The World Health Organization’s Regional Office for South-East Asia has been working closely with its Member States to improve the national food safety programmes, through technical assistance and collaborative activities. A regional food safety strategy has been prepared with the intention of assisting Member States to identify and prioritize food safety actions in relevant national sectors. The goal of the regional food safety strategy is to encourage Member States to initiate, develop and sustain multisectoral approaches and measures for the promotion of food safety among all the population groups. In reaching this goal, four strategic elements have been formulated, related in particular to food safety policies and plans of action; food control systems; control and prevention of foodborne diseases, including waterborne diseases, and establishment of effective surveillance systems; and partnerships and networking. Each strategic element has specific activities with clear expected outputs. The progress of achievement of Member States in each strategic element can be monitored and evaluated, based on clearly defined indicators.
Regional Food Safety Strategy
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**Writers**

Kunal Bagchi  
Nattapol Tangsuphoom

**Reviewers**

A B M Abdul Hannan  
Aishath Shazla  
Ashok Bhurtyal  
Bardan Jung Rana  
C Anoma Jayathilaka  
C R Dalal  
Crispin da Costa Araujo  
Dilruba Ahmed  
Ely Setyawati  
Endang Widyastuti  
Farzana Bilkes  
Ganesh Dawadi  
Gyanendra Gongal  
Gyem Bidha  
Indah Deviyanti  
Indira Chakravarty  
Jamyang Phunsho  
Jiwan Prava Lama  
Jose Moniz  
K Miyagishima  
Kim Chang II

Manasuwee Phaichamnan  
Maung Maung Lin  
Min Nwe Tun  
Myint Myint  
Nur Annisa Rahma  
Rinarso Ramadhan  
Ruki Fanaike  
Ryu Tok Su  
Sajidha Mohamed  
Sanjay Dave  
Sayed Humayun Kabir  
Sharad Adhikary  
Sok Yong Guk  
Songsak Srianujata  
Sugeng Eko Irianto  
Tetty H. Sihombing Misriati  
Tilakaratne Haputhanthirige  
Vinod Kotwal  
Visith Chavasit  
Zin Zin Nwe
# Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAFP</td>
<td>good animal feeding practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAHP</td>
<td>good animal husbandry practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>good agricultural practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GFN</td>
<td>Global Foodborne Infections Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHP</td>
<td>good handling practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLP</td>
<td>good laboratory practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GMP</td>
<td>good manufacturing practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRP</td>
<td>good retail practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRtP</td>
<td>good restaurant practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSP</td>
<td>good storage practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSVP</td>
<td>good street vending practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>good transportation practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>GVP</td>
<td>good veterinary practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>HACCP</td>
<td>Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points</td>
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<tr>
<td>IHR</td>
<td>International Health Regulations</td>
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<tr>
<td>INFOSAN</td>
<td>International Food Safety Authorities Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>International Organization for Standardization</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAARC</td>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for South-East Asia has been working closely with Member States since the early 1990s to improve national food safety programmes, through technical assistance and collaborative activities. Ten key strategies for achieving safe food for all in the region were identified and a 10-point regional strategy for food safety in the South-East Asia Region was formulated in 1998. The implementation status of the 10-point strategy was assessed, based on available data on food safety programmes in Member States, followed up by a survey conducted in 2008 to determine the food safety situation in the Region. Based on the assessment, the following need to be improved in several Member States: the food control systems; control and prevention of foodborne diseases, including effective surveillance systems; food laws, acts and standards; appropriate food safety policies/plans of action; technical capacity and financial resources; and alignment with international standards and alert systems.

Formulation of the global food safety strategy; rapid changes in globalization; the impact of climate change on food production, distribution and consumption; emerging biological and environmental contamination of the food chain; and new food technologies are issues that are closely related to food safety. Therefore, these issues should be reflected in the regional food safety strategy. Based on the food safety situation in the Region and global emerging issues in food safety, a draft Regional food safety strategy was prepared and was intended to assist Member States in developing a multisectoral approach and identifying and prioritizing food safety actions in all the relevant national
sectors. The strategy has taken into consideration the diversity exhibited in the nature and magnitude of food safety problems in Member States, as well as the available national capacities and technical expertise to address such problems.

The draft *Regional food safety strategy* was reviewed at the Regional Meeting of Programme Managers on Nutrition and Food Safety held in Jakarta, Indonesia, 27–30 November 2012. All recommendations from the review process had been incorporated and it was further reviewed and finalized at the Expert Group Consultation held at New Delhi, 20–21 August 2013.

