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**REPORT ON THE CARIBBEAN FOOD SAFETY INITIATIVE:  
MODERNIZATION OF THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD  
SAFETY, ANIMAL HEALTH AND PLANT HEALTH**

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## **Introduction**

1. In 1999, the United States for International development (USAID) provided support to the Caribbean Food Safety Initiative, in partnership with the CARICOM Secretariat; the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition and the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, both at the University of Florida; the Plant Quarantine Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Jamaica; and the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization. Under this initiative a thorough assessment of the food safety systems as it relates to human, animal and plant health was conducted. The study was then used to developing strategic plans for each CARICOM Member State and the Caribbean Subregions. The final report was presented and discussed in a meeting of all stakeholders held Saint Lucia, March 2000 and aimed to provide guidance to decision makers on the investments needed at country and sub regional levels.

2. In October 2002, the Caribbean Food Safety Initiative was strengthened through a project on “Modernization of the Legislative Framework for Food Safety, Animal Health and Quarantine and Plant Health” that was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) designed and coordinated this project through the Office of Caribbean Program Coordination. It was executed as far as possible, in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), the OECS Secretariat and the CARICOM Secretariat.

3. The aim of the project was primarily to assist benefactors in Barbados and the Organization for the Eastern Caribbean States countries (OECS countries) comprising of government authorities, the private sector and members of the food industry, to strengthen their national food safety systems within the confines of a modernized food legislative framework. For several decades, Caribbean Governments had enunciated their concerns for food safety at the national and sub-regional levels. Moreover, within recent times, there have been increasing issues related to food safety and food security. Former technical and scientific assessments carried out with funding by the USAID in 1999, revealed that there was an urgent need to harmonize disparate national and regional legislation on agricultural health and food safety. Within recent times, various agencies have become involved in providing assistance in selected areas of Agricultural Health and Food Safety in the Caribbean, and Caribbean governments continue to seek ways to promote or establish policies and strategies to guide their regional governments in health related matters. The project therefore, sought to fill the legislative gaps in agricultural health and food safety, taking into account the many concerns for the establishment of a Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). It also provided support to Member States to help them resolve issues related to enhanced trade and economic competitiveness.

4. PAHO/WHO recognized that the support of USAID was consistent with the provisions of Article 9 of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, and was thus pleased to collaborate with USAID to strengthen its efforts to provide technical assistance to Barbados and the OECS countries in order to enable those countries to develop their legislative infrastructure through the establishment of national regulatory activities.

### **Outputs of Project**

5. The outputs of the USAID-funded project on the Modernization of the Legislative Framework for Food Safety, Animal Health and Plant Health that ended on February 28, 2005, are expected to prove invaluable to Caribbean governments and the private sector, as they seek to continue to establish mechanisms for ensuring greater confidence in the production, marketing, and sale of safe foods for which appropriate controls have been elaborated through the project, and to prevent, reduce, or minimize the risks associated with the production, preparation and consumption of such foods along the farm to table continuum.

6. The activities of the project were thus geared towards establishing an enabling environment for agricultural health and food safety, using the modernized legislative framework as the instrument for capacity building and for the protection of foods from biological, chemical and physical hazards and their attending risks. Specifically, the new or revised laws regarding food safety, animal health, plant health and pesticides and toxic chemicals would assist in building the national capacity to meet the World Trade Organization/Sanitary and Phytosanitary (WTO/SPS) measure. But they would also create a measure of confidence in food safety issues, so that as sovereign states, the countries would not adopt measures of protectionism and establish trade barriers to regional and international trade.

