



International Projects

CAREC countries:
Strengthening food safety
standards to improve
wellbeing and facilitate trade

The story at a glance

- BSI's International Projects team was appointed to deliver a flagship technical assistance programme, in partnership with Asian Development Bank (ADB), aiming to improve public health and agri-food trade in 11 countries in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC).
- Despite accounting for 25% of the world's population and being well-placed geographically, the area's inter-regional trade is less than 1% of global trade*, due to various factors which have created barriers to food exports. ADB's analysis also indicated that weaker food safety systems than in developed countries has led to poorer health.
*CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda (CITA) 2030
- Four outputs were set for the project including: developing new regulations to be consistent with international food safety standards and recommended practice, assessing and improving the infrastructure of food production laboratories,

The CAREC member countries



delivering 133 workshops training key people across the food value chains and also, planning a coordinated regional approach to international food safety standards adoption.

- The project has improved risk management of foodborne illnesses, helped to reduce costs for food operators, and increased opportunities for exporters to trade with higher-value markets.



The starting point

The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme is made up of 11 partnership countries. Known as CAREC Member Countries (CMCs), they span an area stretching east to west from China to Georgia and north to south from Kazakhstan to Pakistan.

Even though the area accounts for a quarter of the world's population and is located between Asia and Europe, its share of global trade is low - 1%, compared to China, 15%.

The CMC's low share is **partly caused by weak food safety control systems**, which impose unnecessary costs, foster poor management of food safety risks, and result in barriers to food exports.

The majority of CMCs also lag behind other Asia-Pacific nations in terms of regional trade and investment integration and have weaker food safety systems than their developed country counterparts, leading to **poorer health**.



The challenge

By improving their food safety regimes, CMCs would open up trade opportunities, increase food security, boost economic prosperity and improve public health and wellbeing.

However, the CAREC countries vary greatly in terms of policy and operational food safety maturity. Fragmented governance frameworks, gaps in laboratory infrastructure, limited human capacity, and inefficient market structures are common.

It would be difficult for the CMCs to achieve their goals unless their food safety standards and support systems became more aligned – and to do this, they would need to adopt international good practice across the region, updating systems and regimes to be compliant with international standards and regulations.

Two critical barriers were the continued reliance on ex-Soviet GOST standard-based approaches for managing food safety and the lack of operational funding for state agencies that frustrates their ability to operate and implement change.

The solution

To address all these issues, the Asian Development Bank launched a technical assistance (TA) programme: Strengthening International Food Safety Standards in Agricultural Value Chains in the CAREC Member Countries (CMCs).

The project was to **engage with the eleven countries to improve each of their national food safety regimes and to promote trade between them**. Through training, workshops and regional networking activities, it provided TA across food safety legislation, regulation, laboratory management, food inspector training and food safety networks.

BSI's International Projects (IP) team was appointed as lead on this flagship programme. Their role was to support the CMCs in aligning their systems with international food safety standards and recommended practice, and **to strengthen their institutional capacity to implement these standards.**

Quality control procedures were put in place in the labs and the team ensured it was understood what issues needed to be addressed in order to secure international accreditation.

A four-part project

The IP team set four outputs for this extensive project.

1 The **first output** was to develop new regulations compliant with international food safety standards and recommended practice. The team would assess **the legal framework and food safety agencies in all eleven countries**, then draft new laws if required, update inspection checklists and advise on risk categorization. In all cases, the focus was on ensuring that key state agency managers understood the changes they should make, had ownership of them, and were equipped to pursue them.

2 The **second output** was to identify laboratory rationalization and infrastructure requirements for international food safety standards. Laboratories are an important component of food safety set-ups so **food production labs were assessed to make sure both their physical infrastructure and human resources were fit for purpose**.

The BSI team then recommended any required improvements and helped to implement them; if needed, they also helped the lab to develop investment and operational plans. After assessing the human resources, the team recommended any staffing improvements and drew up capacity-building and training plans, if needed. Quality control procedures were put in place in the labs and the team ensured it was understood what issues needed to be addressed in order to secure international accreditation.

3 The **third output** was to improve the capacity of state agencies to train staff to undertake correct food factory/operations inspections, enabling them to implement required measures to achieve international food safety standards.

One major obstacle to having international food safety standards adopted by institutions in the region was their capacity constraints. In most CMCs there are layers of market structure with different food safety management systems. **To bring consistency, BSI's IP team identified all the key people** in the food value chain – from retailers and wholesalers to food inspectors and technical staff – **and trained them in international best practices for food safety**. Key managers and staff in food safety agencies received particularly in-depth training in three areas: Good Hygiene Practices (GHP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and HACCP systems. A total of 133 workshops were delivered during in-country missions and a further 61 online training sessions.

4 The **fourth output** was supporting the planning process for a coordinated regional approach to international food safety standards adoption. Again with a view to harmonizing internationally-accredited food safety parameters across CMCs, the IP team planned **to create a peer-to-peer food safety network between the eleven countries**. This would help the various agencies to work together, share resources and learnings, and bring consistency to quality control.



The result

The project has helped to focus regulatory rules more clearly on the highest-priority food hazards, thus **reducing foodborne illness rates over time**. It has minimized unnecessary regulatory rules and testing requirements, **reducing unnecessary costs for food operators**. In addition, it has opened up more opportunities for food exporters from CMCs to trade with higher-value markets outside the region, **increasing their earning potential**.

In looking at developing new regulations compliant with international food safety standards and recommended practice, the BSI IP team promoted legislative reform, helping to formulate primary and secondary legislation in all countries. New draft laws on food safety were introduced in the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan and a new food law is about to be introduced to the Uzbek parliament, while in Tajikistan, revisions were made to the current law on food safety.

In addition, a range of new regulations and/or inspection checklists and risk categorization frameworks were introduced in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Kazakhstan Government also approved a new food safety road map committing to implementation of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP).

Key improvements were made for laboratory compliance with international standards and food safety laboratories in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan secured national accreditation, thanks to their improved quality control procedures. In addition, four laboratories were able to secure international accreditation in certain areas.



The various training sessions and workshops were very well attended, with 131 public and private sector representatives joining the online training in Mongolia alone – demonstrating the region's interest in adopting more modern food system control approaches. As a result of the training, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have started using the materials in their own training programs. There has also been increased interest from the private sector in pursuing HACCP voluntarily.

Delivering the training online was deemed so successful that future online training is being considered as a component of all technical assistance programmes by BSI, though always supplemented by in-country missions where possible.

Finally, with the fourth output, the IP team supported the process of developing a regional approach, facilitating a series of roundtable events and developing a mandate and operational plans for a peer-to-peer food safety network.

With all the positive results and overall, it being a successful project, BSI has received additional requests from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan to provide further technical assistance and continue supporting each country to strengthen their institutional capacity and align with, and adopt international standards.

Why BSI?

BSI is a global thought leader championing business excellence, innovation and best practice – whether by developing agile standards or offering quality management advisory services. BSI's International Projects team works with developing countries and transition economies to improve their quality infrastructure, trade and investment flows and market access, with the goal of boosting economic growth and prosperity.

Our aim

BSI's International Projects (IP) department was formed with a specific mission – to help overseas governments to improve their trade policy-making processes, unlock prosperity and boost private sector competitiveness.

For over 20 years, we've been providing regular 'best-in-class' expertise on trade promotion, regulatory compliance and export readiness on a range of technical assistance programmes in more than 100 countries.

Find out how International Projects can benefit your country

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If you have any questions please get in touch.



British Standards Institution

389 Chiswick High Road
London W4 4AL
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 345 086 9001

Contact us

bsigroup.com