The goal of the *Regional food safety strategy* is to encourage Member States to initiate, develop and sustain multisectoral approaches and measures for the promotion of food safety among all population groups. It is expected that, by 2017, all Member States will have: documented a national food safety policy/plan of action; established functional national Codex committees and International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) focal points, with active participation at regional and global meetings; formulated protocols and mechanisms for investigating outbreaks of foodborne disease; established integrated/coordinated national surveillance systems for foodborne diseases; and established standards, legislation and monitoring criteria for the entire food supply chain, including street foods.

In reaching this goal, four strategic elements have been formulated, related in particular to food safety policies and plans of action; food control systems; control and prevention of foodborne diseases, including waterborne diseases, and establishment of effective surveillance systems; and partnerships and networking. Each strategic element has specific
activities with clear expected outputs. With support and technical leadership provided by the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, it is expected that Member States will achieve all expected outputs within the time frame of this strategy. The progress of achievement of Member States in each strategic element can be monitored and evaluated, based on clearly defined indicators.
1. Introduction

Background

Food safety is the assurance that food will not cause harm to the consumer when it is prepared and/or eaten according to its intended use (1). Microbiological contamination of food and water is a major cause of deaths and illness due to diarrhoea, which is estimated to kill about 2.2 million people annually, including 1.9 million children (2). In order to prevent foodborne disease and improve food safety, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been assisting its Member States to establish and strengthen their national programmes for assuring the safety of food, from production to consumption.

Through its resolution WHA53.15, the Fifty-third World Health Assembly in 2000 urged Member States to recognize food safety as an essential public health function and to help reduce the burden of foodborne disease (3). To enhance national capacities in conducting integrated surveillance of foodborne and other enteric infections, from production to consumption of foods, the WHO Global Salmonella Surveillance (GSS), now called the Global Foodborne Infections Network (GFN), was also initiated in 2000.

As result of a strategic planning for food safety organized by WHO (Geneva, February 2001), the Global strategy for food safety (3) was developed in 2002, with seven key components: (i) strengthening surveillance systems for foodborne disease; (ii) improving risk assessments; (ii) developing methods for assessing the safety of the
products of new technologies; (iv) enhancing the scientific and public health role of WHO in the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC); (v) enhancing risk communication and advocacy; (vi) improving international and national cooperation; and (vii) strengthening capacity in developing countries.

As part of its global strategy to reduce foodborne diseases through education of the general population, WHO developed a set of simple and clear messages – “Five keys to safer food” (4) – that were easy to understand and could be easily adapted for different target audiences. The “Five keys” messages were: (i) keeping clean; (ii) separating raw and cooked food items; (iii) cooking thoroughly; (iv) keeping food at safe temperatures; and (v) using safe water and raw materials. In addition to its extensive use in promoting safe food during routine food handling and preparations globally, the “Five keys” message has also been used widely in emergency situations to prevent and control disease outbreaks.

In collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), WHO has been supporting Member States by holding technical consultations, workshops, conferences and related activities to improve the food safety programme for over 50 years.

The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) was set up in 2004 by WHO, in collaboration with FAO, to promote the exchange of food safety information and to improve collaboration among food safety authorities. INFOSAN currently has 181 Member States and works actively in resolving most global food safety events. Each Member State has a designated INFOSAN focal point for communication between national food safety authorities and the INFOSAN secretariat regarding urgent events.

In the South-East Asia Region, access to safe food remains a challenge, with a large number of foodborne diseases widely prevalent in most Member States. Each year,
an estimated 5 billion cases of diarrhoea are reported globally in children aged 5 years and above, and 3.2 billion of these cases are reported from South-East Asia (5). Foodborne and other infectious enteric diseases increasingly affect people’s health and well-being and also have economic impacts on affected individuals, communities and countries.

Since the early 1990s, the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia has been working closely with Member States to improve national food safety programmes through technical assistance and collaborative activities. A review of the food safety initiatives in the region was conducted in 1993, followed by a consultation on a strategic plan for food safety in the South-East Asia Region in 1998, which resulted in formulation of the 10-point regional strategy for food safety in the South-East Asia Region in the same year (6).