7. The major outputs of the project have thus revolved around a legislative framework that embodies the following revised and modernized legislation:

- Food Safety Act
- Food Safety Regulations
  - Food Safety (Food-handling Establishments and Caterers) Regulations
  - Food Safety (Food Production and Processing) Regulations
  - Food Safety (Food Inspections) Regulations
  - Food Safety (Sampling) Regulations
  - Food Safety (Street Vending) Regulations
- Animal (National and International Movement and Disease Prevention) Act
  - Biological Residues (Control) Regulations
  - Animals (Quarantine Inspection and Certification Fees) Regulations
  - Anthrax Regulations

- Foot and Mouth Disease Regulations
- Slaughterhouse (Hygienic Practices) Regulations
- Meat (Post Mortem) (Boneless Meat) Inspection Regulations
- Meat (Post Mortem) Inspection Regulations
- Poultry Disease Regulations
- Cottage Poultry Processors (Food Safety) Regulations
- Swine fever regulations
- Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) Regulations
- Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Act
- Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Regulations
- Environmental Health Services Act
- Plant Health Act

### **Scope of Work**

8. Building on the previous assessment, also conducted with the help of USAID, the USAID/PAHO project had set out to ensure that in accordance with the terms of reference, Barbados and the OECS countries were provided assistance for modernizing their legislative framework, taking also into consideration the numerous weaknesses of those countries in:

- Knowledge and surveillance of diseases, including zoonoses, food-borne diseases and animal diseases;
- Laboratory capacity to support the identification of disease agents;
- Database on imported and exported animal products;
- Standardized food safety training programs and systems;
- Food safety outreach programs for consumers;
- Animal disease emergency preparedness plans;
- Regulatory enforcement; and
- Port Health and Quarantine.

9. International, regional, and national legal consultants were contracted with the appropriate experience and training to carry out the principal project activities. All contractors worked under the supervision of the PAHO/WHO Project Manager and collaborated closely with the principal National Authorities and representatives of the public and private sector. They reviewed existing laws, identified deficiencies and gaps in the legislation, and in consultation with national authorities and other stakeholders, developed a full understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of systems with respect to their legal domain, capturing any recommendations that would lead to effective, sustainable changes.

10. In working with nationals, the consultants were able to ensure that the legal provisions were updated, taking into account regulatory provisions as enunciated by the

World Trade Organization/Sanitary and Phytosanitary (WTO/SPS) agreement and measures, as well as national constraints that affected the harmonization of the farm to table concept at the respective national levels.

### **Methodology**

11. Several country visits were made by the consultants, and matters arising out of the discussions, consultations and meetings, were incorporated into the drafting/redrafting of the various Acts and Regulations. At national consultations, policy guidelines were evaluated so that the tasks that were carried out afterwards ensured the appropriate design and implementation of a modernized framework. The results were incorporated into the legal provisions, and all laws were rewritten as necessary and new Acts and supporting Regulations prepared with the provisions compatible with one or several of the international codes – CODEX Alimentarius, the Office of International Development (OIE) Code and measures elaborated by the International Plant Protection Commission (IPPC). There was value-added support in this new legislative framework, since for the first time in the legislation of many of these countries, provisions were clearly made for relevant Competent Authorities, to effectively and efficiently implement the control measures necessary for providing assurance of the safe food chain. As far as possible and in accordance with the terms of the USAID grant, training activities and workshops were conducted. These were designed to ensure that the key stakeholders developed the necessary skills and knowledge to support the sustained efforts of the project as well as to ensure that the new legislative mechanisms were understood and enforced.

### **Results**

12. The assistance provided to the CARICOM Member States through this project, has undoubtedly provided help in the restructuring of the individual country-specific agricultural health and food safety programmes. Furthermore, the project activities have made significant contribution to the building of capacity for human resource development to assist trade liberalization and institutionalization of trade-related matters.

13. Ministries of Health and Agriculture, and by extension, Bureaus of Standards, Ministry of Trade and Tourism in Barbados and the OECS countries, have been provided with tools and some key prerequisites to meet the demands of agricultural and health determinants that impact on human health and well being, sociocultural concepts, food quality, food safety and food security.

