UPDATE ON THE AFRICA PHYTOSANITARY PROGRAMME (APP)

TO THE 37TH TECHNICAL CONSULTATION AMONG REGIONAL PLANT PROTECTION ORGANISATIONS (TC-RPPO)

(Prepared by the IPPC Secretariat)

Update on APP implementation

[1] The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Secretariat is implementing the Africa Phytosanitary Programme (APP), to empower phytosanitary officers of national plant protection organizations (NPPOs) and relevant national stakeholders, with modern science and advanced digital tools to boost their capacity to rapidly detect, respond to and recover from outbreaks of plant pests that have regulatory, economic and environmental consequences.

[2] The APP is designed to enhance the resilience of Africa's plant health systems against significant plant pests and is envisaged to support all 54 African countries, starting with a pilot phase of 11 countries. The IPPC is implementing APP in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the African Union Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment.

[3] ***APP Phase two:*** APP Phase two was launched with a Train-the-trainer (ToT) workshop from 23-27 June 2025 in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. Nine countries joined this phase: Algeria, Cape Verde, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Liberia, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia. Once back in their countries, the participants, who became master trainers, will pass on the knowledge and skills to their peers, strengthening national and regional capacity in pest surveillance, diagnostics, identification and reporting and promoting regional collaboration.

[4] Trainers included expert pathologists, entomologists and plant health professionals from the NPPO of South Africa, FAO subregional office for Southern Africa, the APP Technical Working Group, CABI, IITA and the IPPC Secretariat. FAO Deputy Director-General Beth Bechdol delivered a recorded video message, emphasising APP's contribution to building a critical mass of phytosanitary personnel across Africa, equipped to prevent and address plant pest threats that jeopardise food security, agricultural trade, economic growth and the environment. John Henry Steenhuisen, the Honourable Minister of Agriculture of South Africa, delivered his remarks through the Head of the NPPO of South Africa. Also present were representatives from the European Commission, USDA APHIS, AU-IAPSC and NEPPO.

[5] Phytosanitary officers from six pilot countries- Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Zambia and Zimbabwe shared their experiences in APP implementation. They presented their progress and highlighted successes, challenges, gaps and opportunities.

[6] The IPPC Secretariat shipped 70 tablets to South Africa for each of the country's participants at the ToT.

[7] ***Capacity development***: In January 2025, the secretariat combined national training of two of the pilot countries with refresher training for officers trained last year in Cairo. The Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) hosted refresher training for English-speaking pilot countries (Egypt, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) while the NPPO of Cameroon hosted similar training for French-speaking countries (Guinea-Bissau, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and Morocco). Both sessions were facilitated by the IPPC Secretariat team.

[8] ***Tablets and field supplies***: The IPPC Secretariat dispatched tablets to all 11 countries in phase one. Nine of these have distributed the tablets and submitted lists of recipient phytosanitary inspectors. The other two countries are Sierra Leone, which intends to conduct a national training first and Morocco, which is yet to clear customs. The countries are already using the APP digital tools to conduct surveillance for major pests; however, Kenya, Mali and Cameroon are the most active users. The IPPC Secretariat has already initiated the procurement of 400 tablets for the countries in phase two. Part of the programme involves supporting countries with field survey supplies such as pheromone lures, insecticide strips and fruit fly traps. So far, the procurement of these supplies for countries in phase one is in advanced stages. The field supplies will be sent to FAO country representations or NPPOs.

[9] ***APP coordination and staff support****:* In March 2025, on the sidelines of CPM-19, the IPPC Secretariat invited African countries, APP donors and partners to a side meeting to discuss APP implementation. The African Union Inter-African Phytosanitary Council (AU-IAPSC) urged a more active role in APP implementation, decision-making and advocacy. Countries requested support in resource mobilisation for APP implementation, noting that APP is a unique and relevant programme, but funding is a big issue. He proposed identifying a champion to promote the programme or highlighting a country with notable progress.

[10] At the IPPC Secretariat, Avetik Nersisyan- Senior Agricultural Officer has been assigned to oversee APP activities, supported by Arop Deng, a consultant supporting APP day-to-day operations. Tommaso Teti and Marco Benovic, who were supporting finance and budgeting, have since left the secretariat. Other secretariat staff supporting APP are Descartes Koumba, Levon Rukavishnikov, Tanja Lahti, Anita Tibasaaga and Alessandra Falcucci, a GIS Specialist, supporting the mapping and mobile application work.

[11] The team meets weekly to discuss programme updates and review plans. The APP's Coordination Group, Technical Working Group and Communication Working Group (OCG, TWG and CWG) support the secretariat in implementing APP. Following a CPM-19 recommendation, the Secretariat developed APP governance options with associated Terms of Reference for an APP International Steering Committee, which was discussed at the CPM Bureau at their June meeting. The bureau decided to postpone final decisions until a new IPPC Secretary is appointed.

[12] ***Funding:*** In March, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, through the International Biosecurity Programme provided ~USD 1.2 million (£ 950 000) for APP implementation for two years. Additional funding of USD 600 000 until 2027 is from the European Commission. At CPM-19, FAO Director-General QU Dongyu announced FAO's additional allocation of USD 500 000 in its Programme of Work and Budget for 2026-27 to support the IPPC's work on APP and ePhyto. This was reconfirmed during FAO Conference in July 2025.

The IPPC Secretariat also created an APP Multidonor Trust Fund (MDTF) for contributions from donors and contracting parties.

