Progress Report on Implementing

The Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015

World Health Organization
Western Pacific Region
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<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
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<td>APSED</td>
<td>Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCASIA</td>
<td>Codex Coordinating Committee for Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCNASWP</td>
<td>Codex Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>EBS</td>
<td>Event-based surveillance</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>FERG</td>
<td>WHO Foodborne Disease Epidemiology Reference Group</td>
</tr>
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<td>FSCWG</td>
<td>Food Safety Cooperation Working Group</td>
</tr>
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<td>FSER</td>
<td>Food Safety Emergency Response</td>
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<td>GFN</td>
<td>Global Foodborne Infections Network</td>
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<td>HACCP</td>
<td>Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBS</td>
<td>Indicator-based surveillance</td>
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<td>IHR</td>
<td>International Health Regulations</td>
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<td>INFOSAN</td>
<td>International Food Safety Authorities Network</td>
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<td>LIMS</td>
<td>Laboratory information management system</td>
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<td>NCD</td>
<td>Noncommunicable disease</td>
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<td>NPEHA</td>
<td>Northern Pacific Environmental Health Association</td>
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<td>OIE</td>
<td>World Organisation for Animal Health</td>
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<td>RBIS</td>
<td>Risk-based inspection system</td>
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<td>SOP</td>
<td>Standard operating procedure</td>
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<td>Sanitary and phytosanitary measures</td>
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<td>TBT</td>
<td>Technical barriers to trade</td>
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Executive summary

Access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food is a basic human necessity, and it is an essential element in achieving poverty reduction and ensuring sustainable development. Unsafe food causes many acute and chronic diseases, with more than 200 diseases spread through food. With increased globalized trade in food commodities, as well as the growth in international travel, the spread of foodborne diseases across national borders has become a regional and global public health concern. Food safety is clearly an essential component of health security.

These considerations highlight the need to establish and maintain strong national food control systems and to ensure collaboration among countries to prevent the spread of foodborne diseases, respond adequately to outbreaks and ensure the implementation of equitable measures to protect consumers. The responsibility for food safety belongs to various sectors. Effective action requires coordination among responsible agencies at the national, regional and global levels.

It is against this background that the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 was developed. The strategy was endorsed in October 2011 by the sixty-second session of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific. It focuses on strengthening national food control systems and promoting in-country coordination and collaboration among countries, as well as between partners and national governments. The strategy also calls for enhanced cooperation among key agencies and programmes at the regional level.

The Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 covers the following seven themes:

1. Improved food control and coordination throughout the food chain continuum and adequate funding;
2. Risk-based regulatory frameworks;
3. Improved availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis;
4. Inspection services;
5. Food safety training and education;
6. Capacity to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies; and
7. Enhanced cooperative planning and implementation of regional and subregional food safety strategies and action plans.
Resolution WPR/RC62.R5 calls upon Member States to use the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 as a framework for strengthening national food control systems by enhancing or sustaining respective human and financial resources, collaborating and sharing relevant information with other countries, and participating actively in the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) and the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The Regional Director was requested to support countries in implementing the strategy, to enhance collaboration with partners in the Western Pacific Region and to report periodically to the Regional Committee on progress of the implementation of the strategy.

The current progress report provides information on the state of implementation of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 at its midterm, recognizing that food control system development is an ongoing process. As such, further work will be needed beyond 2015 to ascertain food safety throughout the Region. Therefore, an evaluation of the strategy is vital.

Information on the state of implementation of the strategy in Member States was derived from country reports in response to the questionnaire for monitoring progress in the implementation of IHR core capacities, which gauge the progress of core capacity development within the framework of implementation of requirements mandated by the International Health Regulations (2005), also known as IHR (2005). Management of food safety and country capacity to detect and respond to food safety events that may constitute a public health emergency of national or international concern are among these core capacities. Other sources of information included information obtained from 12 countries in response to a specific survey on the state of implementation of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015, country reports to regional INFOSAN meetings, as well as other sources of information.

Overall, country reports reveal that good progress has been made in the Western Pacific Region in developing national food laws, regulations or policies to facilitate food safety control, to establish the necessary infrastructure and to institute mechanisms for cross-sectoral collaboration. National or international food safety standards are applied in most countries in the Region. Food laws and regulations are up to date and implemented, and risk-based food inspection services are in place in a large majority of Member States. Access to laboratory capacity to confirm suspected high-priority food safety events of national or international concern are available in 73% of countries. In 88% of the countries, communication mechanisms and materials are in place to inform, educate and advise stakeholders across the farm-to-table continuum.
While considerable progress has been made, more work needs to be done in implementing and evaluating plans for responding to food safety events. Operational, multisectoral mechanisms at the national level for food safety events are in place in two thirds of the countries in the Region, while response plans for food safety events have been developed, tested and evaluated in only half of the countries. Analyses of food safety events, foodborne illness trends and outbreaks that integrate data across the food chain were published in only 42% of Member States in the Region.

The WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific played a major role in coordinating food safety work at the regional level and also supported countries in their national implementation of actions within the framework of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015, particularly in developing relevant legislation and enforcement infrastructure, in developing human resources capacities, in improving surveillance and laboratory capabilities, and in setting up education and training programmes for consumers and various stakeholders. The work of INFOSAN in Asia continued with renewed emphasis on in-country management of food safety emergency situations. Guidance has been developed to support actions by Member States on various aspects of food safety. One key achievement relates to developing approaches to strengthen the surveillance of foodborne diseases in the Region and to save scarce resources by linking such efforts to existing mechanisms, such as event-based surveillance and indicator-based surveillance, INFOSAN, and others. A practical manual on surveillance and response for foodborne diseases is currently being developed.

Strong emphasis was placed on addressing Theme 7 of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 by strengthening the cooperation among key regional agencies and programmes with responsibilities for food safety under the umbrella of the Food Safety Cooperation Working Group (FSCWG) established in 2012. The group encompasses the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Food Safety Cooperation Forum, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Expert Group on Food Safety, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), WHO, and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). WHO first convened FSCWG in December 2013. Partners committed to seeing the working group serve as a platform for sharing information and coordinating actions among technical agencies and development partners in the Asia Pacific region.

Further efforts are needed by all Member States to ensure the success of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015. Key steps in this direction include prioritizing actions and enhancing efforts for the implementation of the various elements of the strategy, including the provision of necessary human and financial resources. Given the complexity of systems involved in the field of food safety, more work is needed to ensure efficient cross-sectoral collaboration in the field of food safety management.
Food safety is a key component of public health. Ill health outcomes due to foodborne infectious diseases and food contamination are well documented. With growing globalization of food trade, foodborne diseases do not stop at national borders. Food produced in one country may be processed in another, then transported and consumed in yet another country or several other countries. Mass production of farm animals for food production is also a potential source of health risks emanating at the human–animal interface. It is, therefore, clear that food safety is an essential element of health security.

Safe food is also a prerequisite for sustainable development. Access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food is a basic human necessity. Combating hunger requires that food made accessible to the poor is safe as it is the undernourished and poor populations that are more susceptible to foodborne diseases, particularly diarrhoeal diseases. In this respect, food safety is among the preconditions necessary to ensure sustainable development, since a healthy population is a basis for a healthy economy.

WHO, within its broad mandate for the protection of public health and actively promoting health security, has a responsibility for food safety. The WHO Constitution clearly spells out the responsibility of the Organization to develop, establish and promote international standards with respect to food, among other responsibilities. The World Health Assembly has renewed the mandate for food safety with a number of resolutions, the most recent of which was resolution WHA63.3, Advancing food safety initiatives, which was adopted in May 2010. The WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific consulted with Member States and partners in developing a food safety strategy for the Region, with the goal of providing a framework for countries, development agencies, and regional and international bodies.

The Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 was endorsed by the sixty-second session of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2011, and the Regional Committee urged Member States to use the strategy as a framework for strengthening national food control systems to effectively protect public health, prevent fraud, avoid food adulteration, and facilitate trade in safe and healthy food. The Regional Committee also requested the Regional Director for the Western Pacific to support Member States in implementing the strategy.
The Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 is available at: http://www.wpro.who.int/foodsafety/en/

The strategy covers seven themes:
1. Improved food control and coordination throughout the food chain continuum and adequate funding;
2. Risk-based regulatory frameworks;
3. Improved availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis;
4. Inspection services;
5. Food safety training and education;
6. Capacity to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies; and
7. Enhanced cooperative planning and implementation of regional and subregional food safety strategies and action plans.

Each theme covers background information, strategic direction, strategic actions and indicators. While the strategy is time limited, it is understood that food control system development is an ongoing process, and as such after 2015 it is likely that the strategy will need to be reviewed and updated, taking into consideration the progress made, lessons learnt and new challenges.

WHO has worked with Member States, resource mobilization development agencies and other partners to implement the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 following its endorsement. The activities suggested in the strategy follow international best practices defined by FAO and WHO and reflect a whole-of-food-chain approach – from farm to table.

Many of the activities have been undertaken using a multi-stakeholder collaboration approach and in partnership with FAO, ensuring broader impact and reducing risks of duplication of effort and resources.
This document serves as a midterm report of the implementation of the *Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015* and focuses on the period from September 2011 to December 2013. However, a number of actions completed early in 2014 were included. Mapping the progress of the implementation of this strategy serves as a means to summarize the food safety status in the Region. The document follows the seven themes of the strategy and the topics covered under each theme (where relevant or available) include: a general overview with background information about the theme; a regional overview of progress based on data provided through the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities; activities undertaken at the regional level; examples of activities at the country level; and challenges identified.

The progress report also highlights overall conclusions, main challenges encountered and future directions for food safety strengthening in the Western Pacific Region.
Overall progress

• Overall progress was achieved in implementing all aspects of the strategy in the Region.

• In particular, good progress has been made in developing national food laws, regulations or policies to facilitate food safety control, to establish the necessary infrastructure and to institute mechanisms for collaboration among various stakeholders.

• Some progress has been made in implementing and evaluating plans for responding to food safety events, but more work needs to be done.

• Key challenges to many countries are the lack of financial capital and limited access to adequate technical and administrative expertise and scientific resources.

• Effective governments, adequate legislation and good relationships between government agencies and the food industry are vital.

Progress on overall food safety capacity in the Western Pacific Region

Overall, there has been good progress in strengthening national food control systems in the Western Pacific Region. The Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 serves as a guiding tool for countries and areas to improve food safety coordination mechanisms; develop or update food legislation; implement risk-based food inspection systems; improve the availability of food safety data; improve food safety training and education; detect, assess and manage food safety events; and enhance cooperation in the development of food safety strategies and action plans. Despite progress and key achievements, significant work still needs to be done to strengthen food safety across the Western Pacific Region.

With IHR (2005) having come into force on 15 June 2007, all IHR States Parties were required to assess the ability of their national structures and resources to meet minimum national core capacities for surveillance and response as specified in IHR (2005). Countries were also required to develop a plan of action to ensure that these capacities would be present and functioning. WHO is mandated to provide appropriate tools, guidance and support to States Parties to achieve these requirements. In accordance with Article 54 of IHR (2005) and World Health Assembly resolution WHA61.2, States Parties and WHO must report annually to the Health
Assembly on the implementation of IHR (2005). For this purpose, a monitoring framework was developed with technical input and expertise obtained from a number of technical experts, institutions and WHO partners, as well as from within WHO itself.

The questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities is a data collection tool that enables each State Party to provide standardized information about progress of its core capacity development within the framework of its implementation of IHR (2005). The questionnaire is divided into 13 sections. Management of food safety and country capacity to detect and respond to food safety events that may constitute a public health emergency of national or international concern are among these core capacities. In 2013, 96% of countries – 26 of 27 – in the Western Pacific Region responded to the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities (see fig. 1).

As a means of monitoring progress on the implementation of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015, the IHR core capacity monitoring framework is being used as a reference since these core capacities also address those core capacities of importance to food safety and to the surveillance of and response to foodborne disease outbreaks and are consistent with the regional strategy.