14. Despite the many constraints with regard to time and changes in the work program, visits were successfully carried out. Challenges linked to the delineation of responsibilities among national authorities, and the roles of personnel from inter-Ministerial bodies, did not unduly hinder the final outcome of the project. At the same

time, since there were several concurrent activities, some related to SPS that were being undertaken by other national, regional, and international bodies/agencies. PAHO/WHO availed itself of every opportunity to partner with those agencies (National Governments, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the CARICOM Secretariat) to enhance the effective outcome of the project deliverables. This partnership proved valuable in assisting the Member States and particularly governments. For example, it provided an opportunity for PAHO/WHO to communicate and plan with the Council of Trade and Economic Development (COTED) of CARICOM, in establishing an effective mechanism for coordinating matters of agricultural health and food safety through a regional Single Agency. With regard to this latter Agency, the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA), project support was given through an alliance between PAHO/WHO, IICA, FAO and the CARICOM Secretariat. Invaluable assistance was provided because CAHFSA is expected to be the principal regional machinery for ensuring that legislative concerns among other matters related to agricultural health and food safety, are dealt with adequately and in a timely manner. A major benefit of the alliance just mentioned was the assistance given to the Ministers of Agriculture and Trade for the placement of CAHFSA into an existing regional institution. The Caribbean Agricultural Research Development Institute (CARDI) was eventually selected as the institution to host CAHFSA. As a follow up to that, COTED mandated the CARICOM Secretariat to prepare the relevant legal framework for the establishment of CAHFSA within CARDI. This has been a significant achievement, and it is expected that through CAHFSA, the legislative framework for all CARICOM States would be kept current and harmonized with international standards.

### **Agricultural Health and Food Safety Systems**

15. The project activities have made significant contributions to the overall Caribbean Food Safety Initiative and the expansion of the capacity of the selected CARICOM states for international trade and economic competitiveness. The way has been better paved for Caribbean governments to attain desired goals that depend partly upon the national ability to regulate Food Safety Systems and Infrastructure, Agricultural Production and Trade systems and Food Service Inspection and Educational systems; as well as strengthened Laboratory Infrastructure, Disease Surveillance Capacity at the national and sub-regional levels, Food-borne Disease Outbreak Investigations, Organizational Programs for consumer Education, and Risk Analysis Systems.

16. In so doing, countries have been provided with an enhanced capacity to better monitor farm production practices; develop trace-back mechanisms for tracing food products implicated in disease outbreaks due to farm practices; and detect and eliminate possible sources of disease-causing organisms (*Salmonella*, *E. Coli* 0157:H7, tuberculosis, brucellosis, leptospirosis and others). Additionally, governments are better

able to provide greater assurance for the safe processing, distribution, and use of foods. The achievements can facilitate the development of instruments that can influence better farmer and consumer education, as well as support improvements in the safe handling, storage and preparation of foods at different establishments. For instance, in several ways, the experience to be gained from this new legislative framework, would serve well for educating the public on the risks associated with eating certain foods, whether raw or undercooked, contaminated or improperly stored. Ultimately, the information and knowledge gained could be used to strategize on programs that target consumers, farm producers, grocers, restaurants, hoteliers, food service workers and health institutions, among others. Therefore from the perspective of PAHO/WHO, this project would also serve to enable the CARICOM Member States to not only build their national capacity in agricultural health and food safety, but also to enhance their capability to strengthen their approaches for reducing morbidity and perhaps to a lesser extent mortality in the area of food protection.

### **Specific Achievements**

17. Inherent during the execution of the project activities, was the overall concern for the increasing incidence of Food Borne Diseases (FBDs). Such diseases were well known to cause the impact on tourism and trade leading to economic burdens and human suffering. This was significant since all the countries that received support from the project, were particularly vulnerable to socio-economic decline in the areas of tourism and trade. Furthermore, food issues are often affected by Animal and Plant Health issues and to a lesser extent, Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals. Therefore, the establishment of updated legislation in all these areas will be of great benefit to the countries that were supported in this modernization of the legislative framework.

### **Food Safety Act**

18. A new Food Safety Bill that has been prepared respectively for Barbados and the OECS countries, and it provides for the safety of foods produced, packaged and imported into, or exported from, the respective country. The provisions therein are aimed at ensuring integrity and safety of foods, and the protection of humans from the consumption of unsafe foods and the effects of biological, chemical or physical hazards. Moves have also been made to allow for more effective regulation of the production, processing, manufacturing, preparation, handling and sale of food at food establishment (inclusive of street vending operation), and taking into consideration whether food is distributed as prizes, rewards, or for advertising and overall retailing and trade.

