

## **Addressing SPS issues in the SADC region**

The Regional Economic Integration Support (REIS) Programme, funded by the European Union, has been a catalyst for the rapid development of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) management in the region over the past fifteen months enabling the regional SPS structures to consolidate and formulate work programmes aimed at solving SPS challenges in the region.

The programme aims to facilitate the improvement of trade in agricultural commodities within the region and internationally as well as foster compliance with regional and international multilateral trade agreements and create awareness of SPS measures amongst farmers and agro-food processors. It also supports meetings of regional SPS Coordinating Committee (SADC SPS CC), the Livestock Technical Committee (LTC), the Plant Protection Technical Committee (PPTC) and the Food Safety Technical Committee (FSTC); and it also facilitates workshops to raise awareness on SPS issues amongst food and agriculture stakeholders. SADC's approach to SPS management is based on provisions of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of SPS measures (or the 'WTO SPS Agreement' for short) which are mirrored in the SPS Annex to the SADC Protocol on Trade. The objectives of the SPS Annex to the SADC Protocol on Trade are to facilitate the protection of human, animal or plant life or health in the territory of Member States (MSs); enhance the MSs' implementation of the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures; enhance technical capacity to implement and monitor SPS measures including promoting greater use of international standards and other matters concerning SPS; provide a regional forum for addressing sanitary and phytosanitary matters, and a regional forum for resolving trade related sanitary or phytosanitary issues.

At their last meeting held in Gaborone on 24-25 June 2014, the PPTC and FSTC created 'expert sub-committees' to deal with specific areas of SPS concerns arising in the region particularly in the area of food safety and plant protection.

One of the issues singled out for action by expert sub-committees of both technical committees is the development of "Rapid Alert Systems" to enable each MS to be able to quickly notify relevant authorities in other MSs whenever undesirable agro-products enter the region, or when there is a possibility of products condemned in one MS being transported to another MS. From a plant protection perspective the system would allow for advance warning of any pest outbreak threatening crops for example. Another FSTC expert sub-committee will investigate how recognition can be

accorded to select accredited laboratories within the region so that they act as regional reference laboratories in areas of testing relevant to SPS.

To date over a hundred regional farmers and agro-product exporters have participated in REIS organized awareness workshops and SPS training sessions. In many cases the participants are drawn from national farming unions who go back and share the knowledge with their members.