Based on reporting by countries on the 2013 questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities, functional mechanisms for national multisectoral collaboration for food safety events are in place in 85% of countries. An effective coordination mechanism has been established among the food safety authorities with responsibility for aspects of food safety, including the establishment of links between INFOSAN Emergency Contact Points and the National IHR Focal Points in 92% of countries. 92% of the countries are members of INFOSAN.

National food laws, regulations or policies to facilitate food safety control are in place in 92% of the countries, while food laws and regulations are up to date and implemented in 85% of the countries. National or international food safety standards are applied in 85% of countries in the Western Pacific Region.
A list of priority food safety risks is available in 73% of the countries in the Region, while 62% of the countries collect and systematically analyse epidemiological data related to food contamination. Some 85% of countries exchange information regarding food safety events in a timely and systematic manner among food safety authorities, surveillance units and other sectors. In 85% of countries, information about foodborne disease outbreaks and food contamination has been used to strengthen food management systems and to inform the setting of food safety standards and the development and updating of relevant regulations.

Risk-based food inspection services are available in 92% of the countries, while 73% of countries have access to laboratory capacity to confirm priority food safety events of national or international concern, including through the use of molecular techniques.
Communication mechanisms and materials are in place to inform, educate and advise stakeholders across the farm-to-table continuum in 88% of the countries.

Mechanisms for tracing, recalling and disposing of contaminated products have been established in 92% of the countries, while operational response plans for food safety events have been implemented in 69% of the countries. In 69% of the countries, guidelines or manuals on the surveillance, assessment and management of priority foodborne risks are available. A roster of food safety experts is available to assess and respond to food safety events in 73% of countries.

In comparison with the previous year, the overall good progress on food safety control capacity has been made in 2013 in the Western Pacific Region as shown in Fig. 2 (Progress on overall food safety capacity in the Western Pacific Region, 2012-2013). The capacity for food control and coordination, related to Theme 1 of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015. The significant improvement over the preceding year with regard to capacities for food control and coordination in the Region is shown Fig. 3. The capacity for incident and emergency response, which constitutes Theme 6 of the strategy, has also been enhanced in the Region in 2013 (see Fig. 4). However, the capacity for data collection, analysis and integration, covered by Theme 3 of the strategy, did not improve in the Region in 2013 (see Fig. 2).

In summary, good progress has been made in developing national food laws, regulations or policies to facilitate food safety control, to establish the necessary infrastructure and to institute mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration. While some progress was made on implementing and evaluating plans for responding to food safety events, more work remains to be done.

Figure 2. Progress on overall food safety capacity in the Western Pacific Region, 2012-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>Source: WHO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanism for tracing, recalling and disposal</td>
<td></td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational response plans updated</td>
<td></td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational response plans implemented</td>
<td></td>
<td>69%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts roster for assessment and response</td>
<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance for events available</td>
<td></td>
<td>69%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in INFOSAN</td>
<td></td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk based inspection</td>
<td></td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data integration</td>
<td></td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information use</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection and analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of priority risk</td>
<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication mechanisms available</td>
<td></td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory frameworks updated and implemented</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory frameworks available</td>
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<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Food standards in place</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food safety control management system</td>
<td></td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multisectoral collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination mechanism</td>
<td></td>
<td>92%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Overall progress

Figure 3. Capacity for food control and coordination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordination mechanism</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multisectoral collaboration</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food safety control management system implemented</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WHO

Figure 4. Capacity for incident and emergency response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active in INFOSAN</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance for events available</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts roster for assessment and response</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational response plans implemented</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational response plans updated</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanism for tracing recalling and disposal</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WHO
Progress in selected Asian countries and areas in the Western Pacific Region

Information in this section has been obtained through a questionnaire distributed in 2012 to assess progress by countries and areas with regard to six of the seven themes of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015. Replies were received from 12 countries and areas in Asia: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong (China), Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore and Viet Nam. In addition, data presented in two regional INFOSAN meetings in 2012 and 2013, as well as in WHO Programme Budget 2012–2013, served as additional sources of information on progress. It is noteworthy that in response to resolution WPR/RC62.25 adopted by the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2011, which urged Member States to use the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 as a framework for strengthening national food control systems, national strategies have been developed in some countries, like Malaysia, or are being developed in others, like Mongolia.

With regard to improved food control and coordination throughout the food chain continuum and adequate funding, all countries reported that some form of coordination mechanism to oversee food safety has been established. However, the scope and scale of these mechanisms range from highly developed and comprehensive regulation systems in some countries and areas, such as Japan and Hong Kong (China), to more basic systems in the developing countries of the Region.

Steady progress is taking place. Among the respondents to the questionnaire, seven reported that specific food safety laws or policies were in place, while four were in the process of passing legislation. Most have implemented regularly scheduled reviews of existing regulations, although many experience difficulties in negotiating among various government agencies and the private sector. Three Member States reported that food safety bills had been drafted but not passed into law. Legislative and policy gaps within existing regulations have been identified, and work to introduce appropriate measures is ongoing.

Significant work is taking place to strengthen risk-based regulatory frameworks, and several countries have developed effective frameworks. The coordination of relevant national, regional and local government agencies is, in many cases, managed by specific food safety regulatory
authorities, although central government health and agriculture agencies also play key roles within the framework.

Countries continue to progress in reviewing current regulations to ensure they are risk-based and aligned with international food standards like the Codex Alimentarius Commission standards and guidelines. INFOSAN is a key platform for sharing information related to food safety among countries in the Region. Moreover, working groups established under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also serve as information-sharing mechanisms.

Progress on improving the availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis is taking place, but more needs to be done. Collection and analysis of data on foodborne diseases is taking place, but less developed countries, in particular, have difficulties in establishing the networks that allow them to share the information with public health stakeholders. Four countries reported that a foodborne disease surveillance database was an integral part of their food control strategy, but that the creation of these databases is yet to take place. Data are often shared between government agencies upon request and on an adhoc basis.

A number of countries have completed smaller food consumption surveillance studies, and four countries reported undertaking total diet studies as part of their surveillance and data collection. Other surveillance methods included using comprehensive medical records to identify risks, EBS and DNA analysis.

Strengthening food inspection services is a core aspect of most countries' food safety systems, and significant progress has taken place in this area. Several countries have revised their inspection criteria to be more risk-based, and some also monitor high-risk points identified along the food chain continuum and update inspection targets and processes accordingly.

Increasing the capacity of health inspectors is important for nearly all countries, and nine of the respondents reported that they offer initial and ongoing training to health inspectors and other government staff. However, the level of training varies significantly depending on the domestic capacity of the country, and some have relationships with international training institutes. Work is being done in several countries to develop domestic qualifications in this area.
Significant progress on strengthening food safety training and education has been made in most countries in the Region. There is a clear commitment to improve food safety education for vulnerable groups, such as children and older people, in almost all countries, and many have implemented food safety awareness programmes in combination with other health programmes, such as maternal health and nutrition.

Many countries have enacted policies and legislation that make it mandatory for food handlers to undergo basic food safety training, and this is being enforced through food inspection systems. Various initiatives designed to improve food safety knowledge of key industry stakeholders along the food chain continuum have been developed, although some countries need training for producers and farmers on good agricultural practices and food safety.

Countries are in the process of building capacity to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies. Most countries have either developed and implemented food safety emergency response plans or are in the process of developing a plan. While most developed countries have complex event detection systems and risk analysis capacities, less developed countries have very limited emergency response capacity. Most countries actively participate in INFOSAN.
Progress in Pacific island countries and areas in the Western Pacific Region

Pacific island countries and areas are characterized by unique food safety challenges caused by their geographical isolation, small populations, heavy reliance on imported food, and environmental health concerns caused by climate change, overfishing and population pressure.

Food safety issues include histamine in fresh as well as canned fish, mercury levels in fish exceeding international guidelines, ciguatera fish poisoning, and poor hygiene practices among food handlers and producers. In addition, concerns remain regarding food labelled in foreign languages; expired foods; foods high in fat, sugar and salt; and the need for food to meet national requirements to address public health issues, like fortification requirements.

In line with the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015, good progress has been made in strengthening national food control systems. This includes development of up-to-date food laws and regulations in line with international recommendations and a common Pacific approach; strengthening risk-based food inspection and enforcement services; and increased training, education and awareness-building among consumers and food handlers. Guidance documents have been prepared and the integration of food control activities into other programmes, such as environmental health and climate change, nutrition, and noncommunicable disease (NCD) prevention and control are taking place.

Based on the Strategic Plan for the Codex Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific (CCNASWP) 2008–2013, Pacific island countries have enhanced their participation in work related to Codex Alimentarius Commission and improved coordination of food standard setting across the subregion. A new strategic plan for CCNASWP for 2014–2019 has been developed to enhance the effectiveness of CCNASWP in achieving its responsibilities to its members and the Region’s contribution to the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Collaboration and coordination between WHO, FAO and other development partners, including the International Trade Centre under the World Trade Organization (WTO), are ongoing and joint national and regional training programmes have been conducted.
Effective national food control systems in the Pacific are challenged by limited technical and financial resources, as well as weak linkages between sectors and programmes involved in activities related to food safety. Country capacity to respond to food safety incidents and emergencies and to actively engage in INFOSAN and National IHR Focal Point networks is limited, and there is a need for developing standard operating procedures and guidance documents that can help facilitate action.

Training on strengthening risk-based food import control systems has been provided, and countries have made improvements in facilitating the control of food imported to the Region through harmonization of legal requirements and enforcement procedures. However, the increasing importation of food from all over the world continues to be a major challenge and a priority area for improvement for Pacific island countries.

All countries and areas are in the process of strengthening their national food safety and control systems, and they are using the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015 to develop relevant strategic actions.

Overall, significant work has occurred to establish food control coordination mechanisms, regulatory frameworks and inspection services. Tasks such as training and public awareness, improved food data, and management of food safety incidents appear to be a priority for most countries.

A key challenge for many countries is lack of access to financial capital. Significant public funding is needed to access adequate technical and administrative expertise and scientific resources such as trained staff, laboratories and equipment. Effective food control management systems, adequate legislation and enforcement as well as good relationships between government agencies and private sector stakeholders are also challenges.
Theme 1
Improved food control and coordination throughout the food chain continuum and adequate funding

- Coordination mechanisms among authorities responsible for aspects of food safety are available in 92% of countries in the Western Pacific Region, and mechanisms for multisectoral collaboration to manage food safety events are functional in 85% of countries.
- Such mechanisms are, however, not fully functional in those countries in the Region that lack sufficient resources, and where food laws and regulations do not clearly define roles and responsibilities of different agencies.
- A further challenge is the lack of technical and administrative expertise within relevant agencies in some developing countries in the Region.

1.1 Overview

An effective national food control system is essential to protect public health and facilitate the production and distribution of safe and healthy food. An effective national food system requires coordinated management throughout the food chain continuum and involves sound food laws and regulations to enforce food safety control measures based on the principles of risk analysis.

Food laws and regulations should cover the whole food chain, including production, processing and marketing, and define the responsibilities of food producers, processors, manufacturers and traders to ensure that food is safe and fit for human consumption.

Food legislation – or national policy – should include provisions that describe how different bodies involved in food safety control cooperate and collaborate to ensure the consistent implementation of food safety controls, and the functions and powers of all agencies involved in food control need to be clearly defined in the legislation or policy. Furthermore, food safety policy should be integrated with other policy areas to facilitate multisectoral action towards food safety concerns.
This theme also highlights the importance of adequate funding for the national food control system. Food legislation should ensure that adequate financial resources are available to provide the necessary experienced staff and other resources for the implementation of official controls.

**Strategic direction:** Improve coordination of the management of food control by updating and modernizing food legislation and/or formal policy agreements so that unambiguous provisions describe how the different national bodies and agencies should cooperate and collaborate to ensure the consistent implementation of food safety controls and how these same bodies and agencies will be adequately resourced to effectively implement food control.