The 10-point regional strategy for food safety in the South-East Asia Region identified 10 key strategies for achieving safe food for all in the region: (i) food safety policy; (ii) food legislation; (iii) food control and inspection; (iv) analytical capability; (v) epidemiological system; (vi) relationships with the food industry and trade; (vii) relationships with food service providers and retailers; (viii) relationships with consumers; (ix) education and training; and (x) research in food safety. All Member States were urged to adopt the strategy and develop their national food safety policies.

To follow up the activity of food safety in Member States of the South-East Asia Region, questionnaires were sent to all member countries, beginning in 1999, to assess the implementation of the 10-point regional strategy for food safety in the South-East Asia Region (6). It was found that only a few countries had made significant progress. At that time, food safety programmes dramatically varied among Member States, with a limited integration of the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) into food regulation and inspection. Major concerns were the adequacy and
relevance of food legislation and regulations, the need for technical assistance, resources and capacity-building.

Later that year, the regional food safety strategy was endorsed by the Fifty-third session of the Regional Committee, in resolution SEA/RC53/R7, in which Member States were encouraged to adopt the regional strategy as a framework for development of national food safety programmes and to provide adequate resources to establish and strengthen these programmes, with an emphasis on preventive approaches.

In accordance with the resolution of the Regional Committee, a regional consultation on food safety (7) was held in 2001, to review the implementation of the regional strategy on food safety (6) and other food safety issues in the region. The consultation addressed the needs for capacity-building with support from the regional office; updating and revising food legislation; establishment of a national food safety body; establishment of databases for contamination monitoring and foodborne disease surveillance; review of inspectors’ qualifications and training; development of a risk-communication strategy; and studies for assessment of the exposure of consumers to chemical contaminants in food. The importance of research in identifying priority foodborne hazards was also recognized by the consultation.

The 59th session of the Regional Committee in 2006 decided in resolution SEA/RC59/23 to hold technical discussions on nutrition and food safety in the South-East Asia Region in the following year. The discussions (8) led to the adoption of resolution SEA/RC60/R3 at the 60th session of the Regional Committee in 2007, calling for the development of an integrated national nutrition and food safety policy and plan of action; initiation of action-oriented research and studies; establishment of a monitoring and surveillance system for food safety; education of target groups/stakeholders; and resources provided by the Member States to sustain the programmes. The technical group recommended that the WHO Regional Office for South-
East Asia should provide support and technical leadership to Member States for the development of national policies and plans of action; assist in developing evidence-based actions for food safety programmes, assessment, monitoring and surveillance; estimate the economic burden caused by foodborne disease; establish an information networking and sharing mechanism in the region; and ensure adequate resources.

A follow-up survey (9) was conducted in 2008, to determine the situation in relation to food safety in the region (10). The report highlighted the need for greater national commitment to the implementation of the regional strategy; development of integrated national plans of action for food safety; updating of food safety policy and legislation; establishment of integrated monitoring and surveillance systems; attention to food markets and food for domestic consumption; and translation of research results into policy.

Information gathered by the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (11) in 2009 to determine the current status of the implementation of the regional food safety strategy indicated that food safety programmes in the Member States were progressing at a slow pace, and alignment of the national programmes with the regional food safety strategy remained inadequate. Several Member States lacked adequate resources (manpower and equipment) for effective functioning of the national food safety programmes, while participation of other Member States in the Codex process was minimal.
2. Regional experience

A joint WHO–FAO mission in 2009 reviewed the food safety policy and strategy of the Ministry of Public Health, Thailand, with the objective of evaluating the current status and advice on actions and policies to strengthen the strategic development of the national food safety programme. The establishment of a national Food Control Authority as an independent agency, developing effective food laws to provide more protection to the domestic consumers, and ensuring integration of food control along the entire food chain were some of the key recommendations of this mission (12).

A recent review of food safety research in India (13) reported that only a limited number of studies have been conducted over the years to assess the risks to the health of consumers posed by adulterants, additives and contaminants. Protection of the population’s health from such food-related hazards would be considered a public health priority. Additional focus should be on risk assessments and early warning/rapid alert situations, with reference to the exportation of agro-products and processed foods and their compliance with national and international market standards.