19. His legislation makes provision for administrative arrangements, and for the establishment of a National Food Authority to administer and enforce the Act and its Regulations. The Food Authority is charged with the duties of coordinating and

integrating the food safety system. Additionally, it would provide support for the maintenance of a national program that would continue to be harmonized with regional and international food safety standards, and respond to appropriate WTO/SPS requirements in the interest of the state. In the Act, immediate advice would be given to the Minister charged with the responsibility for the Act and support provided to the Food Authority by a National Food Safety Committee.

20. The Act and its Regulations in this new framework, empower the Competent Authority and the Inspectors to carry out the full discharge of their duties related to food manufacturing, processing, preparation, distribution; and to the identification of hazards, the assessment of risks, sampling, testing and evaluation of foods, and seizure, detention and confiscation of suspected foods, and overall control and inspection of foods for human consumption. The Act also takes into account matters related to the registration and licensing of food businesses in a two-fold way. It provides for suitable regulatory enforcement, and makes allowances for the industry to become engaged through improvement notices, so designed as to allow for remedial action for non-compliance. Recognizing the scarcity in human resources in the respective Member States, the Act deliberately leaves room for the Minister to appoint Food Inspectors from a wide range of competent, well-trained national professionals that are duly qualified to conduct the functions of the Food Inspector. The Food Inspector has been given powers to enter and inspect and make decisions in the interest of public health on all matters related to food safety. However, the Food Inspector is prohibited from entering and searching food premises with respect to activities regulated under the Animals (National and International Movement and Prescribed Diseases Prevention) Act and other Acts that regulate clearly defined and specified areas of agricultural health and food safety.

#### **Animals (National and International Movement and Disease Prevention) Act**

21. The Animals (National and International Movement and Disease Prevention) Act and its eleven Regulations have been developed to allow the Member States to have a more effective regulatory framework for Animal Health programs, while taking into consideration several Food Safety issues previously mentioned in the comments on the Food Act and its Regulations. The Regulations that were developed through the project sought to address key issues enshrined in the WTO/SPS Agreement with specific concerns for matters related to the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) Code.

22. The provisions of this legislation aimed at enabling the examination and inspection of animals in order to detect and eliminate sick animals prior to slaughter or through post-mortem inspection to avoid unfit meat and meat production from being consumed by humans. The schedules to the Regulations specify which diseases are of national importance in this regard, detailing whether such animals are to be condemned or declared suspect. Additionally, the Regulations make provisions for cost recovery

through specified fees and certificates. The Regulations also provide for sampling of animal and animal products and for identification of biological residues and other hazards. In general, however, there are legal obligations placed on veterinary surgeons, the police, farmers and occupiers of premises where animals or animal diseases have been identified, to deal with any infected animal or place. Poultry and poultry diseases are regulated by this Act.

23. The above are only a selected number of the many provisions of the Act and its Regulations, since the new legislation has introduced fundamental changes from the former Animal Health legislation. The Veterinary Competent Authority is clearly defined in the Act, and the roles, functions and duties specified therein. A Veterinary Advisory Council is identified to facilitate the execution of the Act and its Regulations by the Competent Authority. Some functions to be carried out include diagnostics, inspection of animals and animal products, research, animal movement and control and quarantine measures. It is believed that the enactment of the Act would make Barbados and the OECS countries more compliant with international requirements, particularly with reference to OIE requirements.

### **Plant Health**

24. The Plant Health Act has provisions that would assist in preventing the introduction and in controlling the spread of plant pests and diseases in order to protect the plant resources, to facilitate trade in plants and plant products, and to regulate other related matters. It also empowers the Minister to designate responsibilities to the National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO) as the appropriate government unit responsible for Plant Health. A Plant Protection Board is also to be established to advise the Minister on issues of plant protection, much like the other Advisory bodies in the Acts mentioned before. A series of provisions are made to deal with imports and exports, issues of cost recovery, the containment and eradication of diseases and pests of plants. While the Act makes reference to the establishment of Regulations, the details of such Regulations were not spelt out, and it was the view that country-specific Regulations would be developed later. In general, the several schedules strengthen the effectiveness of the Act and its enforcement in that they cover many issues including quarantine pests, phytosanitary certification, permits, fees, detention, confiscation, port health facilities and requirements, and Emergency Action Plans for Exotic Pests.