**Indicators:** Legislation enacted, or a formal policy agreement in place, that includes provisions for setting up a coordination mechanism to oversee food safety throughout the food chain continuum and adequate financial resources in all Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

### 1.2 Regional progress

Progress has been made in the Western Pacific Region in developing and maintaining national capacities for food safety control and coordination throughout the food chain continuum, as evidenced by the data from the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities.

The 2013 data reveal that a coordination mechanism among authorities with responsibility for food safety has been established in 92% of countries in the Region. This includes better coordination between the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point and the National IHR Focal Point. In 85% of countries, a functional mechanism for multisectoral collaboration to manage food safety events was in place by 2013. Food safety control management systems including for imported foods were available in 92% of the countries of the Region.

In comparison with the previous year, the availability of coordination mechanisms among authorities with responsibilities for various aspects of food safety was reported by 92% of countries
in 2013 as opposed to 69% of countries in 2012. While in 2012, 65% of countries had mechanisms in place for multisectoral collaboration, the number of countries with such mechanisms increased to 85% of countries in 2013. An increase was also observed with regard to the availability of functional food safety control management systems, with 92% of countries having established such systems in 2013 as opposed to 77% of countries in 2012.

1.3 Activities

At the regional level
Rather than a separate approach or activity, the principle of improved coordination across the food chain continuum at a national level has been adopted across all activities. This means that projects and workshops are developed with an aim to involve officials from all relevant governmental agencies. Also, where relevant, the time to develop joint action plans relating to the workshop topic is included in programmes to assist with ongoing coordination. Working in partnership with FAO supports and facilitates this approach.

At the international and regional level, a significant step forward to streamline information gathered on food control system development, including food control and coordination, was the agreement during the 12th session of the Codex Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific (CCNASWP) and the 18th session of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Asia (CCASIA) to develop a template for country reporting that meets the needs of the relevant Codex Alimentarius committees, FAO and WHO. This will improve the information made available and reduce reporting burdens on countries.

In partnership with FAO and the Codex Trust Fund, a regional meeting for the Pacific countries of the Western Pacific Region was organized. It focused on the theme of utilizing risk-based approaches in national food control systems in the Pacific.

Progress on implementation at the national level has been reported by Member States mainly through a country report survey in 2012. The reports of INFOSAN Asia meetings held in 2012 and 2013 were also used as a reference. Following the strategic actions of this theme, all 11 countries outlined their activities undertaken in this area during 2012.
**In countries**

Almost all countries in the Western Pacific Region have specific food safety laws in place, or are in the process of updating/revising their food safety regulations or of passing legislation that promote coordination. Most have implemented scheduled reviews of existing regulations regularly, although in some cases difficulties negotiating among various government agencies and the food industry were evident.

In the Philippines, the Congress passed the Food Safety Act 2013, which clearly defines functions for government agencies and calls for the establishment of the Food Safety Coordinating Board as the key coordination mechanism. Once formed, the board will focus on hiring regulatory analysts and building the capacity of food regulators and industry partners. New food laws have been enacted in Mongolia in 2012 and in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2013. Both cover the entire food chain and define rights, roles and responsibilities of all key actors. In Samoa, a new law on food safety will facilitate improved coordination among government agencies and will provide for modern approaches to food safety control. In Hong Kong (China), there is a clear policy on food safety throughout the food chain continuum. The Food and Health Bureau is responsible for formulating policies regarding food safety.

All countries in the Region have implemented some level of coordination mechanisms to oversee food safety through the food chain continuum. Marked variations among countries exist with regard to the scope and scale of these mechanisms, which range from highly developed and comprehensive regulation systems to more basic ones.

In the Republic of Korea, coordination has been strengthened through the establishment in 2013 of the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (MFDS), with responsibility for food safety management throughout the food chain. All activities in the field of food safety, which used to be conducted by various agencies, are now streamlined and integrated. China has a combined comprehensive coordination system for national food safety control. Building on its 2009 Food Safety Law, China has established a working mechanism at the state, provincial and county levels to ensure coordination and consistency. This includes coordination among the Ministry of Agriculture, the China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA), the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ), and the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC).
Mechanisms of coordination have been established in Singapore with the “One Health Platform”, bringing together the Ministry of Health, the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA), and the National Environmental Agency (NEA). Coordination platforms among relevant agencies are also functional in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Viet Nam. Malaysia held a national workshop involving all food safety authorities and ministries to plan for the implementation of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015, which served as a basis for updating the National Food safety Action Plan.

### 1.4 Challenges

Most countries of the Western Pacific Region involve multiple agencies to manage the food control system. This requires the establishment of effective coordination mechanisms among authorities with responsibility for aspects of food safety. However, such mechanisms, while available in 92% of the countries in the Region according to the data from the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities, are not fully functional in every country of the Region. Coordination is often hampered due to the absence of national food policies or food laws that define the roles and responsibilities of each agency in a number of countries in the Region.

One major challenge in several developing countries of the Region is the lack of technical and administrative expertise within relevant agencies, leading to difficulties in implementing a comprehensive and effective food control system through the food chain continuum. In addition, developing countries are often faced with a lack of funding available for food safety control and coordination in food-related laws and policies.

With progress being made on providing a legislative basis for food safety, and on establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms among agencies with responsibility for food safety, the vital importance of food safety is yet to be realized. Improving and modernizing food laws, progress on enhancing coordination and cooperation mechanisms at national and subnational levels, ensuring adequate funding, and building of necessary technical and administrative capacities are challenges requiring high attention to ensure the safety of food in countries of the Region.
Country case – Australia
Improved food control and coordination throughout the food chain continuum and adequate funding

Australia and New Zealand have a joint food regulation system based on a treaty between Australia and New Zealand and an agreement among Australian states and territories. Australian states and territories and New Zealand government agencies are responsible for implementing, monitoring and enforcing food regulation through their individual food acts and other food-related legislation.

Food regulation authorities in Australia and New Zealand work together through the Implementation Subcommittee for Food Regulation (ISFR) to ensure food regulations are implemented and enforced in a consistent manner.

An Australian government agency, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), develops food standards for both Australia and New Zealand. FSANZ also plays a pivotal coordination function for food recalls and incident response in Australia on behalf of state and territory agencies.

Under the national Strategy for Consistent Implementation and Enforcement of Food Regulation, ISFR agreed that a National Food Incident Response Protocol (NFIRP) be developed to maintain an effective system for the management of national food safety incidents.

While New Zealand maintains its own incident response system, the NFIRP involves New Zealand as part of a binational approach. FSANZ performs a number of key coordination roles under this arrangement, including National Food Incident Coordinator, Risk Assessment Coordinator and Communications Controller.

NFIRP defines a food incident as “any situation within the food supply chain where there is a risk, potential risk or perceived risk of illness or confirmed illness, associated with the consumption of a food or foods” and relates to an issue that could or is expected to impact multiple government jurisdictions. NFIRP provides a link between the protocols of Australian Government and state and territory agencies responsible for food safety and other food issues. It formalizes arrangements among these agencies and defines roles and associated responsibilities required during the response to a national food incident.
Food safety issues can be identified through a number of sources, including a multijurisdictional outbreak investigation, food recalls, or intelligence from industry, local and state government or international counterparts. NFIRP has been a valuable tool for responding to food incidents in Australia, however, early identification and intervention can minimize the initial impact and escalation of a food safety incident. This requires early information sharing and communication. Consequently, the Bi-National Food Safety Network has been established by ISFR to provide a high-level overarching framework for all members to routinely share information and determine, as appropriate, subsequent actions. FSANZ provides a coordination and information sharing and communication role for the Bi-National Food Safety Network, which includes all members of the health, agriculture and food agencies within ISFR. An outline of the approach is provided in Fig. 5.

**Figure 5. Bi-National Food Safety Network**

**Issue identified via:**
- Department of Health (e.g. epidemiological investigation);
- Departments of Agriculture; food agencies
- International (e.g. INFOSAN, RASSF, other networks)
- Industry
- Media

**Information shared and validated:**
- Information communicated via email/intranet
- Teleconferences convened when required

**Issue identified via:**
- Department of Health (e.g. epidemiological investigation);
- Departments of Agriculture; Food agencies
- International (e.g. INFOSAN, RASSF, other networks)
- Industry
- Media

*Source: Food Standards Australia and New Zealand*
Bi-National Food Safety Network

Resource implications were considered when establishing the Bi-National Food Safety Network. Resources used in discussions on issues under the Bi-National Food Safety Network were equal to, or even less, than those required in managing issues under more formalized tools, such as a complex food recall or an incident under NFIRP.

Any ISFR member can request that a teleconference be convened and/or information circulated to Bi-National Food Safety Network contacts for information and/or discussion. To ensure clarity of shared information and expectations, information is circulated to the Bi-National Food Safety Network members in the following format:

**Issues**
Summarize the issue and what you are asking the network members to do, i.e. information only, requesting feedback or further information from other jurisdiction.

**Background**
Clear background – how the issue came about.

**Current situation**
The status of the investigation, information pending.

**Risk to public health and safety**
If known, including the outcome of risk assessment undertaken by notifying agency. (The notifying agency is encouraged to share the outcome of any previous risk assessment undertaken with network members).

**Public communication**
What communication will be taking place and by whom.

**Distribution in Australia/New Zealand (preliminary only)**
Provide distribution information available at hand – importers, distribution type, retail outlets.
Subsequent actions are determined by the relevant government enforcement agency, however, aim to be as consistent as possible. Implementation of response action occurs under the relevant state or territory legislation, response plan or protocol, and could be a range of options including:

- no action (information only)
- initiate/continue investigations
- communication activities
- commissioning further risk assessment
- further jurisdictional discussions/meeting
- food recall
- triggering NFIRP
- referring the issue to the relevant governing body for discussion.

Operation of the Bi-National Food Safety Network supports early engagement with other government networks when relevant, such as the epidemiologists within the OzFoodNet\(^1\). Developing links with industry networks is another important aspect of the Bi-National Food Safety Network and will be the focus of further development.

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\(^1\) The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing established OzFoodNet in 2000 as a collaborative initiative with Australia’s state and territory health authorities to provide better understanding of the causes and incidence of foodborne disease in the community and to provide an evidence base for policy formulation. Health departments from Australia’s states and territories are funded to employ epidemiologists to focus on foodborne illness surveillance. A coordinating epidemiologist ensures a consistent direction and methodology for OzFoodNet through consensus. OzFoodNet analyses data on foodborne diseases in Australia. These analyses enable the network to identify outbreaks linked to particular infections, and to help health departments to detect problems with food or water safety.
Country case – Fiji
Food Taskforce Technical Advisory Group aids change in Fiji

The Fiji Food Taskforce Technical Advisory Group, a multisectoral group formed in 2011, has played a key role in updating Fiji’s food safety regulations and working with the food industry and private sector to improve food safety and nutrition.

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) provides the Ministry of Health with advice on food quality and safety issues, ranging from food policy and legislation to risk assessment, enforcement and compliance, taxation, and labelling. Some of the TAG members come from various Ministry of Health departments, including the Food Unit, Nutrition and Dietetics, Wellness, and Policy and Planning. Other members come from the National Food and Nutrition Centre, the Consumer Council of Fiji, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Revenue and Customs, the academia and WHO.

The TAG not only responds to Ministry of Health queries, but also provides coordinated advice and guidance on best practices and evidence-based approaches for improving food quality and safety. This includes advice on integration of foodborne disease prevention activities into existing government structures and programmes.

Dip Chand, the head of the Food Unit at the Ministry of Health, said the TAG was consulted on the revision of the nutrition labelling section of the 2009 Food Safety Regulations. “The technical advice provided by the group facilitated our discussions and negotiations with the food industry,” he said.

The TAG’s work with the food industry and other private sector stakeholders includes targets for product reformulation and improvement of the private sector’s capacity to comply with national food safety laws and regulations, as well as the restaurant grading regulations. The restaurant grading regulations aim at ensuring good hygiene practices in all food establishments.
The TAG has organized and facilitated a series of food industry consultations to assist private-sector stakeholders in improving food safety; working towards national targets for salt, sugar and fat reduction and in ethical food marketing and corporate social responsibility.