Street foods have been an important source of food for a large proportion of the population groups in urban and pre-urban settings in the Member States. Unfortunately, street foods as a source of foodborne illnesses also hold important public health significance. In 2010, the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia examined the existing status of the safety aspect of street foods in South-East Asia. This
was followed by a regional consultation on promoting safe street foods in Asia. The definition, principles and practices, monitoring and evaluation criteria, legislation issues and road-maps to ensure safe street foods in the Member States were examined and established (14).
3. WHO initiatives

Food safety has been addressed as a strategic objective (15) for 2008–2013, focusing on developments and capacity-building for integrated food safety and nutrition policies and effective national food control systems. The strategic objective proposed to (i) develop networking and coordination and build leadership at country, regional and global levels; (ii) produce food safety standards, guidelines or training materials; and (iii) establish and strengthen systems for surveillance, prevention and control of foodborne diseases and food hazard monitoring and evaluation programmes.

In 2010, the WHA63.3 resolution (16) requested advancement of food safety initiatives to prioritize food safety programmes in Member States. Member States were urged to establish several activities, some of which are to: (i) establish and maintain activities for responding to the natural occurrence, accidental release or deliberate use of biological and chemical agents or radionuclear materials that affect health; (ii) further develop and implement the core capacities as defined in the International Health Regulations (2005); (iii) enhance the integration of food safety considerations into food aid, food security and nutrition interventions, in order to reduce the occurrence of foodborne diseases and improve the health outcomes of populations, in particular those of vulnerable groups; and (iv) participate actively in the Codex Alimentarius Commission’s standard-setting process and to adopt Codex standards whenever appropriate.

The resolution also called for further development of INFOSAN, by encouraging the participation of all Member States through timely sharing of data, information...
and knowledge. WHO was requested to further develop INFOSAN through the implementation of WHO’s *Global strategy for food safety* (3); to strengthen INFOSAN’s emergency function and to ensure sustainable support; and to encourage communication and technical exchange of risk assessments and best practices among members of INFOSAN, among other activities (16).

The Regional Office undertook reviews of the national Codex committees and INFOSAN committees in its Member States. This was achieved through perusal of existing information and interviews with key stakeholders (17, 18).

In recognition of the rapid changes at global, regional and country levels with regard to food safety programmes; the emergence of new challenges in food safety issues; and the increase in international trade and commerce of food items, bringing with it control and standards issues, it was considered timely to review the existing regional food safety strategy and introduce amendments as appropriate.

This exercise, which commenced in mid-2011, utilized available information on food safety programmes and the status of their alignment with the *10-point regional strategy for food safety in the South-East Asia Region* (6), in addition to conducting telephone and electronic interviews with the national food safety focal points, and perusing international and regional publications on food safety issues. The draft regional food safety strategy was formulated with the overall purpose of assisting Member States to strengthen their national food safety programmes, considering the existing situation, requirement and technical capacity of each Member State. The draft regional food safety strategy has been reviewed by Member States and a select panel of experts before its submission to the Regional Committee of the South-East Asia Region.
4. Food safety programmes in Member States

Food safety programmes in Member States were reviewed, based on available data on their food safety activities. Continuous updating is required and WHO country offices are requested to verify the accuracy of the available information in relation to national food safety focal points. Major food safety activities in Member States of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia are summarized in Annex 1.

4.1 Food safety policy

Several Member States do not have any specific policy on food safety, although action plans for food safety have been developed in all Member States. Single food safety agencies set up to work specifically as the key authority on food safety have been established in India (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India), Indonesia (National Agency for Drug and Food Control), Maldives (Maldives Food and Drug Authority), Nepal (Department of Food Technology and Quality Control) and Thailand (National Food Commission). A National Food Safety Advisory Council is under formation in Bangladesh, which will develop the policy and strategy for food safety and quality control.

A common problem in most Member States is that several government agencies are involved in food safety programmes, with a minimum level of coordination and cooperation among them. In some Member States, the responsibilities of the sectors involved in food safety remain unclear, with an absence of any established leadership in programme implementation and monitoring.
4.2 **Food legislation**

Food legislation in several Member States has been updated. Revision of food standards/acts/regulations has been undertaken in order to modernize and harmonize national legislation with the Codex guidelines. Bhutan established its “Food rules and regulations” in 2007; Indonesia launched the Ministry of Health’s regulation for the “Hygiene and sanitation requirements of catering” in 2011, and in the same year, India launched the “Food safety and standards rule and regulation act” and Maldives drafted its “Food act”. The food safety monitoring guideline of Timor-Leste was developed and reviewed in 2010.

