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FOOD CONTROL SYSTEM ASSESSMENT TOOL INTRODUCTORY BOOKLET

Food control system assessment tool: introductory booklet

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1. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ASSESS A NATIONAL FOOD CONTROL SYSTEM?

DEFINITION OF FOOD CONTROL SYSTEM

“Food Control” means:

A mandatory regulatory activity of enforcement by national or local authorities to provide consumer protection and ensure that all food is safe, wholesome and fit for human consumption during production, handling, storage, processing and distribution; that it conforms to food safety and quality requirements; and is labelled honestly and accurately as prescribed by the law (FAO and WHO, 2003¹).

“Food Control system” means:

The integration of regulatory activities across all responsible competent authorities to achieve the key objectives of food control, including preventive and educational strategies that protect the whole food chain (FAO and WHO, 2003). The objective of a national food control system is to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade (CXG 82-2013).

The other technical terms and acronyms mentioned in the FAO/WHO Food Control System Assessment tool are defined in the “Introduction and Glossary” publication.

¹ FAO & WHO. 2003. *Guidelines for strengthening national food control systems. Assuring food safety and quality*. Rome, Italy. (also available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/y8705e/y8705e00.htm>)

CODEX TEXTS SPECIFY THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NATIONAL FOOD CONTROL SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

The tool is primarily based on Codex Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems (CXG 82-2013) as well as other relevant Codex guidelines for food control systems, which are referenced throughout the tool. Application of the tool can therefore help countries to implement Codex texts while taking into consideration their national contexts.

The following are extracted from Codex Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems.

- **THE EFFECTIVENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS OF THE NATIONAL FOOD CONTROL SYSTEM SHOULD BE REGULARLY ASSESSED** against the objective of the system, effectiveness of control programmes, as well as against legislative and other regulatory requirements.
- **CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT** should be established, clearly defined and documented, and may also include cost benefits and efficiency.
- The results of the evaluations, including the results of self-assessment and audits, should be considered in **FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS OF THE SYSTEM**, and corrective actions should be made as appropriate.

WHY DO WE NEED TO ASSESS NATIONAL FOOD CONTROL SYSTEM?

National food control systems play a pivotal role in protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade. Whatever the architecture of a national food control system, we must ensure that the system is effective in achieving its goals and that limited resources are targeting the right priorities. Measuring its performance allows us to know where we are, identify areas for improvement and target investments.

Keeping track of progress is also a clear signal of transparency and accountability. This is the foundation for trust, which is key to building stakeholder confidence domestically and internationally, opening new markets and improving safe trade.

The FAO/WHO Food Control System Assessment Tool supports governments planning for the future. It helps responsible government authorities to evaluate the adequacy of the resources and the relevance of their controls and surveillance systems. It also supports competent authorities to review their interactions with stakeholders such as food chain operators, consumers and trading partners. Finally, it reviews how decisions are being made in a spirit of continuous improvement.

In doing so, the tool brings together all stakeholders in a process that looks beyond individual parties and integrates contributions from all contributing authorities. This is the only tool to assess overall capacities of national food control system in a comprehensive way.



2. HOW IS THE FAO/WHO FOOD CONTROL SYSTEM ASSESSMENT TOOL STRUCTURED?

THERE ARE SEVERAL INSTRUMENTS TO ASSESS SPECIFIC PARTS OR FUNCTIONS OF NATIONAL SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY CAPACITIES

IHR JOINT EXTERNAL EVALUATION TOOL – (TECHNICAL AREA) FOOD SAFETY

All WHO Member States are required by the International Health Regulations (2005) to develop certain minimum core public health capacities. The Joint External Evaluation Tool (JEE) evaluates the capacities required under the IHR and contributes to the implementation of the regulations. It also contributes to building resilient health systems. A technical area on food safety in the tool consists of two major components:

1. surveillance system in place for the detection and monitoring of foodborne diseases and contamination;
2. mechanisms are established and functioning for the response and management of food safety emergencies.

OIE TOOL FOR PERFORMANCE OF VETERINARY SERVICES (PVS)

The OIE supports Member Countries to evaluate, plan and estimate costs for strengthening their national veterinary services through a cyclical process called Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) Pathway. The PVS Pathway activities are based on the basic methodology of the OIE PVS Tool. They form the basis for evaluating performance against the international standards published in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code. The PVS Tool describes 45 critical competencies of veterinary services, categorized into four fundamental components:

1. Human, Physical and Financial Resources;
2. Technical Authority and Capability;
3. Interaction with Stakeholders;
4. Access to Markets.

IPPC TOOL FOR PHYTOSANITARY CAPACITY EVALUATION (PCE)

The Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) is a type of evaluation that helps contracting parties identify and develop the best legislative, technical and administrative measures to help them meet their IPPC obligations. The PCE uses a modular online software system consisting of 13 modules that use a questionnaire to document the evaluation process.