“We are starting to see a change in the relationship between the Government and the food industry in Fiji,” said Dr Isimeli Tukana, National Adviser for Noncommunicable Disease. “The work of the Food Taskforce Technical Advisory Group has contributed to strengthening the partnership between the Government and industry and scaling-up efforts of the industry towards producing safer and more nutritious food products.”

Mrs Ateca Kama, manager of the National Food and Nutrition Centre, citing examples of recent progress said reduced-sodium products have been introduced and formal commitments have been agreed upon by the food industry.

“The industry has agreed to a number of targets for salt, sugar and fat reductions,” Mrs Kama said, “and the advisory group is now working with industry partners in achieving these targets.”
Theme 2
Risk-based regulatory frameworks

- National food laws, regulations and policies to facilitate food safety control have been developed in 92% of the countries in the Region, and enforced in 85% of them.
- Functioning risk communication systems and information materials for stakeholders were in place in 88% of the countries.
- Lack of technical expertise and human resources was seen as a major hurdle for less developed countries to undertake risk-based analysis of existing regulatory frameworks.
- Managing the informal sector, including street-vended food and food markets, remains a key issue for developing countries.

2.1 Overview

The primary responsibility for the production of safe food lies with the food industry and food businesses. Each food business must ensure that food safety control systems are in place to ensure safe food is provided to consumers. To complement and support the efforts of food businesses, national governments must develop and implement adequate and effective regulatory frameworks that reflect risk analysis principles. Regulatory frameworks include: (1) primary legislation that includes definitions, roles and responsibilities, and also the principles of food control, and provide for the establishment of adequate traceability and recall mechanisms; (2) food regulations and standards that define the rules that regulate the production, processing, storage, distribution, marketing, import/export and sale of food, reflecting food safety, dietary-related NCD and micronutrient deficiency issues; and (3) codes of practice that assist food businesses in implementing the regulations and standards by identifying acceptable controls.

The development of food regulatory measures should be based on the best available scientific evidence and data, and they should be managed and communicated appropriately. Risk analysis frameworks are commonly used at national and international levels as the basis for developing food regulations and standards.

**Strategic direction:** Focus industry and official food control systems and actions on the assurance that consumers have access to safe and healthy food; robust regulatory frameworks will be developed based on risk analysis and a broad consultative process.
Indicators: (1) Risk-based food safety regulatory frameworks in place in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region. (2) Risk communications mechanisms in place for the interactive exchange of information among stakeholders in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

2.2 Regional progress

Most countries in Western Pacific Region have set up national regulatory frameworks and standards for food safety control as evidenced by the data from the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities. For example, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cook Islands, Fiji, Japan, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, the Philippines, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu have developed – or are in the process of putting in place – strengthened national food regulations.

In 2013, according to the data from the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities, national food laws, regulations or policies to facilitate food safety control have been developed in 92% of the countries. Laws and regulations have been enforced in 85% of countries in 2013, indicating a slight increase in implementation over 2012 (81%).

Good progress has been made in establishing functioning systems for risk communication in countries of the Region in 2013. Communication mechanisms as well as materials to deliver information, education and advice to stakeholders along the farm-to-table continuum have been in place in 88% of the countries in 2013, as compared to 77% of countries in 2012.

2.3 Activities

At the regional level

On-the-job training for National Codex Contact Points from the South-West Pacific (Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) was provided in partnership with FAO, the Codex Trust Fund and the Government of New Zealand. The training provided an opportunity to learn more about the role of a national Codex Contact Point and the associated systems in place to support this role. This document is available at: http://www.wpro.who.int/foodsafety/documents/fos_codex_meeting/en/index.html.

Initial steps have been undertaken to create a web-based platform to facilitate risk communications information sharing across the Region.
In countries

According to the responses to the specific questionnaire sent to Member States in the Western Pacific Region in 2012 to assess the progress made in implementing the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015, as well as country reports at INFOSAN Asia meetings in 2012 and 2013, most countries reported that significant work is currently being undertaken to achieve progress within this indicator. Several countries have developed effective risk-based regulatory frameworks or are strongly committed to reviewing current regulations to ensure they are risk-based and aligned with international food standards, such as the ones of Codex.

Risk-based regulatory frameworks have been set up in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. And Hong Kong (China) has revised food safety regulations to reflect prevailing risks and to consider international developments. Singapore has strengthened relevant food safety regulations to ensure that they are risk-based and encouraged partnerships with all relevant stakeholders. AVA Singapore has engaged in a proactive dialogue with the private sector to ensure that it plays an efficient and effective role in complying with the food safety regulations and sets up its own adequate food control systems.

Several countries have reviewed their food regulations and standards to ensure that they are consistent with international standards such as the ones of Codex Alimentarius. Japan has revised food safety standards based on the results of risk assessments conducted by its Food Safety Commission. In setting or revising food safety regulations and standards, Codex standards are taken into account to ensure compliance with the requirements of the World Trade Organization, in particular those stipulated in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and technical-barriers-to-trade (TBT) agreements. Cambodia has developed local standards on a number of food commodities in line with Codex Standards. In Mongolia, the capacity of the National Codex Committee has been strengthened. Brunei Darussalam is in the process of drafting Food Hygiene Regulations and reviewing its Public Health (Food) Act and its regulations, with the aim of ensuring that they are in line with relevant international standards. In the Republic of Korea, the Ministry for Food and Drug safety (MFDS) has ensured that food standards, either newly developed or revised, are in line with international standards, particularly those of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Many countries in the Region developed codes of practice, guidance documents and training materials on legislation for distribution to all relevant stakeholders in order to ensure effective and
consistent enforcement nationally. Cambodia and the Philippines are in the process of developing codes of practice outlining the requirements for hygiene certificates.

The capability of food control authorities in the area of risk communication has been strengthened through the development of specific strategies and the establishment of programmes to enhance the communication skills of food safety professionals. In China, Food Safety Risk Communication Guidelines have been prepared, and nationwide risk communication training is provided by experts from international and national authorities and from academia. In Hong Kong (China), risk communication mechanisms are in place for the interactive exchange of information among stakeholders, including the Government, the trade sector and consumers. The Republic of Korea runs various risk communication capacity-building/training programmes for staff from MFDS, regional authorities and related entities from the private sector.

INFOSAN is reported as the key method countries use to share information related to food safety. Other methods for regional and international information sharing include ASEAN working groups. Brunei Darussalam and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic reported that these working groups proved useful for sharing information with other countries.

2.4 Challenges

Less-developed countries and areas reported that undertaking a risk-based analysis of existing regulatory frameworks is often hampered by a lack of technical expertise and human resources. Several countries have also reported that a lack of legal resources within countries prevents legislation from being enacted in a timely manner.

The absence of a globally harmonized approach in date-marking definitions and how date-marking is applied on food products are causing significant confusion for food regulators, food businesses and consumers in Member States across the Region. Date-marking is not always applied to foods that may be unsafe after a defined period. Furthermore, incorrect date marks may sometimes result in unnecessary destruction of safe food incorrectly identified as outdated.

Managing the informal food sector, including street-vended foods and food markets, remains a key issue for developing countries given the rapid increase in the number of vendors, ever-changing vendors, limited education of vendors and funding to put controls in place.
Country case – China
Strengthened risk communication improves food safety in Shanghai

People are understandably concerned about food safety. But the public perception of food safety is closely related to the public’s understanding of food safety risk factors, an issue that requires some scientific and technical knowledge.

In an effort to improve the public’s understanding of food safety, WHO and FAO, under the umbrella of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, have developed principles for food safety risk analysis. The risk analysis process consists of three stages: risk management, risk assessment and risk communication. The Government of Shanghai has taken several steps in recent years to strengthen public food safety risk communication, recognizing its importance within the risk analysis paradigm.

The City Government produces Shanghai Food Safety Status Report every year, with the report widely available in the media.

In addition, it provides guidance to the public on the prevention and control of food safety risks, with three food safety risk communication columns on the Shanghai city FDS’s website: warning notices, consumption tips and guidance for industry. These tips cover subjects ranging from banned food items and aluminium in food to pathogens and shellfish toxins.

Risk communication materials are available in various formats, including handbook and flyers for community organizations, schools and other enterprises. Food safety events have been conducted including a food safety awareness week.

Shanghai city FDA and meteorological departments work together to set up an early warning and forecast system for bacterial food poisoning, using websites, mobile phone text messages and TV. Another effective measure has been publicizing regulatory information
and a “black list” of enterprises and people who seriously violate food safety regulations. Five black lists have been published, singling out 20 food enterprises and 36 individuals. The Government also uses its website to release information on food inspections and food sampling. Social media and microblogs have helped with rumour control on issues ranging from anthrax-contaminated beef products to import crabs.

These efforts have clearly enhanced the understanding of the scientific basis for food safety in the media and among the public. Risk communication in particular has been helpful in avoiding misunderstandings and managing overreaction in the media and among the public.

These food safety efforts also have helped with the development and implementation of risk management measures. They allow all stakeholders to exchange information and concerns in a timely manner, so that risk management and decision-making are improved.

As a result, consumer confidence in food safety has been enhanced. The Chinese public often lack confidence in food safety, and media reports – some less than accurate – also affect the consumer confidence. Risk communication is the key means to rebuild confidence.

Working in a transparent and open manner – and using good risk communication tools – consumer confidence will grow, making daily meals a safer and more enjoyable experience for everyone.
Country case – Lao People’s Democratic Republic
Risk-based approach to food safety in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Food safety is the responsibility of everyone in the food supply chain, and collaboration and cooperation among food producers, food distributors, and government authorities are the keys to safer food and better health.

In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, food safety is under the responsibility of the Food and Drug Department of the Ministry of Health. It is supported by the work of the Food and Drug Administration Commission, the Bureau of Food and Drug Inspection, and the Food and Drug Quality Control Center, which tests food to determine its safety. The development of effective food laws and regulations along with the work of these agencies ensures a safe food supply chain, including food imports and exports.

The Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic is committed to the principles of the World Trade Organization Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement as a means of ensuring an effective food safety management system in the country. The Government also has embraced the worldwide movement from a reactive to preventive approach to food safety by instituting risk-based approaches to food safety that require key stakeholders in the food supply chain to share responsibility.

In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the risk-based food safety regulatory framework is enshrined in the first revision of the 2013 Food Law and in Food Inspection Regulation 297, adopted in 2012.

The development of the food legislation in the country involved consultations with international experts from the FAO and WHO, among others including food businesses and the private sector. More than 500 people were involved in the consultations that led to the current laws and regulations.

The revised 2013 Food Law identified three categories – low, medium
and high risk – with an emphasis on risks for children and issues associated with food supplements and novel foods. The law calls for independent evaluations of health-related risks based on scientific evidence without unnecessarily creating barriers to trade.

A risk-based food safety control framework defined the risk analyses and risk assessments that need to be undertaken in a transparent manner, including inspections, sampling and testing, with a view towards the country-specific context. The frequency of food inspections, including imported foods, is spelled out in the framework and is based on potential risks.

The Government appreciates the support of FAO, WHO and other partners in efforts to develop the risk-based regulatory framework, as well as in training and conducting exercises. Challenges remain, including the establishment of risk evaluation groups on food safety to provide ongoing technical support.

These efforts have helped improve the safety of food from the farm to the table, leading to safer food and healthier lives.
Theme 3
Improved availability of food safety data to better guide policy and risk analysis

- Timely and systematic exchange of information between food safety authorities, surveillance units and other relevant sectors takes place in 85% of the countries.
- Integration of data along the food chain, including those related to food safety events and foodborne disease trends and outbreaks, in contrast, has been performed only in 42% of the countries.
- Several developing countries of the Region do not have appropriate foodborne disease surveillance systems and food contamination monitoring programmes.

3.1 Overview

Modern food safety control systems, in order to be efficient and effective, rely increasingly on the availability and use of data and information on foodborne disease and food contamination, as well as data on the performance of controls throughout the food chain. The provision of such data is limited in developing countries, and developed countries also have challenges in accessing such data.

