

EuropeAid

Asia Trust Fund

For Trade-related Technical Assistance

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Upgrading the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) 's Capability in Fish Inspection Services

Target Country

Philippines

Implementation period

May 2005 – May 2006

EC co-financing

€ 161,282

Partners

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The project was initiated in response to a 2004 EC Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) mission that pointed out a number of shortcomings in BFAR's inspection system that needed to be addressed before the Philippines could compete successfully in the global fisheries market. The project had two main objectives: (i) to improve the effectiveness of inspection services in the Philippines for fishery exports; and (ii) to improve the quality and safety of fish supplies to meet the requirements of import markets, namely the EU.

Area: TBT, SPS, standardization, quality assurance, certification

1. Introduction and Project Description

The fishery and aquaculture products trade comprises a significant component of the economy of the Philippines, exporting to the key import markets such as the EU, USA, Japan and China, among others.

Imports of fishery and aquaculture products to the EU from the Philippines have been governed by special conditions laid down by Commission Decision 95/190/EC, which was adopted following an EC inspection mission carried out in 1995. Following several missions after then, the EC DG (SANCO) FVO Mission in October 2004 reported serious deficiencies in the control system of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the designated Competent Authority (CA) for the export of fishery products to the EU market. Non-compliance with relevant EU legislation, including failure to implement good hygienic practices in establishments and lack of a traceability system, particularly for aquaculture products, are findings that showed unsatisfactory measures taken by the CA to ensure control and certification.

The FVO inspection team considered the findings likely to jeopardize the safety of fishery products exported to the EU. There was thus an urgent need for BFAR to implement corrective actions in order to address the deficiencies cited by the FVO Mission regarding its sanitary monitoring and inspection services.



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The project had the overall objective to improve the effectiveness of inspection services in the Philippines for fishery exports and the quality and safety of fish supplies to meet the requirements of the EU and other export markets. It was aimed at creating synergies between the ongoing activities of the EC and BFAR, and included the recommendations from the EC Delegation to ensure that the project is complementary to the forthcoming bilateral EU Trade Related Technical Assistance (TRTA) programme. It also contributed to the development of local capacity building of fish inspectors and industry personnel in the area of seafood inspection, fish quality, safety and HACCP.

2. Description of activities

Visits to fishery establishments, fish ports, landing sites and ice plants: to identify specific needs for training, and to demonstrate the industry and the inspectors the root causes and consequences of nonconformities with the EU requirements. The visits also contributed to build a team effort to address the issues relative to the industry's non-compliance with EU requirements and deficiencies in the Competent Authority's control system. In total 24 fisheries facilities were visited.

A review of BFAR's central and regional sanitary monitoring and control systems: to identify the changes needed to strengthen these functions in terms of management structure, inspection capacity, documentation of policies and procedures for accreditation and certification, coordination between the central office and regional offices, and laboratory capacity.

Training for BFAR inspectors: to enhance their understanding on the basic principles of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) in the fish industry, design and implementation of HACCP and to enable them to undertake auditing in the fish processing industry against EU and domestic requirements.

Training for establishments producing fishery and aquaculture products for export to the EU: the overall learning objectives were to create a greater awareness and understanding of the EU and Philippines requirements among industry personnel and to enhance their knowledge of fish food safety and good hygiene practices and HACCP principles and implementation.

3. Results

The positive impact of the project has been evidenced by the favourable feedback the country received from a subsequent FVO mission which took place in October 2006. The report noted: "Taking into consideration the above-mentioned findings and conclusions, and considering in particular the remarkable improvements since the last FVO mission, the mission team considers that BFAR should be in a position to ensure full control and certification of the specific conditions governing imports of FP and AP originating in the Philippines, as laid down in Decision 95/190/EC, once all the issues related to vessels, establishments, cold stores and laboratories have been promptly and properly addressed. "

Additional positive impacts were:

Restructured fish inspectorate: the regulatory functions of the units concerned with fish-product safety have been streamlined with increased focus on inspection and higher budgetary allocations that allow inspectors to carry out follow-up inspections where required.

Expanded export document control and records management: BFAR's sanitary monitoring and control systems were reviewed and restructured at national and regional levels. A separate office was set up for the certification unit, which resulted in an improved and more secure record keeping system. The project also produced two draft manuals on fish inspection and certification procedures.

Enhanced capability of fish inspectors: the project provided more than 50 fish inspectors with "hands-on", formal training on the regulatory assessment of fishery establishments, thereby strengthening and upgrading their capability. Additional inspection tools, supplies and kits were provided to help improve their performance.

Improved understanding of and compliance with EU food safety requirements: the project provided a forum for consultative dialogues between the expert and producers of fishery and aquaculture products, leading to a better understanding and implementation of the EU requirements for fishery exports.

4. Lessons Learnt

The success achieved by the project was, to a great extent, due to the serious commitment by the main beneficiary, BFAR, and its Directors, and the fishery sector in accepting immediately the recommendations provided by the experts.

The priority given by all the parties concerned to the urgency and importance of the assistance required allowed a great deal of accomplishment in a short time. The strong desire of the main parties to continue to maintain the Philippines' trade relations on fish and fishery products with the EU has been the driving force of the project.

The constant dialogue facilitated by the Project Team Leader between the government and industry helped in finding possible solutions and action plans to the non-compliance issues.

The project highlighted the need for closer collaboration between BFAR and the port authorities to ensure that the entire process from unloading the fish until their storage prior to dispatch is carried out as per the hygiene requirements of the EC.

5. Outreach and dissemination

The project created synergies between the ongoing activities of the forthcoming bilateral EU-TRTA programme and BFAR. It incorporated the recommendations and valuable inputs provided by the EC Delegation during the design and implementation phase. The EC Delegation Representative in Manila was updated on the project activities on a regular basis.

Some of the activities and information generated as a result of the ATF project will be useful inputs to the EU-TRTA 's SPS component. Among these are the activities related to the strengthening of inspections and enforcement measures through training on HACCP, GMP and on the new EU Food and Feed Hygiene Rule to cover a wide range of stakeholders engaged in the integrated fish and feed supply chain. In addition, the review of the Philippines legislation may provide useful inputs to the TRTA gap analysis and upgrading of the regulatory framework.

As part of the dissemination strategy, the findings and recommendations of the project were presented at a final roundtable meeting to all the concerned stakeholders. The meeting provided an opportunity to create an open dialogue among stakeholders and to assign responsibilities for the recommendations on implementation.

6. Sustainability

Some of the activities and information of this project will be useful inputs to BFAR's EU-TRTA project. This project will conduct more information dissemination and educational campaign through workshops, training on HACCP and on the new EU food hygiene rule to a wide range of stakeholders, including fish inspectors and health officers. Some changes in the regulatory framework and requirements are anticipated to harmonize with EU standards.

The success of this project and the interest shown by other Asian countries with similar urgent needs led to the designing of two additional projects under the Asia Trust Fund in Indonesia and Malaysia, both of which address similar issues.

Programmes and activities have been re-designed to adhere to the governments' commitment to provide safe food supplies to the consuming public and its desire to maintain its important trade relations with the EU and other world markets.

7. Recommendations

The project's medium- and long-term recommendations require the government to review its current policies, structural framework and functional operations, which will be carried out over a relatively longer timeframe.

Industry training on compliance with the EU food safety requirements for the export of fishery and aquaculture products.



Fish port of General Santos City, Philippines