IICA PERFORMANCE, VISION AND STRATEGY (PVS) FOR FOOD SAFETY SERVICES

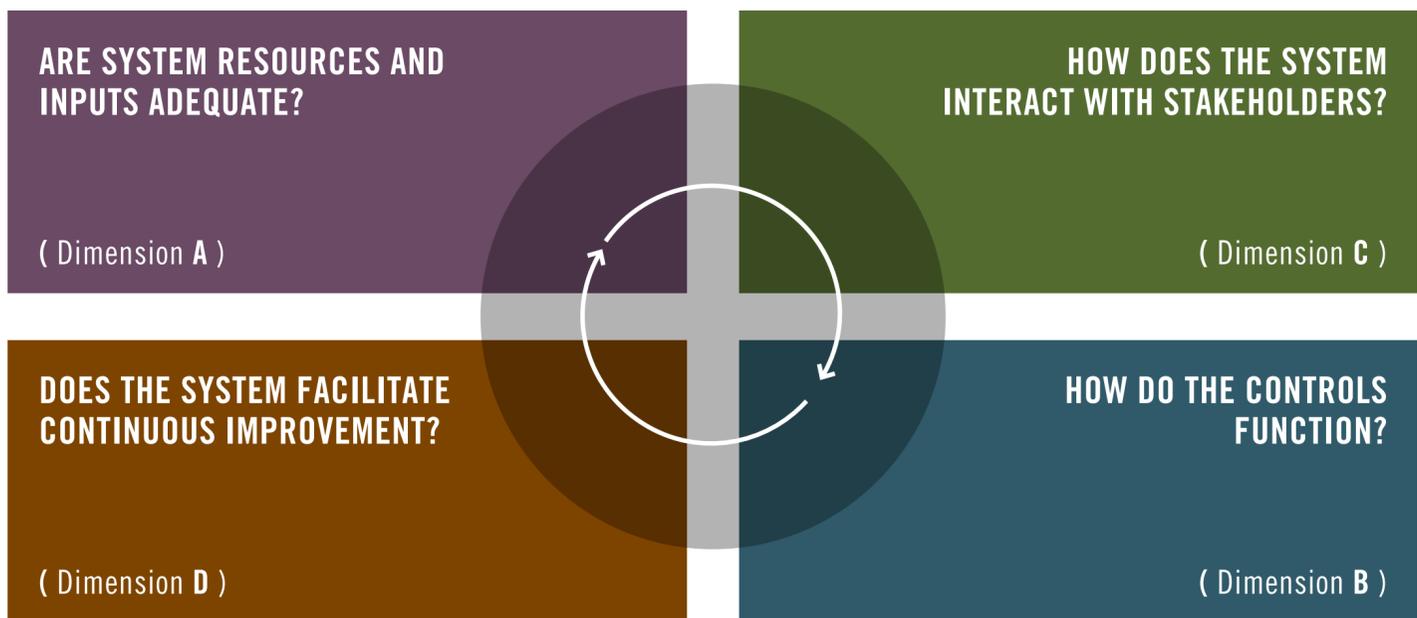
In 2008, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) joined forces to adapt the Performance, Vision and Strategy (PVS) instrument – which was originally developed by IICA for national veterinary services – for use by national food services comprising the national food safety system. This tool is comprised of

1. Technical Capability;
2. Human and Financial Capital;
3. Interaction with the Private Sector;
4. Safeguarding Public Health and Market Access.



THIS IS THE ONLY TOOL THAT FOCUSES ON FOOD CONTROL CAPACITIES, COVERING ALL ASPECTS OF A NATIONAL FOOD CONTROL SYSTEM IN A COMPREHENSIVE WAY

FIGURE 1: STRUCTURAL LOGIC OF FOOD CONTROL SYSTEMS



The primary focus of the assessment is the **Competent Authorities (CAs)** – how they work and what outcomes they are able to reach – as well as the enabling framework in which they work (for example, the policy and legal context). The information collected from the CAs is aggregated and analyzed at system level to provide a global and integrated picture of the food control system.

The tool aims to provide an approach to analyzing a national food control system not only for its “traditional” system dynamics (inputs, processes and outputs), but also for the interactions occurring within its processes and for its capacity to evolve and improve (see **FIGURE 1** left). Four central dimensions are at the basis of the tool, as follows:

These four dimensions are further divided into nine sub-dimensions, which consist of 25 specific system competencies, as presented in **FIGURE 2**.

FIGURE 2
STRUCTURE OF THE TOOL

DIMENSIONS	SUB-DIMENSIONS	SYSTEM COMPETENCIES
A INPUTS AND RESOURCES	A.1 POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS	A.1.1 Policy and legal drafting process
		A.1.2 Institutional framework
		A.1.3 Elements for food control legislation
	A.2 INFRASTRUCTURE AND FINANCE	A.2.1 Financial resources
		A.2.2 Infrastructure and equipment
		A.2.3 Analytical resources
	A.3 HUMAN RESOURCES	A.3.1 Qualification of personnel
		A.3.2 Capacity development of personnel
		A.3.3 Staff management and staff motivation
B CONTROL FUNCTIONS	B.1 ROUTINE CONTROL ACTIVITIES OVER FOOD PRODUCTS	B.1.1 Domestic controls
		B.1.2 Import controls
		B.1.3 Export controls
	B.2 MONITORING, SURVEILLANCE AND RESPONSE FUNCTIONS	B.2.1 Monitoring programmes in relation to the food chain
		B.2.2 Food-borne disease surveillance
		B.2.3 Management of food safety emergencies
C INTERACTIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS	C.1 DOMESTIC STAKEHOLDERS	C.1.1 Relationships between CAs and private sector regarding training needs
		C.1.2 Information flows and integration of Food Businesses Operators (FBOs) into risk management
		C.1.3 Communication flows and involvement with consumers

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