In addition to the need for food safety information that can guide food regulations and standard setting, as well as food safety inspection and control, it is important to ensure rapid access to information on foodborne disease outbreaks. One important approach is to ensure efficient linkage with event- and indicator-based surveillance systems. For this aim to be achieved, it is essential for national food control systems to establish effective lines of collaboration between food control agencies and public health authorities. National food control authorities should also establish effective links between various data sources to facilitate the assessment of combined data and increase efforts to share data among agencies within the country, as well as internationally, for improved risk management.
Current foodborne disease surveillance systems in countries across the Western Pacific Region are limited and do not provide comprehensive information, or in some cases any information on the number of foodborne disease events. The estimated incidence of foodborne infections per 100 000 per year in the Miyagi Prefecture, Japan, is estimated by a model at 237 cases for campylobacter, 32 cases for salmonella and 15 cases for V. parahaemolyticus. Simulated results indicate a significant difference between estimated incidence and the reported cases of food poisoning in this area. Research undertaken in Australia demonstrates the massive burden of gastroenteritis nationally, with an estimate of 17.2 million episodes occurring in one year. In addition to the public health impact, the economic impact of foodborne disease and food contamination is also significant. New Zealand estimated that in 2009 six foodborne diseases cost the country approximately NZ$ 161.90 million (US$ 134.14 million).

The authorities responsible for food safety are expected to use information from foodborne outbreaks and food contamination to strengthen food management systems, safety standards and regulations. This requires that national food control authorities systematically collect and analyse epidemiological data related to food contamination. Further, authorities should publish an analysis of food safety events, foodborne illness trends and outbreaks that integrate data from across the food chain. Timely and systematic information exchange among food safety authorities, surveillance units and other sectors regarding food safety events is also essential.

**Strategic direction:** Introduce a systematic effort to collect, analyse and interpret data on food contaminants and food consumption and establish effective links with the public health system to improve the availability of attributable data on foodborne disease.

**Indicators:** (1) Links established with the public health system to improve the availability of data on foodborne disease through event-based surveillance and indicator-based surveillance in all Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region. (2) A plan and a programme of work for collecting, analysing, interpreting and applying food safety data to improve the management of risks associated with priority hazards are in place in all Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.
3.2 Regional progress

With regard to the exchange and use of information for food safety management, 85% of the countries in the Region reported in 2013 that a timely and systematic information exchange is taking place between food safety authorities, surveillance units and other relevant sectors regarding food safety, and that information from foodborne outbreaks and food contamination has been used to inform efforts undertaken to strengthen food safety management systems and the setting of food safety standards.

By way of contrast, the data from the 2013 questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities showed that data collection and analysis of food safety events, foodborne illness trends and outbreaks are not necessarily integrated along the whole food chain continuum. In 2013, integration of data along the food chain has been performed only in 42% of the countries.

Data collection and analysis of epidemiological data related to food contamination has been performed in many countries in the Region, with 85% of countries having shared such data in a timely and systematic manner with other sectors in 2013, as opposed to 65% of countries reporting that such systems were functional in 2012.

3.3 Activities

At the regional level

A strong emphasis was placed on developing approaches to strengthen the surveillance of foodborne diseases in the Western Pacific Region and to save scarce resources by linking such efforts to existing mechanisms, such as EBS and IBS in line with APSED, INFOSAN, and others. To address this issue, an Informal Consultation on Strengthening the Surveillance of Foodborne Diseases in the Western Pacific Region was held in February 2014 in Manila. A practical manual on surveillance and response for foodborne diseases is currently under development.

Workshops were held in Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam to develop microbiological and foodborne disease surveillance capacities. The experience gained in these countries contributed to the development of a laboratory and foodborne disease surveillance assessment tool. This has been applied by Member States of the Region. The tool assists countries
in reviewing their current laboratory and surveillance capacities relating to food safety and in developing longer term action plans to address capacity gaps.

In partnership with FAO and the Codex Trust Fund, a Technical Workshop on Chemical Risk Analysis in the Food Chain was conducted in China for Asian countries in the Region. Total diet studies, the contribution of food contamination data to global databases and risk analysis were key topics in the workshop.

Through the Global Foodborne Infections Network (GFN), Member States were offered the opportunity to take part in an external quality assurance systems exercise to assist in the production of reliable laboratory results of consistently good quality. Reports are available at: http://www.who.int/gfn/activities/eqas/en/

To support the outsourcing of laboratory analysis in situations where countries lack the appropriate laboratory capacity, a tool to identify relevant laboratories in the Region has been developed.

WHO collaborating centres in the Western Pacific Region, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in Centre for Food Safety in Hong Kong (China), the China National Center for Food Safety Risk Assessment, University of Otago (New Zealand), Food Standards Australia New Zealand, and the Food Laboratory at the Health Sciences Authority (Singapore) have assisted WHO in strengthening a regional system for contamination monitoring and assessment capabilities and the surveillance of chemical contamination of food in the event of an emergency.

**In countries**

Most countries of the Western Pacific Region have established effective links between food safety coordination mechanisms and public health systems. Collection and analysis of data on foodborne disease is common, but less-developed countries reported difficulties establishing the networks that allow them to share the information with public health stakeholders. Four countries stated that a database was an integral part of their food control strategy, but that they had not yet been able to develop one. Data are sometimes shared between government agencies upon request where there is no formal database.

Strong links between food safety and public health systems are in place in Hong Kong (China), with an established mechanism for communication of available data between the Centre for Food
Safety and the Centre for Health Protection. A formal collaboration mechanism has been set up in Cambodia among authorities with responsibility for aspects of food safety, hospital departments, laboratories (public sector) and relevant ministries, as well as with country and regional offices of WHO and FAO. A documentation centre has been established in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic to provide food safety data and reports as a resource for risk assessment scientists and risk managers. In addition, a database has been set up and is accessible in all provinces. The Department of Royal Customs and Excise in Brunei Darussalam has introduced an electronic system that facilitates the online approval of imported food products, namely the Brunei Darussalam National Single Window (BNDSW). The One Heath platform has been established in Singapore to facilitate the sharing of information on food safety and to carry out joint risk assessment of food safety events. In the Pacific, foodborne disease surveillance is built into the Pacific Syndromic Surveillance System.

China and Japan are undertaking studies on the burden of foodborne disease under the auspices of the WHO Foodborne Disease Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG), with Japan being a pilot country for the global initiative. Japan hosted officials from Malaysia so that information from the Japan study on the burden of foodborne disease could be shared and serve as a model for a similar exercise in Malaysia.

With regard to building capacity for monitoring foodborne diseases in local institutions, China has developed a foodborne disease surveillance system and established eight reference laboratories for monitoring of food safety risks in the country, with the National Food Safety Risk Assessment Center playing the leading role in food safety risk monitoring. Nearly 1200 national monitoring stations for chemical pollutants and harmful factors, as well as for and foodborne pathogens, have been established as of 2012, covering 100% of the provinces, 73% of the cities and 25% of the counties. Laboratory services have the capacity to detect, identify and quantify chemical and microbiological hazards in Brunei Darussalam. The Republic of Korea operates a foodborne bacteria-tracing system to identify contamination sources using molecular analysis techniques and a DNA database of pathogens isolated from distributed or imported foods.

A number of countries have completed smaller food consumption surveillance studies, and four states reported undertaking total diet studies as part of their surveillance and data collection. Hong Kong (China) conducted the First Hong Kong Total Diet Study aiming to estimate dietary exposures of the population and various population subgroups to a range of substances, including contaminants and nutrients, in order to assess any potential associated health risks.
Hong Kong (China) also conducts risk assessment studies every year, which consist of comprehensive reviews and analyses of food-related hazards, for example chemical hazards and microbiological hazards that are of public health significance. In Japan, a total diet study has been conducted regularly by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare since 1945 to estimate the dietary intake of contaminants, pesticide residues and food additives. Similarly, the Republic of Korea conducts regular total diet studies, taking into account the typical diet of the Korean population, to assess exposure levels to hazardous contaminants by linking with data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey that is carried out by the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Republic of Korea has also introduced a Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) encompassing regional public health and environment research institutes and government-certified food-testing laboratories in order to set up a database comprising test results from all domestic laboratories.

### 3.4 Challenges

Foodborne disease surveillance systems and food contamination monitoring programmes are available to a limited extent in some countries but are completely lacking in other countries. This is one of the major challenges faced by several developing countries in the Region. Lack of expertise and funding for implementation of efficient mechanisms for surveillance and monitoring of foodborne diseases and food contamination is a critical concern for many countries.

In some developing countries in the Region, there is no structured mechanism to share information among stakeholders. This hampers risk assessment that would benefit from accessing and combining relevant data from different sources.

Similarly, access to analytical laboratories that produce reliable, timely data is an impediment to ensuring an optimal functioning of surveillance programmes in many developing countries of the Region.

Gaining agreement with public health officials on the importance of collecting and sharing foodborne disease information and establishing a system to link foodborne disease surveillance to existing mechanisms for event- and indicator-based surveillance would help in concentrating efforts, utilizing relevant expertise and saving resources.
Tourism in Cambodia, the “Kingdom of Wonder”, is a major contributor to the national economy. In 2013, more than 4.2 million tourists travelled to Cambodia, a 17.5% increase over the previous year, visiting the temples at Angkor Wat, the beaches at Sihanoukville and the national park at Kirirom and other tourist sites.

Recognizing that a safe food supply chain is critical to promote tourism, Cambodia, in 2013, declared a new vision for food safety under the banner of universal access to safe food to promote health, trade and tourism.

Six government ministries – Agriculture, Commerce, Economy and Finance, Health, Industry and Mining, and Tourism – are leading the effort.

The ministries called for “a modern, integrated and efficient national food safety system that protects the health of individuals and the rights of consumers, as well as supports the development of export capacity of the food sector”.

Officials from the six ministries held a workshop in Phnom Penh in December 2013 with the aim of putting in place a new national food safety system. The initiative has been supported by WHO and FAO.

The workshop included a needs assessment exercise to identify gaps in the current food safety system and developed an intersectoral work plan to be carried out over the next several years. The plan is intended not only to promote and protect the health of consumers in Cambodia but also to create an environment that is supportive of economic development through food trade and tourism.

The draft plan was presented at the regional INFOSAN meeting in Manila, Philippines, in December 2013. It is serving as an example of how coordination of food safety services can be achieved in a cooperative manner within a clear legal structure.

At the same time, an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism for food safety cooperation is essential in order to ensure the cooperation of all authorities involved in various aspects of food safety from farm to table.
**Theme 4**
**Inspection services**

- Risk-based food inspection services are in place in 92% of the countries in the Region as critical components of national food safety control systems.
- Training for food inspectors is provided in countries in the Region, and there are examples of cooperation among countries on such training.
- The ability of countries in the Region to provide improved inspection services is mainly hampered by financial constraints and, in some instances, the lack of appropriate regulations.

### 4.1 Overview

Food inspection is an essential service to support the administration and implementation of food laws. Food inspectors are the key functionaries who have day-to-day contact with the food industry, the trade sector and often the public. The reputation and integrity of the food control system depends, to a very large extent, on the integrity and skill of food inspectors. It is evident that proper training of food inspectors is a prerequisite for an efficient food control system.

The responsibilities of the inspection services include: inspecting premises and processes; evaluating Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans and their implementation; sampling food; identifying unsafe food; identifying and documenting nonconformance with legislation; encouraging voluntary compliance with legislation; and education and training.

**Strategic direction:** Establish competent food control authorities as independent and trusted public health bodies and contribute to effective national food control systems through the strengthening of risk-based food inspection services.

**Indicators:** (1) Food inspector training programmes, reflecting core competencies, are required by national legislation and are implemented in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region. (2) Increased uptake of the use of risk-based food inspection systems in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.
4.2 Regional progress

Risk-based food inspection services are in place in most of the countries in the Region, as shown in the data from the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities of 2013, with 92% of countries having set up a risk-based food inspection service as a critical component of their national food safety control systems. In 2012, 88% of countries in the Region had introduced risk-based food inspection systems.