### **Environmental Health Services Act**

25. The new legislation, as previously outlined has mainly a focus on SPS measures. However, some of these measures invariably have a direct or indirect impact on the functions of the Environmental Health Officers as well as other public officials such as Veterinarians and Plant Health specialists, among others. It was therefore necessary to

revisit the provisions as specified in the Public Health Act in individual country, to ensure that the areas of that Act that would be repealed as a result of the new legislative provisions, would not adversely affect the proper functioning of the overall Environmental Health Program. This latter observation was made, given that Public Health Act is generally the overarching Public Health instrument for enforcement of matters related to Public Health, and under which the Environmental Health Officers received their greatest regulatory powers. As such, it was essential to establish the Environmental Health Services Act to serve as the nexus between critical public health functions and matters of importance to agricultural health and food safety. Significantly, provisions have been made in the Environmental Health Services Act to observe those sensitivities that were enshrined in the standards and provisions related to SPS measures dealt with in the Food Safety Act, the Animal Health Act and the Pesticides and Toxic Chemical Act, and for which there could arise the possibility of commission of offences and nuisances.

### **Enforcement**

26. Caribbean Food Safety Systems in the continuum from the gate to the plate are affected by human resource limitations. The number of inspectors in some of our countries, for example, is insufficient to properly oversee the various food safety activities, and ensure industry compliance. This poses the challenge for greater promotion of the implementation of an integrated approach to food safety, as a mechanism for closer monitoring of food activities, and for detection of risk factors. With that level of integration, CARICOM states can strengthen their national capacity for on-farm monitoring to ensure safety in foods.

27. This was taken into consideration by the Project Coordinator during the modernization of the legislative framework, since it was a significant factor of consequence on the public and private sector capacity with regard to the enabling of the safe food environment. This factor together with the need for supporting training and other activities as outlined in the project description, led to training sessions being provided on the fundamental principles for enforcement of the new legislation. The project time span did not allow for all countries to receive this training, as originally projected. However, one OECS country, St Lucia, benefited from an intensive three-day training program at which public and private sector persons were provided with an understanding of the process involved in the prosecution of possible offenders of the legislative provisions.

28. Participants were drawn from persons from the Environmental Health Department, the Veterinary Services Division, the Plant Health Department, the Bureau of Standards, the Police Service and from the Food Industry. Participants were exposed to the provisions of the Food Safety, Animal Health, and Plant Health and to a lesser degree

the Pesticides and Toxic Chemical draft Acts and their associated regulations. Lectures were supplemented by court room simulation sessions that allowed participants to apply basic legal concepts, using case studies to demonstrate the processes and skills required in prosecution and defense within a modern legislative environment.

29. The approach taken in conducting this training provided significant benefits, among which, was the greater national integration of key partners in the promotion of food safety. Participants were provided with essential tools for food safety enforcement. Essentially, public officials and industry personnel were given the opportunity to define and understand the roles and responsibilities of regulators and industry providers in the national food safety program. While however, the enforcement training was undoubtedly a successful milestone in St. Lucia, there is still need to do more training, to do follow up evaluations of legislative enforcement in St. Lucia, and to conduct such training in the other CARICOM Member States.

