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**A series of meetings on ACP-EU development issues**

**Briefing session n° 11: Meeting food safety standards:  
Implications for ACP agricultural exports**

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**FOOD SAFETY AND AGRICULTURAL STANDARDS:  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACP EXPORTS**

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*Executive Summary*

The degree of impact of food safety and agricultural standards on ACP exports depends on the commodity and type of standard being applied. Livestock products represent the highest level of risk to human and animal health and consequently face the highest level of public regulation of international trade. For most ACP countries export of livestock products to high value markets such as the EU is almost impossible to achieve. This is due to the very high level of public and private sector investment required and the extreme level of difficulty in demonstrating compliance with requirements such as those for disease free areas. Excellent national systems must be in place and in many cases the necessary control systems must operate at regional level as with the case of Namibia and Angola.

Requirements for export of fresh fruits and vegetables are easier to meet. All exports must comply with the minimum standards established under the SPS agreement administered by WTO which links to international standards for human, animal and plant health developed by Codex, OIE and IPPC respectively. In practice ACP exports of fruits and vegetables to the EU must meet the requirements set under the EU harmonised regulatory framework for SPS measures. These are relatively straightforward and cause relatively few problems for many ACP countries. However, over the last 15 years new requirements have appeared in the form of private voluntary standards. Private standards are business to business relationships that reflect but normally go well beyond public regulatory requirements. Food safety remains the main focus but private standards also deal with other consumer concerns such as environmental sustainability, animal welfare, health and safety and social issues. These standards are not transparent and often fail to provide a voice for developing country stakeholders. Compliance criteria may not be based on scientific evidence but can instead reflect the buyers' perception of risk. Private standards have proliferated at both farm and processing level with many standards available. The choice of standard is determined by market demand. For fruits and vegetable production GLOBALGAP (formerly EurepGAP) has become the dominant standard for good agricultural practice making the choice quite simple. However, some growers have to comply with one or more retailer specific standards in addition to GLOBALGAP. For processing facilities different markets may require different standards to cover the same management systems. This creates unnecessary additional costs and loss of time in creating dual systems and multiple audits. Efforts are being made towards mutual recognition of different standards through benchmarking schemes such as those operated by the Global Food Safety Initiative but recognition is still buyer dependent.

For major exporters and large-scale commercial growers private standards represent an unwelcome but necessary additional cost, complaints arise over inconsistent auditing and continued updating of standards but overall there are no significant problems with compliance. For smallholders standards like GLOBALGAP are very complex and expensive to implement and maintain, and the compliance criteria were not developed

with smallholders in mind. In Kenya, NRI & IIED found that smallholders could only access GLOBALGAP if heavily supported by a well resourced export company. Establishment and maintenance costs averaged €1,240 and €800 respectively but farmers only contributed €445 and €110 towards these costs. However, these contributions were significant as most farmers' incomes from export vegetables ranged from €210 - €525. Loans for establishment costs took 2-3 years for repayment. GLOBALGAP compliance improved quality, productivity and knowledge of smallholders and also increased the value of skilled labour in rural areas. However, over a three year period 60% of smallholders were found to have been excluded from GLOBALGAP certification due to high costs of compliance. However, 83% of excluded growers were still exporting through intermediaries but derived a lower income from export vegetables.

Demonstrating compliance with both public and private standards is very important in building a reputation for integrity on food safety at company and country level. This is often difficult to quantify but is well illustrated by the example of the damage done to China by the recent melamine in milk scandal.