4.3 Activities

At the regional level

Core capacities reflecting food inspection needs throughout the food chain continuum have been developed in the Western Pacific Region. Materials have been developed to support training institutes to reflect these core capacities in their training curriculums. WHO has developed technical guidance documents and model curriculums for food inspectors. In the Pacific, in-country risk-based food inspection has taken place in several countries and a risk-based food inspection manual is being developed. The Pacific Open Learning Health Network (POLHN) is being considered as a platform for providing training to food inspectors. Progress has been made to create a web-based forum for institutes across the Region to share training materials.

WHO has conducted training on risk-based food inspection in a number of countries in the Region, including Cambodia, Kiribati, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Food inspection equipment, like temperature probes, to enable risk-based food inspections have been provided to developing Member States, namely Cambodia, Kiribati, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.
The Northern Pacific Environmental Health Association (NPEHA) has initiated discussions with partners to determine how best to deliver food inspector training to small island states.

In partnership with FAO and the Codex Trust Fund, a Technical Workshop on Chemical Risk Analysis in the Food Chain was conducted in China for Asian countries in the Region. Total diet studies, the contribution of food contamination data to global databases and risk analysis were key topics in the workshop.

**In countries**

Some countries and areas in the Region, such as China, Hong Kong (China) and Singapore, developed core competencies for food inspection, reflecting inspection needs throughout the food chain continuum including imported food. Mongolia conducted an assessment of the core competencies of the food inspection system. Mongolia also refined its risk-based inspection criteria and inspected almost 100,000 food industry entities in 2011–2012.

Several Member States have implemented or strengthened risk-based food inspection systems. China has implemented a number of food inspection measures including daily inspection of edible agricultural production, production processing and circulation, as well as catering. The system also ensures that improvements are introduced whenever required, and that appropriate actions are taken with regard to avoiding illegal practices. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic has established a Bureau of Food and Drugs that conducts inspection programmes in a systematic manner that targets major food safety risks. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic has also developed standard operating procedures (SOP) for risk-based food inspection. A risk-based inspection system (RBIS) for licensed food premises and a functional, risk-based food surveillance programme at import, wholesale and retail points are in place in Hong Kong (China).

Training courses for food inspectors and in-service training programmes for current inspectors to reflect core competencies have been strengthened in the Region. A postgraduate training programme for inspectors was developed in Mongolia. Training programmes are also offered in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Japan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Singapore. Most are targeted at training new inspectors, but several address also continuing education
and further skill development of inspectors who are already in service. Japan has also launched a web-based training programme for food safety inspectors that provides the latest scientific and technological information.

There are some examples of cooperation on training of food inspectors among countries in the Region and beyond. The Republic of Korea developed a multi-year training programme in food safety in collaboration with Australia, China, Indonesia and the United States of America. This programme includes training in food inspection for professionals from academia and the private sector in member states of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group. In addition, HACCP training courses are carried out by the Korea Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI) and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) for experts from China.

### 4.4 Challenges

Financial constraints are a key factor in the ability of countries to deliver improved inspection services, with some countries noting that they were unable to provide comprehensive training, technical support or suitable testing equipment to health inspectors.

Other countries reported difficulties detecting food safety breaches and enforcing regulations within very large food industries. Limited food regulations prevent food inspectors from undertaking appropriate action in some Member States. Finally, a lack of understanding of risk-based inspection at high government level in some countries has limited the ability to implement this approach effectively.

In the Pacific, most food inspectors have multiple responsibilities covering various areas of environmental health. Food inspectors’ limited time and technical background in food safety, as well as weak institutional structures and accountability mechanisms, are challenges for the provision of effective risk-based food inspection services.
Country case – Federated States of Micronesia
Risk-based food inspection

WHO has provided ongoing support to the Federated States of Micronesia on implementing risk-based approaches to food inspection. Training events have brought together environmental health officers and food inspectors working at the national and state levels in the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia: Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap. “The training has started to change the way food inspection activities are being planned, implemented and documented in the Federated States of Micronesia,” says Mr Moses Pretrick, National Environmental Health Coordinator, Ministry of Health. “Before food inspection activities were conducted at an ad hoc basis, whereas now we are assessing the risk of different food products and businesses and conducting food inspection activities accordingly.”

The training has contributed to improving national and state food inspection systems and has provided food inspectors with the skills and understanding to identify food safety hazards, assess food safety risks, and monitor and evaluate control measures. The training has also contributed to the development of draft risk categorization models of food businesses and products that can be used by inspectors to plan, implement and evaluate risk-based food inspection activities. “Risk categorization of food products and businesses is a complex area of work, but the training provided by WHO has provided a good basis for food inspectors to initiate such activities,” said Mr Pretrick.

In addition to food safety issues and concepts, the training also covered issues of regulatory interest. This included food labelling and fortification, as well as food- and diet-related noncommunicable disease (NCD) risk factors. It has been recognized that food inspectors play an important role in addressing food and diet-related NCD risk factors, and the training discussed practical actions and approaches food inspectors can take to address the Pacific NCD crisis. Mr Pretrick emphasized that the link between NCD prevention and control, nutrition, and food safety needs to be strengthened and food inspectors must be able to work with food producers, importers and distributors in improving the quality of products produced and sold in the Federated States of Micronesia.
Theme 5
Food safety training and education

- Almost all countries of the Region had specific food safety training and educational programmes targeting different stakeholders, with educational materials and specific information notes produced in 88% of the countries.
- Educational programmes face difficulties in developing countries of the Region due to the lack of adequate financial and human resources.

5.1 Overview

Food safety education for stakeholders across the farm-to-table continuum is an increasingly important function within food control systems. Activities include the provision of balanced factual information to consumers, the provision of information packages and educational programmes for key officials and workers in the food industry, development of training-of-trainers programmes, and the provision of reference literature to extension workers in the agriculture and health sectors.

Efforts to enhance food safety education and training should also be focused on specific at-risk population groups and food businesses employed in the handling of high-risk foods. Producers, processors, food handlers, food retailers, food traders, and those preparing food for and caring for vulnerable populations also all need to understand the factors that can influence the safety of the food they handle, as well as their moral responsibility to ensure the safety of any raw material, semi-processed material, ingredient, additive or food during their care of it.

Competent and capable trainers and educators are critical to the success of any training and education programme. Trainers trained in key food safety messages and how such messages can be used to increase safe food handling and safe food choices are essential to any effective programme for improving safe food handling and increasing the ability of individuals and communities to make safe food choices. Education programmes should also include an evaluation process to measure their effectiveness and improve them as necessary.
**Strategic direction:** While recognizing the importance of food safety education and training for all stakeholders, intensify the food safety education and training programme for priority groups, including women of reproductive age, pregnant women, mothers and carers of infants and young children, schoolchildren (preschool, primary and secondary), and health workers and carers of the elderly, immune-compromised and chronically ill. Require mandatory food safety training for food handlers in those businesses handling high-risk foods. To achieve maximum impact and sustainability, build partnerships and links with existing health education programmes and with those who can facilitate an enabling environment for improved safe food handling. In addition, to improve training and education and maximize its effectiveness, ensure evaluation processes are integral components of programmes.

**Indicators:** (1) Food safety education and training programmes set up to be targeted and effective and to reach priority groups. (2) Partnerships identified and applied to enhance food safety education and training outcomes. (3) Food safety training for food handlers engaged in handling high-risk food required by legislation and an implementation process in place.

### 5.2 Regional progress

IHR core capacity monitoring framework does not cover specific information on the availability and implementation of specific programmes for food safety training and education in Member States. The available information indicated that almost all countries in the Region have provided specific food safety training and education programmes on various aspects of food safety that are within the remits of other themes of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015, such as food inspection and management of food safety incidents and emergencies.

The 2013 data from the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities showed, however, that 88% of countries produced educational materials and specific information notes targeting different stakeholders involved with food safety across the farm-to-table continuum, compared to 77% of countries in 2012.
5.3 Activities

At the regional level

The WHO Five Keys to Safer Food are global health-based food safety messages developed as a means to communicate simple principles, based on scientific evidence, to educate all types of food handlers, including consumers. Countries in the Region have been supported in translating these messages into local languages so that the Five Keys become accessible to all.

Regional support has led to successes in a number of countries. The Federated States of Micronesia provided food safety education to street food vendors, utilizing the Five Keys to Safer Food, which was translated into local languages. Hong Kong (China) uses the Five Keys to Safer Food to disseminate recommendations on behaviours that ensure the safety of foods. Examples include roving exhibitions, TV programmes and outreach to priority groups. Mongolia has raised consumer awareness on food safety using messages from the Five Keys to Safer Food.

The WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific has launched a cross-cutting collaborative project entitled the Mekong Project in Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic targeting communities and schools. The project has been implemented in six primary schools in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and six primary schools in Vientiane, Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The 12 schools were selected to create supportive physical environments, to enhance the availability of healthy, nutritious and safe food options, and to train food vendors, primary school teachers and students on food safety and good nutrition.

The Mekong Project proved to be an encouraging collaboration at the country level between national government (education and health sectors), local authorities, and youth and women organizations. Moreover, within the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific and the country offices, the project brought together the technical expertise of Regional Office technical units working in health promotion, food safety and nutrition, promoting cross-divisional collaboration. A multisectoral approach allows multiple health topics to be fully addressed.

In countries

Food safety education and training programmes targeting priority groups, including training for food handlers who deal with high-risk food, have been set up in most countries of the Region. In Cambodia, emphasis is on increasing food safety education for priority groups of consumers and care providers. In particular, workshops targeting mothers have been held to address the use
of infant formula. Food safety information materials for consumers have been developed and disseminated in the Democratic Republic. Food safety education materials targeting women and children in rural areas have also been developed in China. In addition, China has introduced food safety courses in primary and secondary schools as part of a food safety education initiative. The initiative aims at raising awareness of food safety issues among schoolchildren to above 80% by the end of 2015. Educational materials on food safety are distributed in Mongolia to schoolchildren as part of a healthy school lunch programme.

Samoa has implemented a training programme for horticultural workers covering issues of food safety among other subjects, given that contaminated products of horticulture had been detected in the past. Similar programmes are foreseen in other Pacific island countries and areas.

In Mongolia, a mandatory training programme for food handlers has been introduced. Food safety training was also provided to food handlers and managers in large canteens in Viet Nam. Brunei Darussalam encourages the production of safe food of high quality through, among other approaches, an annual award.

In addition to food safety education programmes, Singapore regularly organizes a food safety month, during which multiple activities take place, including outreach to the communities and food processors. Also a food safety partnership scheme is in place to encourage the food industry to take action beyond maintaining high standards of food safety by playing a proactive role in educating the public on food safety.

### 5.4 Challenges

Developing countries reported that their capacity to conduct comprehensive training and education programmes and to run awareness campaigns is limited, and as a result such programmes often face difficulties. There is a need to provide technical assistance and resources to developing countries in the Region in order to promote education and training on food safety, including approaches to train trainers. Knowledge by producers and farmers of all aspects of food safety, including good agricultural and handling practices and the commitment to consider these by all relevant players, requires more outreach, education and training work in many countries of the Region.
Country case – Mongolia
Food safety education

School lunches should be safe, but 60% of foodborne diseases in Mongolia has been traced to the school lunch programme in primary schools. The news is troubling as children are at particularly high risk for foodborne illnesses because their immune systems are still developing and they weigh less than adults.

The school lunch programme implemented nationwide in 2006 has encouraged better school attendance and academic performance, but the nutritional values of meals have lagged far behind national standards. The programme also was intended to provide increased food security for children from low-income households, but instead major gaps in the food safety system have exposed youngsters to unhealthy and unsafe food.

A 2012 study showed that food advertisements are common around schools, with the vast majority (92%) for unhealthy foods. The foods most commonly advertised were sugar-substitute sweetened drinks and sweetened fruit juice and drinks. Schoolchildren know what they can buy with only 1000 tugrik, equivalent US$ 0.40. “You can buy so many favourite things if you have 1000 tugrik: chips, frozen yogurt, Lollipop, gummy candy,” pupils at an elementary school told a reporter.