Most of the food regulations and standards in the region remain voluntary, with a generally low level of enforcement of regulations. Authorities responsible for the enforcement of food laws and regulations do not have clear identified scope of authority and operating procedures. Food safety systems and standards for manufacturing food for export are different from those for food for domestic consumption, with variable levels of enforcement. Attempts have been made to harmonize food regulations among the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

4.3 **Food control and inspection**

Strengthening and improvement of the national food control and inspection systems have been included in the plans of action of all Member States. The concept of a “farm-to-table” approach has been adopted and implemented by several others. However, food control activities in many Member States continue to rely on reactive procedures, with an emphasis on infrastructure and end-product analysis rather than preventive activities. The low level of enforcement is a persistent problem. The Regional Office for South-East Asia has continued to provide technical
assistance to Member States to enhance national capacities for monitoring, assessment and control of food safety through risk assessment.

The HACCP principles have been introduced as part of the regional strategy and most of the Member States now conduct their own food control and inspection activities based on these principles. Routine post-marketing food monitoring and control measures have been established in most Member States, while pre-marketing inspection exists in few Member States (Indonesia, Thailand).

The “code of practice” for food inspectors, and guidelines for risk-based inspection and sampling have been developed and introduced in some Member States, although appropriate inspection guidelines and manuals for hazard investigation in the production and manufacturing process are lacking in several instances. The results of monitoring and inspection and other food control activities, e.g. inspection reports and analyses, are not made public in most Member States and data remain confined to the relevant technical units or departments. Food inspectors in several Member States also lack sufficient training and are too few in number to make any real positive impact on monitoring. The human resources aspect of food inspection remains a neglected issue in most Member States.

4.4 Analytical capability

All Member States have established national food analysis laboratories. In several Member States, provincial and district-level food analysis laboratories are also operational. Overall, analytical capacities vary considerably among the Member States. Financial resources for the maintenance of laboratory equipment and facilities remain a major concern in many Member States, particularly those where the national laboratories were established with external support, including from WHO. Irregular and insufficient provision of the necessary equipment and supplies, and lack of financial
resources and trained technical staff are other constraints encountered. Data- and information-sharing or coordination between different laboratories is limited.

Accreditation of the public and private laboratories is limited to few Member States (India, Indonesia and Thailand). Even in such instances, accreditation lacks uniformity and grading.

Standardized methods for food sampling, food analysis, monitoring of food contaminants, and quality-assurance systems to meet international standards have been developed in some Member States (Indonesia, Thailand). Several constraints remain in others – for example, inadequately certified reference materials, calibration facilities for operating equipment and standard measurement devices. The Department of Medical Services in Thailand has developed test kits for primary screening of various food contaminants that have been successfully used at the national level and have also been used by some other Member States.

4.5 Epidemiological systems

Activities related to foodborne disease surveillance systems remain limited in several Member States. Some have taken steps to strengthen their existing national databases on surveillance of foodborne diseases, with assistance provided by the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia. A laboratory-based foodborne diseases surveillance system, along with harmonized guidelines for data collection and establishment of a microbiology testing unit at its National Public Health Laboratory, were achieved in Bhutan, with input provided by the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia.

A food safety database information system, linked to a national network mechanism for microbiological risk assessment, i.e. rapid response, was established in Indonesia, with WHO support to enable effective communication
between agencies. A similar system is operational in Thailand, along with a number of information networks and response systems, namely the Food Alert System of Thailand and Thailand FoodNet.

Various regional and international information networks on food safety are functioning in the region – the ASEAN Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, and Asia FoodNet. To strengthen the rapid alert system in food safety emergencies, a regional meeting of GFN/Asia FoodNet was organized in 2010.

In several Member States, foodborne illnesses are reported in general terms. There are no specific surveillance data on foodborne illness, owing to the lack of epidemiological investigation to trace the causal factors of foodborne disease outbreak and lack of specialized laboratory support for investigating and confirming the causative agents.

The first global meeting of INFOSAN was held in 2010 to provide a forum for members to discuss the current approaches and existing mechanisms of INFOSAN, including a plan for its enhancement and strengthening the capacity of members’ participation. A more detailed review of INFOSAN in the region was recently prepared (17). Even though information network systems have been developed in the region, they are in the early stages of development. Mechanisms for collection, linking and updating of relevant data are needed, and the issue of sustainability also needs to be addressed.

