverty endured by generations. The development of phytosanitary measures to minimize the risk of international movement of three weevils and a moth, which were later adopted as international standards, is credited with removing an import barrier in place for 82 years and providing growers and packers with a decent living at home – significantly reducing the migratory flow to the US.

17. The increasing expectations from Contracting Parties that they benefit from greater participation in trade while safeguarding their own plant resources, has created unprecedented demand for the CPM to assist them. Contracting Parties want greater coordination by the IPPC Secretariat of capacity development and training relevant to the IPPC that will increase their ability to trade safely, in real terms. Resources are available that can assist, but accessing and using them requires coordination and facilitation resources in the IPPC Secretariat that are currently insufficient to meet demand.

18. To further facilitate safe trade, the IPPC has identified the need for commodity-specific standards. This new area of work would identify key risk pathways for a broad range of frequently traded commodities and a range of phytosanitary measures that can be used to mitigate these risks to facilitate safe trade. This will directly benefit developing countries that may currently face barriers in negotiating export requirements for their plant products and help them to identify import requirements that will protect their plant resources.

19. Many countries are pressing the IPPC to play a proactive role in detecting and facilitating responses to emerging plant pest threats. The rapid movement of the Fall Armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) within Africa and the detection of *Xylella fastidiosa* in Europe are just two examples of extremely damaging pests that have had a significant impact on food security and livelihoods. Others, including Red Palm Weevils (*Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*), Fusarium wilt of banana (*Fusarium oxysporum* sp), fruit flies (*Bactrocera* spp), wood borers (Emerald Ash Borer), Ug99 wheat stem rust, and tomato leaf miner (*Tuta absoluta*) illustrate the significant social, economic and environmental impact of pests on increasing scales that necessitate regional and/or global responses.

20. Climate change is an emerging challenge for plant health. Agriculture crops are impacted not only by changes in climate, but also by shifts in biotic factors such as plant pests. New pests can be introduced in a new ecosystem, with potentially disruptive impacts on agricultural productivity. The acceleration of climate changes is outstripping the ability of ecosystems to counter the impacts of changes in pest pressure.

IV. Funding Challenges

21. It is widely recognized that the benefits from harmonization are not achieved unless the IPPC, its recommendations, and standards are implemented. Increasing the capacity and capability of Contracting Parties to better manage phytosanitary risks and more fully participate in the Convention is driving a stronger balance between standards and implementation. Contracting Parties are demanding increased assistance to reap these benefits.

22. The Annual Budget of the IPPC Secretariat is approximately USD 6 million. It consists of a stable FAO Regular programme allotment of USD 2.95 million⁶, and a fluctuating amount of USD 3 million approximately of extra-budgetary funding.

23. The Convention does not allow for mandatory contributions, meaning that the IPPC remains dependent on generous, voluntary extra-budgetary contributions from Contracting Parties. Extra-

⁶ Please see: "The Director-General's Medium Term Plan 2018-21 and Programme of Work and Budget 2018-19": <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ms278e.pdf>

budgetary resources are largely provided by 10-15 donors from the 183 IPPC contracting parties and other external sources such as the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF).

24. The Secretariat is constantly seeking to ensure sustainable and sufficient funding to fulfill the Convention's strategic objectives. The extra-budgetary funding renders the standards implementation and capacity development activities challenging and there is an urgent need to enhance the stability of these resources to fund the activities of the IPPC.