“We’ve observed an interesting mind-set of parents,” says Dr Purevjav Mijeenov, deputy director of Mongolian University of Science and Technology, noting that parents worry more about missed lessons than poor nutrition. “There’s a big amount of marketing in schools because there’s never really been a standard,” says Dr Dagvadorj Ganzorig, food safety focal point in the Ministry of Health. “It’s challenging to ensure food safety in schools looking at all levels of food supply from farm to school, including imported food control, risk-based inspection, and good manufacturing practices and good handling practices in school settings.”

The Ministry of Health took an important step towards improving school food safety and reducing the risks children face from foodborne illnesses by issuing a ministerial order banning certain foods and services in schools. Citing INFOSAN procedures, agencies also agreed to share information about food recalls and illness outbreaks more quickly during emergencies. A multisectoral working group will examine laboratory capacity to detect food additives and contaminants, as well as the application of available standards. Raising children’s awareness on food safety and safe food handling and developing good eating habits are among
the key areas of the national food safety strategy. WHO has been providing support to the Ministry of Health to develop training and advocacy programmes on food safety for school directors, managers, food processors, food handlers and food inspectors. For example, the WHO Five Keys to Safer Food has been used since 2009 and has contributed to the prevention of foodborne diseases. The National Center for Public Health is producing a manual on the Five Keys for children, as well as food safety games and quizzes.

Mr Orgilbold Narandorj, a reporter for National Geographic Mongolia, says the media has an important role to play in making sure people understand that food safety is a health security issue. “It’s amazing the amount of new information I’m getting from meeting with technical people on food safety,” said Mr Narandorj, whose magazine is working with the Ministry of Health and WHO on a 2014–2015 food safety campaign for schoolchildren. “These messages need to be shared with the public, but technical people aren’t always the best communicators. That’s why we need to collaborate with media professionals. But health education shouldn’t be limited to printed media. We need to use social media to engage public.”

As part of the food safety campaign, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the General Agency for State Inspection, food laboratories, National Geographic Mongolia and the Mongolian University of Science and Technology are cooperating to conduct a safety evaluation of certain food additives and contaminants found in foods offered in the school lunch programme and sold near schools. Study findings will be used for educational videos, comics and articles for National Geographic Kids promoting healthy eating and importance of making healthy food choices.

“The study could have amazing implications in identifying gaps in a food supply system,” said Dr Ganzorig. “We plan to pilot healthy food and kids projects in schools.”

As part of a healthy school initiative, a health olympiad was conducted in secondary schools in 2013. The event had a significant impact in improving student knowledge of food safety. In addition, prevention of foodborne illnesses is now included in Mongolia’s integrated primary health-care package.
Country case – Republic of Korea
An enabling environment for a healthy dietary life for children: establishment and operation of Center for Children’s Foodservice Management

The Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (MFDS) of the Republic of Korea, in accordance with the Special Act on the Safety Management of Children’s Dietary Life, has developed guidelines and manuals for the systemic management of sanitation and nutrition for preschool children. In 2013, there were 88 Centers for Children’s Foodservice Management nationwide, with the number expected to grow to 188 by the end of 2014.

The main tasks and responsibilities of the centres include site visits to feeding facilities to guide sanitation management and customized education and training for children, food-service workers, teachers and parents.

In 2013, MFDS conducted a survey to gauge preschool teacher satisfaction with the Center for Children’s Foodservice Management, and it showed a very high overall score. In addition, there have been many achievements related to the dietary management of children, such as an improved cooking environment and sanitation practices of food service workers and better food habits among children. MFDS continues to review, evaluate and guide the activities of the centers to ensure they appropriately support sanitation and the nutrition management practices of childfeeding facilities.

Activities of Center for Children’s Foodservice Management
- **Sanitation control**: sanitation control for child-feeding facilities and their equipment, consultation service, support for the safe management of food ingredients, etc.
- **Nutrition control**: provision of sample recipes and menus, guidance on appropriate amount of food per meal and snacks.
- **Education and training**: customized sanitation and nutrition education and training for children, foodservice workers, parents and teachers, and the provision of information on sanitation and nutrition.
**Country case – Samoa**

**Safer horticulture production**

Samoa is implementing the Ola i Fanua Life in the Land project in collaboration with the New Zealand Primary Industry Training Organisation. The project aims at training people in basic horticulture practices and life skills. The programme provides formal recognition of skills that provide access to qualifications approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).

With support from WHO, three training modules and related materials were developed as part of the Ola i Fanua Life in the Land project. The first module deals with the prevention of foodborne diseases through safe horticulture production. The second module focuses on raising awareness of dietary-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), and the third module concerns the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The three modules provide horticulture workers with knowledge about food safety and hygiene requirements during primary production and the ability to identify and assess potential food safety risks to hygiene and food safety. The training also enables horticulture workers to describe monitoring and reporting procedures and demonstrate safe food handling practices. The training modules provide people working in the horticulture sector with the capacity to identify and describe risks to food hygiene and food safety, as well as the consequences of food contamination and control methods and associated documentation.

“This project has been very useful because trainees are getting hands-on experience about food safety risks,” said Mr Grant Ingles, Business Development Manager of the New Zealand Primary Industry Training Organisation. “We are learning good food handling practices that reduce the risk of produce being contaminated.”

The training modules have been developed in line with WHO’s *Five Keys to Growing Safer Fruits and Vegetables: Promoting Health by Decreasing Microbial Contamination* and is expected to improve the safety of fresh produce in Samoa.

The Government of Samoa is adopting the training model nationwide. This will provide a village-based vocational training system that teaches skills and educates local people about ways to grow safer food and stay healthy.
Theme 6
Capacity to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies

- Ninety-two percent of the countries in the Region are members of INFOSAN, and share information on food safety incidents and emergencies within the network.
- In contrast, guidelines or manuals on the surveillance, assessment and management of priority food safety events, as well as operational plans for emergency response to food safety events, are available only in 69% of the countries.
- Mechanisms for tracing, recall and disposal of contaminated products have been established in 92% of the countries in the Region.
- Rapid sharing of information on food safety events is, at times, hampered by the lack of political support and the insecurity about how shared information would be used by other countries.
- In countries where there is no clear lead for food safety emergency response plan development and implementation, the involvement of multiple agencies in food control led to considerable delays.

6.1 Overview

The protection of public health, through the provision of safe food, is the objective of national food control systems. However, even with the most developed food control system, system failures occur from time to time and unsafe food is sold, leading to foodborne disease. In some cases, emergencies will arise because of the severity of the disease, the extent of the distribution and/or volume of the contaminated food, or the system’s inability to effectively manage the situation. To limit the public health, economic and societal impacts of food safety emergencies, national governments must be able to detect, assess, and manage food safety incidents and emergencies. These capacities are also considered core capacities, as defined by IHR (2005).

The international distribution of food, as well as global travel, is common place today, therefore food safety must be tackled not only at the national level but also regionally and internationally.
through the sharing of information among national food control authorities. INFOSAN, which is a FAO/WHO initiative, facilitates sharing of such information.

**Strategic direction:** Contribute to health security by enhancing capacities to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies at national and international levels. This will be achieved through sharing relevant expertise, resources and information globally, regionally and subregionally.

**The indicators:** (1) Active participation in INFOSAN by all Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region. (2) Food safety emergency response plans in place, tested and updated as needed in Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region.

### 6.2 Regional progress

Almost all countries in the Region are members of INFOSAN, and they participate in the network through sharing information relating to food safety incidents and emergencies that are of regional and international interest. Some 92% of the countries in the Region were active members of INFOSAN in 2013, as compared with 73% in the preceding year.

The data from the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities indicate that guidelines or manuals on the surveillance, assessment and management of priority food safety events are available in 69% of the countries in the Region. In 73% of the countries, a roster of food safety experts with expertise on assessment and response to food safety events has been developed.

Significant progress in developing operational plans for emergency response to food safety events has been achieved in the Region. By 2013, 69% of the countries had such operational plans, while in 2012 only 50% of the countries reported the availability of food safety-related emergency response plans.

Mechanisms for tracing, recall and disposal of contaminated products have been established in 92% of the countries in the Region in 2013 as compared with 73% in the preceding year.
6.3 Activities

At the regional level

The first global meeting of INFOSAN, in 2010, agreed on the development of regionally based strategies for enhancing participation in INFOSAN. Such regional-based strategies will address common issues faced by INFOSAN members within a region with the goal of strengthening the network globally. A regional workshop on developing national food safety emergency response plans was supported for Asian countries of the Region.

Countries in Asia acted on this recommendation and met in November 2012 to develop and agree on priority actions to enhance INFOSAN in Asia. During this meeting, countries also agreed to take action to strengthen INFOSAN by supporting the development of in-country notification systems and risk analysis capacities for emergency situations.

In order to continue the work on strengthening INFOSAN in Asia, a Meeting on Strengthening INFOSAN and National Food Control Systems in Asia was held at the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific in Manila, Philippines, from 10 to 12 December 2013.

The meeting recognized the importance of countries taking appropriate action on INFOSAN alerts. It recommended that countries in Asia consider continuing collective efforts to contribute to early detection of and rapid response to food safety incidents of potential international concern, as well as supporting further INFOSAN activities in the Region and globally.

To enhance country capacity for surveillance of and response to food safety events, action was taken to develop approaches that would strengthen the surveillance of foodborne diseases through linking such efforts to existing disease surveillance systems, including event- and indicator-based surveillance. A guidance document on foodborne disease surveillance and response is currently under development based on the agreements and recommendations of the Informal Consultation on Strengthening the Surveillance of Foodborne Diseases in the Western Pacific Region. Such capacity is vital to contribute to a functional regional and international system.

In countries

Food safety emergency response plans and event-detection systems based on risk analysis capacities have been developed in several countries in the Region, including Fiji, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea.
The Lao People's Democratic Republic reviewed its food safety emergency response plan and tested it through an emergency exercise. The Republic of Korea has developed a variety of mechanisms designed to detect and manage food safety incidents. In the event that harmful products are identified, text messages are sent to 32,000 food handlers across the country and a point-of-sale system blocks their sale.

The Philippines held a meeting to discuss the development of a national food safety emergency response plan. Agreement was reached at this meeting on practical steps in this context, including on approaches to improve national INFOSAN procedures. Fiji and Mongolia have developed national INFOSAN procedures. FAO/WHO guidance materials on food safety emergency response were translated and made available to relevant authorities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.

Participation in INFOSAN in the Western Pacific Region is strong. Japan continued to provide and share test results of radionuclides in food in response to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The Republic of Korea supported the INFOSAN Asia community website creation and operation to facilitate information sharing in the Region.

### 6.4 Challenges

Some countries in the Region are yet to develop National Food Safety Emergency Response (FSER) plans. Access to specialized laboratories to detect foodborne hazards, especially those that are newly emerging, are limited in most countries in the Region, and the capacity of those laboratories is often restricted.

The involvement of multiple agencies in food control has delayed the development of food safety emergency response plans in countries where no clear lead for this activity has been designated.

Countries struggle to share information on a rapid basis due to a lack of political support within the country and also a lack of trust on how the information will be used in other countries.

FSER plans are often not well linked with national public health emergencies plans in line with IHR (2005) requirements.
Country case – Japan
Food safety a priority in Japan after nuclear emergency

The Government of Japan took rapid action in March 2011 to ensure food safety after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in the wake of a massive earthquake and tsunami. The Government quickly established provisional regulatory values and began monitoring foods and agricultural production. It restricted the distribution of food with radionuclide levels that exceeded the newly established levels and ordered the decontamination of farmland in order to ensure a sufficient supply of safe food.

By April 2012, limits were established and are still in effect for food on a basis one millisievert per year, which is consistent with current Codex Alimentarius guidelines. Local governments test food samples based on guidelines set by the national Government to ensure that foods that exceed the limits will not reach the marketplace. Test results are disclosed on the website of Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

If cases exceeding the limits are found for certain products from a particular region, shipment of those products from the same region will be restricted. A summary of the restrictions on distribution of food products issued since the disaster is available on the Ministry’s website.