[13] **APP integration with FAO and IPPC activities:** The Secretariat is liaising with the Digital FAO and Agro-informatics Division (CSI) to support the Geographic Information System (GIS) component of APP, including developing field survey maps, managing user accounts in software programmes by Esri and sharing FAO mapping layers in APP maps. CSI provides technical support when needed and jointly supervises the APP GIS specialist with the IPPC Secretariat. The Secretariat has also integrated some IPPC e-learning courses – pest surveillance and National Reporting Obligations from the Plant Health Campus into the APP training programme as they relate to APP's objectives. Participants in APP training are encouraged to complete these courses. Furthermore, the Pest Outbreak Alert and Response System (POARS) steering group made a presentation during the ToT in South Africa, highlighting the POARS criteria for assessing emerging pests and outlining areas of collaboration with APP. Further integration is possible with the IC Team on National Reporting Obligations (NROs), which requested to assess the list of regulated pests identified by countries implementing APP countries and to identify opportunities for pest reporting on IPP, based on data collected by APP countries.

[14] The IPPC Secretariat has also initiated collaboration with CABI to develop response plans for selected APP priority plant pests in three pilot countries.

[15] ***APP mobile application, mapping & GIS-Hub***: In May 2025, Alessandra Falcucci, GIS Specialist from FAO's CSI division, Descartes Koumba and Paola Sentinelli – Agricultural Officer and Knowledge Management Specialist, respectively, at the IPPC Secretariat, attended a weeklong training in Raleigh, North Carolina. The training, led by USDA-APHIS's Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) unit, focused on transferring management and maintenance of APP mobile application and mapping to the IPPC Secretariat. It covered creating georeferenced maps under different situations, creating survey questionnaires, adding new countries and pests to the APP GIS-Hub and modifying survey protocols.

[16] ***Training materials***: The Republication of the field survey protocols via FAO's Publication Workflow System (PWS) is ongoing. So far, the Field survey guidance for *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus* *and* Field survey guidance for *Spodoptera frugiperda* have been published by FAO. All other protocols, pending final publication, can be accessed on the APP webpage under Training materials here. Once all English versions have been published, they will be republished in FR and AR. The secretariat will also develop training videos on survey protocols for some pests and the APP GIS Hub.

APP pilot phase assessment

[17] The APP Phase 1 survey evaluated national plant pest surveillance systems and user experiences to identify programme strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

[18] Survey results indicated that countries with established surveillance programmes demonstrated better organization, resource availability, and better use of digital technologies, which significantly enhanced their pest monitoring efficiency. In contrast, countries with basic surveillance programmes faced challenges such as limited resources and reliance on manual means for data collection.

Survey responses indicated that the APP has substantially strengthened national surveillance systems, with 57 per cent of respondents reporting considerable improvements and 26 per cent describing APP as having a transformative and positive impact. Surveillance systems were enhanced through key technical support received from APP, including:

- Survey supplies like traps and lures,
- Targeted training,
- Allocation of sufficient resources, and
- Computer software enhancements.

[19] Despite the above-listed benefits, there were several obstacles to the adoption of new technologies, including limited infrastructure, absence of hardware and inadequate training. To address these challenges, recommendations from respondents emphasised the importance of offline-capable software, a reliable supply of equipment, structured training programmes, system integration and streamlined operations.

[20] Overall, survey respondents rated the APP positively, with 74 per cent acknowledging improved pest surveillance efficiency, 75.6 per cent noting faster inspection speeds and more accurate detection, and 74 per cent appreciating better reporting quality. Additional benefits reported included enhanced data collection, improved reporting processes and capacity development.

[21] Looking ahead, survey respondents indicated that future priorities should focus on investing in digital equipment (80 per cent), expanding training opportunities (78 per cent), securing funding (70 per cent), ensuring availability of field supplies (57 per cent) and boosting laboratory capacity (52 per cent). Sustainable APP implementation requires maintaining quality human resources, adequate equipment, stable funding, effective knowledge management, sound governance, and active stakeholder participation.

[22] The APP User survey revealed overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 95.6 per cent of users praising the effectiveness and relevance of the training provided. Training for NPPO staff was the most valued component (23 per cent), followed by digital surveillance techniques (20.4 per cent). Major barriers identified included budget constraints (85.6 per cent) and equipment or resource shortages (65.6 per cent). Suggestions for improvement included offering more practical and longer-duration training sessions, enhancing technology and tools, expanding surveillance efforts, strengthening programme management, fostering regional collaboration and enhancing data management.

[23] Overall, the APP is recognised as a comprehensive, technology-driven initiative that enhances pest surveillance, builds capacity and promotes regional cooperation, while effectively addressing resource and training challenges critical for long-term sustainability.

Communication

[24] The IPPC Secretariat produced a video giving an overview of APP, intended for NPPOs, RPPOs, current and prospecting donors and national leadership. The video aims to create awareness about the pest problem in Africa and how the IPPC, through APP is contributing to solutions through capacity development for digital pest surveillance. The video is available in English, French, Arabic, Spanish and Russian.

[25] In 2024, the programme was mentioned in FAO news and African regional media outlets (print, TV, audio) at least 45 times, creating awareness about the IPPC's support to countries in strengthening their national phytosanitary and pest monitoring capacity.

[26] Following the launch and ToT of APP phase two, the IPPC and APP were mentioned in over 10 news articles in the region. A continent-wide news release was issued, and social media visibility was greatly enhanced through tailored messaging and collaboration with the NPPO of South Africa.

Recommendations

[27] The TC-RPPO is invited to:

(1) *note* the updates on the Africa Phytosanitary Programme implementation;

(2) *note* the main outcomes of the assessment of APP implementation in pilot countries;

(3) *provide any* guidance to improve *the* Africa Phytosanitary Programme implementation.