### 4.6 Relationships with the food industry and trade

Collaborations with food producers, industry and trade exist in many Member States, with the approval of the local and national authorities. Training is also available on HACCP and
Food safety management systems for food manufacturers, including small- and medium-scale food industries. The HACCP principle has been adopted and implemented by the industry, with a certification system conducted by the competent authorities in several Member States. However, compliance of HACCP and good practices, i.e. good agricultural practice (GAP), good handling practice (GHP), good manufacturing practice (GMP) and good veterinary practice (GVP) in food production and manufacturing, have remained voluntary. Many food industries in the region lack in-house controls based on the HACCP system, and commitment to food safety is not fully integrated into the operating cultures of many food establishments, especially those operating on small and medium scales.

Food manufacturer associations exist in most Member States in the region, while a consumer–industry association/workforce is lacking. In some Member States where food export is a high-value industry, producers and industries work closely as associations/networks and play important roles in the national food safety programmes. Various import–export certification systems have been established based on Codex guidelines, although such systems are not mandatory. In many situations, multiple agencies have been entrusted with grading and issuing certificates.

4.7 Relationships with food service providers and retailers

Effective regulations and standards for food service providers and retailers are limited in Member States. As compliance with most regulations is voluntary, enforcement remains weak and varied, especially for restaurants and catering establishments, with limited registration and inspection. Standards for domestic food differ significantly from those for exported food items.
Initiatives to recognize street food facilities that comply with standards for clean and hygienic food exist in several Member States. Similarly, “healthy market” programmes for promoting clean and hygienic sale of raw and processed foods have been introduced in some Member States. The “Clean food, good taste” programme for encouraging street food vendors in Thailand, and the “Healthy market” programme in Indonesia may be cited as good examples of such initiatives. Associations of food retailers and service sectors – hotels, restaurants, hospitals, caterers and street vendors – exist in some Member States, although their participation as stakeholders in the development of national food safety programmes could be vastly expanded and improved.

4.8 Relationships with consumers

Community awareness of food safety and consumer protection acts has been established in some Member States. In India, consumers’ organizations have participated in several technical subcommittees on food safety, and representatives from the Consumers’ Protection Board attended the shadow national Codex Committee. The “Consumers’ Complaint Service” was set up in Indonesia to handle consumer complaints and other issues regarding food quality and safety. As part of a collaborative venture between academia and consumers, Thailand’s Consumer Foundation collected food samples from the market and sent these to the laboratories of the local universities for analysis. The mobile food courts in Bangladesh have often included the views and expectations of a consumers’ consortium. Seen in total, however, the extent of participation of consumers as stakeholders in national food safety programmes and in national Codex activities still remains minimal.
4.9 Education and training in food safety

All Member States are involved in improving the quality of training of food inspectors, food handlers and relevant laboratory staff. WHO has continued to provide technical assistance to Member States. Mention should also be made of the simple awareness tool with five messages – “Five keys to safer food” (4) – that was developed, translated into regional languages and distributed to Member States. The “Five keys to safer food”, along with additional information entitled First adapt, then act! (19) were widely received by national counterparts and consumers and significantly established the foundation for building additional food safety awareness and capacity-building activities.

Education for consumers and training for the programme and technical staff involved with the national food safety programmes should be further expanded, along with development of appropriate information and communication materials.

4.10 Research in food safety

Research and development capacities have remained limited across the region, as also has the extent of collaboration and cooperation between academia and the operational aspects of national food safety programmes. Funding and resource mobilization need to be strengthened, in order to build national capabilities in generating scientific data as a major part of the science-based approach to food safety and to support the statements and position taken by the Member States at international standard-setting meetings and commissions.
5. Strategy

5.1 Rationale

• Access to safe foods remains a major challenge for the populations of the Member States of WHO’s South East Asia Region.

• In 1998, the 10-point regional strategy for food safety in the South-East Asia Region (6) was developed to assist Member States in enhancing food safety programmes in their countries. This was followed by several regional-level meetings and consultations to address the emerging technical needs.

• Periodic follow-ups and occasional assessments of national food safety programmes and their alignment with the 10-point regional strategy for food safety in the South-East Asia Region (6) have been undertaken over the years. The recurring observations have been that while food safety programmes are in place in all the Member States, their effectiveness and magnitude of activities do not conform to the desired standards or to the policy and approaches of the 10-point regional strategy for food safety in the South-East Asia Region.

• Improvement in food control systems; control and prevention of foodborne illnesses, including effective surveillance systems; new food laws, acts and standards; appropriate food safety policies/plans of action; limited technical capacity and financial resources; and alignment with
international standards and alert systems, remain major constraints in several Member States.