The results of monitoring conducted after April 2012 indicate that violation rates are less than 1%. Estimates of exposure to radioactive cesium in foods have been decreasing steadily and now are less than 1% of one millisievert per year.

Since the disaster, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has been sharing the information, including test results through the INFOSAN and has served as the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point in Japan.

Japan continues to share accurate food safety information in a prompt and open manner. In addition, the Government has pledged to continue to work on the issue with the appropriate international organizations.

Further information can be found on the Ministry’s disaster-related food safety website: http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/topics/2011eq/index_food.html
Theme 7
Enhanced cooperative planning and implementation of regional and subregional food safety strategies and action plans

- To enhance collaboration among regional agencies and programmes with responsibility for food safety, the Food Safety Cooperation Working Group (FSCWG) was established in 2012 as a forum for such collaboration.
- The FSCWG is comprised of WHO, FAO, OIE, the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum, and the ASEAN Expert Group on Food Safety.
- Within INFOSAN, a regional information-sharing and collaboration mechanism among Asian countries (INFOSAN in Asia) was established.

7.1 Overview

There is a need to improve food safety within the Western Pacific Region, to increase protection of consumer health and to facilitate food trade through the collaborative efforts of Member States. This will contribute to the coordination of activities to support capacity-building in food safety at the national level, harmonization of legislation among Member States to facilitate trade, and implementation of joint regional activities in food safety to support national efforts in food control.

Effective partnerships in developing and strengthening food safety capacities among countries in particular, between developing and developed countries will contribute to global health security.

Collaboration at the regional level among key agencies and programmes with responsibility for food safety is of ultimate strategic importance to coordinate efforts in support of food safety country programmes, to avoid duplication of efforts and to make best use of available resources.
**Strategic direction:** Develop mechanisms for coordination, planning and implementation of regional, subregional and bilateral food safety strategies and action plans to maximize outcomes, minimize duplication and enhance the efficiency of resource management.

**Indictors:** (1) A functioning food safety cooperation working group set up to coordinate food safety activities in the Western Pacific Region. (2) Effective partnerships established and reinforced in Member States of the Western Pacific Region.

### 7.2 Activities

**At the regional level**
Resolution WPR/RC62.R5, adopted by the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2011, requested the Regional Director to enhance collaboration with partners and to establish a forum for such collaboration. In response, the Food Safety Cooperation Working Group (FSCWG) was established in 2012, comprised of WHO, the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum, the ASEAN Expert Group on Food Safety, FAO and OIE.

The FSCWG inaugural meeting was held in Canberra, Australia, on 12–13 April 2012. The aim of FSCWG is to serve as a platform to exchange information about food safety activities in the Region, and to seek opportunities for coordination of and collaboration on ongoing and planned projects and programmes for building capacities in food safety in countries of the Region. It is intended to ensure efficient use of available resources, enable leverage of each organization’s expertise, and provide potential for joint planning and advance coordination in the future. FSCWG could serve as a basis for developing synergies and for creating new opportunities to improve food safety in the Asia Pacific region. The second FSCWG meeting was held in Manila, Philippines, on 12 December 2013 to review progress made and challenges faced in food safety and to identify and coordinate food safety activities of common interest in 2014–2015.
A key achievement is the establishment of the INFOSAN in Asia as a regional information-sharing and collaborating mechanism. This regional initiative has already resulted in timelier reporting of food safety events of international concern in Asia, and increased information sharing relating to managing such events in a coordinated manner in the Asian Member States in the Region. INFOSAN in Asia facilitates the development of in-country notification systems, coordination mechanisms, and risk analysis capacities for and effective management of food safety emergency situations, as well as implementation of regional food safety strategies.

The Northern Pacific Environmental Health Association (NPEHA) has developed a strategic plan that among other issues has identified priority food safety actions for its members to undertake and to collaborate on where possible. NPEHA, which is made up of members from Guam, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Palau, has proved to be a successful subregional mechanism in furthering the development of food control systems.

Some regional training activities were conducted within the framework of the Global Foodborne Infections Network (GFN) with the aim of enhancing analytical programmes including salmonella in China and antimicrobial resistance surveillance in Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. In addition, steps were taken to prepare for a chemical risk analysis capacity-building activity and for capacity-building in laboratory analysis of pathogens in powdered infant formula in Malaysia and the Philippines. In the Pacific, the Pacific Syndromic Surveillance System is being used for early warning of possible foodborne disease outbreaks.

WHO coordinated the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund Joint Programme on Improving Nutrition, Food Safety and Food Security for China’s Most Vulnerable Women and Children, including the food safety sub-projects implemented by WHO, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and their national counterpart agencies from December 2009 to April 2013.
In countries
Several countries and areas in the Region organized seminars and provided training programmes involving all countries in the Region. For example, Hong Kong (China) ran a symposium on Food Claims: Truth and Myth. Japan provided a training and dialogue programme entitled Seminar for Food Safety Policy-making and Management for senior executives in charge of policy-making and management of food safety in their countries. The participants learned about risk management in Japan, with the aim of applying this information in the context of setting up their own national risk management programmes and of enhancing cross-country cooperation in this field. China hosted, with the support of the Codex Trust Fund, and in collaboration with FAO and WHO, a technical workshop on chemical risk analysis along the food chain to facilitate sharing of results of chemical risk assessment among countries in Asia. INFOSAN in Asia meetings have been supported by the Republic of Korea.

7.3 Challenges
Most countries recognized that it is critical to take part in regional and international food safety activities as a basis for the development of national food controls systems, but they also recognized that the limited resources are a challenge to their full involvement in such activities.

At the regional level, maintaining the dialogue among key players under the umbrella of FSCWG requires that the commitment of all partners is maintained and that the coordination of activities and cooperation on some projects yield tangible outcomes in the near future. In addition, reaching out to support bilateral collaboration between developed and developing countries and working with development banks and other donors are important but challenging for implementing joint activities in countries to enhance their capacities to manage all aspects of food safety.
Conclusions and future directions

Overall conclusions

Based on the activities undertaken and the subsequent development of national food control systems since the endorsement of the *Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015*, the strategy has proved to be a useful tool for Member States, WHO and development partners.

Member States are in the process of strengthening their national food control systems and are using the *Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015* as a guiding tool for developing and implementing national action.

Overall, much work has been done to establish and strengthen food safety programmes, including food control coordination mechanisms, regulatory frameworks and inspection services. Tasks such as training and raising public awareness, improving food safety data, and managing food safety incidents are key priorities for most countries. Good progress has been made as evidenced by the data from the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of IHR core capacities and other sources of information.

Despite good progress, many countries in the Western Pacific Region are still in the early stages of building effective and coordinated national food control systems. Recognizing differences in size, complexity and effectiveness of food control systems between developed and developing countries, progress is being made at different levels in accordance with country capacities and priorities.

Main challenges

Food safety remains a key health concern for countries in the Western Pacific Region. Globalization of the food chain and the increased trade in food and agricultural products, together with technological innovations and an increased concern by consumers about food safety outbreaks, have strengthened the focus on food safety and the risks it poses for consumer health.

Effective national food control systems require strong and structured collaboration among various sectors within each country, as well as among food safety authorities in different countries. A key challenge for countries is the establishment of effective cross-programme linkages and coordination, as well as multistakeholder strategic food safety planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
Effective coordination and the exchange of information among countries also remain key challenges for the Region. The capacity of countries to fully utilize the opportunities embedded in international food safety networks, such as INFOSAN, is yet to be maximized, and it continues to be a challenge for countries in the Region to manage and respond to international food safety alerts.

Increasing country capacities for surveillance of and response to foodborne disease is key to ensuring health security at the national, regional and global levels. Linking such efforts to existing mechanisms, such as event- and indicator-based surveillance, as well as to relevant mechanisms for information exchange on food safety, particularly INFOSAN, should increase efficiency and save scarce resources.

Country participation in priority Codex Alimentarius Committee meetings remains good. However, for most developing countries in the Region, effective use of Codex Alimentarius standards, guidelines and recommendations to inform policy and food standards setting remains a major challenge.

A key challenge for Member States is also a lack of access to financial capital. Significant public funding is needed to access adequate technical and administrative expertise and scientific resources, such as staff, laboratories and equipment. More work is also needed in a number of countries to enhance training of professionals in various fields of food safety and in providing educational programmes to consumers particularly children, and those involved in food production.

Climate change, emerging diseases, and the double burden of malnutrition and NCDs in the Pacific are other concerns that increase the need for effective and well-functioning national food control systems.

**Outlook and future direction**

Implementation of the *Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015* is ongoing and will continue in line with country priorities and needs. Cross-programme linkages need to be strengthened and food safety needs to be an integral part of overall national health security actions in line with IHR (2005). WHO will continue to respond to country requests for technical assistance and support capacity-building efforts to better prevent, plan, and respond to food safety incidents and emergencies.
Strengthened collaboration between technical agencies and development partners and the sharing of country practices are important for the optimal use of limited resources and for avoiding overlaps and gaps in the support provided.

Better integration of food safety into the larger development agenda is a key issue that needs to be addressed at all levels. Unsafe food and consequent foodborne diseases and food poisonings affect the social and economic capacity of populations, and affect the poor more intensely. The economics of safe food, therefore, goes far beyond direct health effects of unsafe food. The hidden cost to national economies due to, among other things, absenteeism, reduced productive capacity and reduced income of the poorest population can be immense. As income diminishes, the access of children to adequate education may be reduced since they may need to help support their families. A vicious cycle of poverty, ill health and lack of educational opportunities can be set in motion.

Food safety must also occupy a higher profile in the larger health security agenda. With food items not restricted to their local area of production and now crossing national borders, the spread of foodborne diseases needs to be properly addressed at the national, regional and global levels. Integrating surveillance of foodborne diseases and poisonings with existing mechanisms for disease surveillance, building capacities to mitigate and respond to food safety events within existing response mechanisms, and ensuring rapid information exchange on food safety events, all will contribute to enhancing global health security. Recent ongoing discussions with regard to global health security highlight the importance of food safety in this regard and create the necessary momentum to identify the elements of global health security that must be addressed, including aspects of food safety. In addition, there is a need to ensure population coverage for action on food safety, a means for financing such activities, and approaches to ensure resilience and the capacity to provide additional capacities in cases of emergency.

Overall, there is a political environment that encourages action to improve food safety at all levels. However, it is important to see food safety within a larger context and to place necessary food safety actions within the larger framework of economic development and health security.
The Regional Committee,

Recalling resolutions WHA53.15, which requested the Director-General to give greater emphasis to food safety; WPRO/RC52. R2 on the Western Pacific Regional Strategy for Food Safety; WPR/RC55/R6 on the importance of multisectoral collaboration and sharing food safety information among Member States; and WHA63.3, which confirmed foodborne diseases as a serious threat and included a series of food safety initiatives;

Acknowledging that the increase in international trade in food and in international travel may impact food safety;

Recognizing the importance of new developments that, in part, address food safety issues, including the International Health Regulations (2005) and the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases (2010);

Recognizing the importance and value of a common framework for effective planning and coordination of various capacity-building activities at both national and regional levels;

Having reviewed the draft Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy (2011-2015),

1. ENDORSES the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy (2011-2015);

2. Urges Member States:
   (1) To use the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy (2011-2015) as a framework for the strengthening of national food control systems to effectively protect public health, prevent fraud, avoid food adulteration, and facilitate safe and healthy food;
   (2) To advocate and disseminate the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy (2011-2015) to partner agencies to mobilize, coordinate and harmonize partner support in strengthening of national food control systems;
   (3) To enhance collaboration with partners to establish a food safety cooperation working groups, as described in the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy (2011-2015);
   (4) To report to the Regional Committee periodically on the implementation of the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy (2011-2015).

Seventh meeting, 13 October 2011
Annex 2

Bibliography


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