

MSU Alliance for African Partnership - African Futures Mentor Application

Brief Research Proposal

Leslie D. Bourquin, Dept. of Food Science and Human Nutrition

MSU faculty (Bourquin, Thiagarajan) recently completed a research project for the Standards and Trade Development Facility of the World Trade Organization (WTO STDF) entitled *“Spillover Effects of Export-Oriented SPS Technical Assistance on the Domestic Food Safety Situation”* (STDF/PPG/535; <https://www.standardsfacility.org/PPG-535>). The objectives of this project were to identify and evaluate existing evidence for spillover effects, propose a conceptual framework that describes potential positive and negative spillover effects, and disseminate the findings of this work in a project summary document. The ultimate goal of this work was to draw key lessons to improve the framework, design, delivery and impact of future trade-related technical assistance programs. A secondary goal was to develop hypotheses that could be tested by research conducted to further characterize potential spillover effects of trade-related technical assistance programs on the domestic food safety situation.

A technical working group was convened to evaluate and refine the conceptual framework and provide guidance on future activities under the PPG. The primary outcomes achieved by the working group were 1) a refined definition for spillover effects as they relate to this project, 2) the development of an overall conceptual framework for spillover effects, 3) revised lists of potential positive and negative spillover effects, and 4) a list of hypothetical conditions that would be expected to increase the likelihood of spillover effects. The revised definition for spillover effects agreed by the working group is: ***“Side effects (both positive or negative) of trade-related SPS capacity building programs on the domestic food safety situation.”*** The working group identified a total of 18 potential positive spillover effects and five potential negative spillover effects. These effects were categorized and conditions were identified that would be expected to impact their likelihood.

The MSU team completed a second phase of research to validate the list of potential spillover effects agreed by the working group. This validation exercise consisted of 1) a review of published research and reports from trade-related SPS technical assistance projects in several economies, and 2) a series of interviews with key informants to gather feedback on the spillovers framework and identify evidence for spillover effects based on their experiences. This review identified anecdotal evidence for most of the positive spillover effects, but little information supporting the occurrence of negative spillovers.

At this time, I propose that focused research be developed to systematically assess spillover effects in a selected African economy. This research conceivably could be conducted in several countries that have received considerable recent investments in trade capacity development on food safety or other SPS issues. The research plan would be based on key informant interviews in a selected country to identify historical and current food safety/SPS investments and to systematically identify evidence for positive and/or negative spillover effects on domestic food safety. This research will help inform future donor investment strategies to improve food safety/SPS capacity in a manner that simultaneously maximizes domestic benefits.

This work will specifically address the AAP agrifood systems thematic area. In partnership with the MSU faculty mentor, the identified African scholar would identify the geography and value chain focus of the proposed research, develop the research approach (which would focus on survey research methods including key informant interviews), summarize the research findings, and write one or more manuscripts for publication. Ideally, this research project would support development of a research proposal to one or more donor organizations to further test hypotheses concerning conditions which are optimal for promoting positive spillover effects on domestic food safety outcomes.