### **Training**

30. Training workshops were conducted in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines aimed at building the national capacity for national officials and private sector personnel to be strengthened in the use of the HACCP methodology. At least 60 persons received training in Risk Analysis. In this regard, careful attention was paid to providing the participants with substantial information on the elements of Risk Analysis, identifying all three components, namely Risk Assessment, Risk Communication and Risk Management. A major outcome of this training was to provide the knowledge and skills for Risk Analysis to the representatives from Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. An additional 147 persons collectively were trained in the implementation of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) methodology in the Food Industry, and the use of Auditing as a management screening tool. Additionally, at least three Caribbean sub-regional meetings were held, bringing together at each meeting, an average of about 45 persons from amongst Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) and Chief Environmental Health Officers (CEHOs), to discuss and develop Action Plans for matters related to agricultural health and food safety. PAHO/CPC collaborated with the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) in partnership with INPPAZ, PAHO/HQ and CDC to host a sub-regional Inter-Agency Meeting aimed at Strengthening Food-borne Disease Surveillance in June 2004 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. There were about seventy-eight (78) persons in attendance. PAHO/CPC was pleased to support the participation of several of the Caribbean CEHOs, CVOs, Senior Laboratory Technicians and National Epidemiologists at that meeting.

## **Conclusions**

31. Policy issues on food safety no doubt, are still essential factors in the delivery of successful agricultural health and food safety programs within the English-speaking Caribbean. But these programs cannot be truly successful without having adequate legislation as an inherent component. More recently, since governments have become signatories to the WTO Agreement to carry out the rules, and to institute requirements for Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures, the laws that have been reviewed, updated, and would be enacted, are expected to meet the WTO demands. More importantly however, is the reformation of the laws in agricultural health and food safety so that they have become more precise in application, more specific in scope and are intended to meet consumer expectations.

32. The reforming the legislative framework with input from the public and private sector, in Barbados and the OECS countries, is expected to play a major role in ensuring that the foods produced or processed are safe and of good quality. The laws as redrafted for Barbados and the OECS countries now have provisions for ensuring that acceptable standards and practices can be in place for a wide range of food establishments. These establishments include food service establishments such as hotels and restaurants, cottage industry including home operations that cater for the public and street food vending operations. The also include manufacturing establishments, and food-processing plants such as poultry processing plants, pluck shops, and abattoirs, and on-farm operations.

33. The above industries have been given the tools to assist in their compliance with established rules or guidelines that are appropriate for good manufacturing practices, good handling practices and good agricultural practices and for adequate monitoring of such compliance. To a lesser extent, the employees of the industry have been sensitized on issues related to adherence to defined food safety guidelines. These would have direct consequences for the success of the industry and the eventual impact on the health of the consuming public.

34. The activities of the project have therefore, brought added value to Barbados and the OECS countries through the drafting of modern legislation, the building of human capacity and diagnostic support, and the training of public and private sectors in specific areas related to the national and sub-regional agricultural health and food safety programs. In general, through this project, Caribbean states have been strengthened for better delivery of programs that impact on safer foods, enhanced tourism, greater trade competitiveness and the overall safety of their citizens and visitors and tourists alike.

35. CARICOM states, as mentioned previously, are still constrained by limitations associated with scarce human and financial resources. However, the strides made in the project activities are expected to assist in development of an integrated approach to

national programs that would be a great asset for dealing with the challenging issues. Furthermore, the strengthened alliance between PAHO/WHO and its regional and international partners and the USAID would greatly aid in promoting the respective programs and the attainment of some level of sustainability in the programs associated with agricultural health and food safety. At the national level, there has also been a strengthened inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral collaboration and coordination between critical partners in the food continuum from farm to table.

36. If properly applied, countries can now embark on comprehensive national and regional programs that take on board systems-based approaches. The technologies and management practices of agricultural health and food safety from farm to table can be more closely studied to determine food hazards that may be potentially dangerous to the health of visitors to and the peoples of the English-speaking Caribbean, and specifically to Barbados and the OECS countries. Data can ultimately be generated for decision making, and there is now a platform upon which the enhanced partnership can facilitate the design and execution of surveillance and research aimed at identifying the presence of hazards and critical points to eliminate or minimize associated risks from the farm production level through the intermediary stages of harvesting, manufacturing and processing, marketing and distribution, up to the consumption level.

37. It has been a pleasure and privilege for PAHO/WHO to participate in, and more so, to manage the project and the Organization waits eagerly to see the final results of the work done. But PAHO/WHO would seek to continue its alliances with USAID and other partners so that our Member States would receive greater impact during our Technical Cooperation program and activities.