- Formulation of the global food safety strategy; rapid changes in globalization; the impact of climate change on food production, distribution and consumption; emerging biological and environmental contamination of the food chain; and new food technologies are affecting all aspects of food safety programmes. These issues need to be reflected in the regional food safety strategy.

- The Regional food safety strategy is intended to assist Member States in developing a multisectoral approach and identifying and prioritizing food safety actions in all the relevant national sectors.

- The strategy has taken into consideration the diversity exhibited in the nature and magnitude of food safety problems in Member States, as well as the available national capacities and technical expertise to address such problems.

5.2 Goal

The goal of the Regional food safety strategy is to encourage Member States to initiate, develop and sustain multisectoral approaches and measures for the promotion of food safety among all population groups.

Indicators

By 2017, all Member States will have:

1. documented a national food safety policy/plan of action;

2. established national Codex committees, functional INFOSAN emergency contact points and focal points with active participation at regional and global meetings;
(3) formulated protocols and mechanisms for investigating outbreaks of foodborne disease;

(4) established integrated/stand-alone national surveillance systems for foodborne disease;

(5) established standards, legislation and monitoring criteria for the entire food supply chain, including street foods.

5.3 Strategic elements

The Regional food safety strategy has the following four strategic elements:

(1) developing country-oriented, integrated and multisectoral food safety policies and plans of action in the Member States of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia;

(2) addressing appropriate food control systems that encompass the entire food chain, with focus on consumers and in alignment with international systems;

(3) addressing effective control and prevention mechanisms for foodborne diseases, including waterborne diseases, and establishing effective surveillance systems;

(4) strengthening partnerships and networking for increased participation and contribution at standards-setting meetings of stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels.

5.4 Time frame

The proposed duration of the Regional food safety strategy is 5 years (2013–2017).
6. Strategic elements, activities and expected outputs

6.1 Strategic element 1

Developing country-oriented, integrated and multisectoral food safety policies and plans of action in the Member States of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia

Activities

(1) Provide technical input to Member States in the formulation of comprehensive national food safety polices and relevant plans of action.

(2) Encourage Member States to promote food safety as an essential component of their national health, food, agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, water sanitation and environment-related programmes, while ensuring alignment with nutrition and food security interventions.

(3) Encourage Member States to include food safety issues in the general education and training curricula of relevant training programmes, of all stakeholders, within and outside the health and food sectors.

(4) Encourage Member States to facilitate the preparation and dissemination of tools to strengthen the competencies of all relevant personnel at various levels involved in all related sectors with the food safety programme.

(5) Encourage the Member States to ensure that national disaster-management programmes maintain strong food safety components.
Expected outputs

(1) Formulated comprehensive national food safety policies and relevant plans of action.

(2) Food safety becomes an essential component of the national health, food, agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, water sanitation and environment-related programmes.

(3) Food safety issues are included in the training curricula of general education and relevant training programmes, within and outside the health and food sectors.

(4) Tools to strengthen the competencies of all relevant personnel at various levels involved in the food safety programme are prepared and disseminated.

(5) Food safety components are adequately incorporated in national disaster-management programmes.

6.2 Strategic element 2

Addressing appropriate food control systems that encompass the entire food chain with focus on consumers and in alignment with international systems

Activities

(1) Assist Member States in establishing appropriate preventive approaches to improve food safety and quality through the application of good practices, including GAP, good animal husbandry practice (GAHP), good animal feeding practice (GAFP), GMP, GHP, good storage practice (GSP), good transportation practice (GTP), good retail practice (GRP), good street vending practice (GSVP), good restaurant practice (GRtP) and HACCP, wherever relevant.
(2) Provide technical assistance for the establishment/upgrading of national laboratory systems with enhanced capability, following good laboratory practice (GLP), and with focus on the decentralization of laboratory activities.

(3) Provide the technical assistance necessary to create suitable food laws and regulations.

(4) Provide the technical input necessary for the harmonization of food standards and related texts with the Codex Alimentarius standards and based on the principles of food safety risk assessment where Codex standards do not exist.

(5) Facilitate the preparation and dissemination of standardized tools and techniques to strengthen the competencies of inspectors and other personnel from food, health and other related sectors involved in food safety interventions.

(6) Provide technical assistance for the development of national food traceability and recall systems in line with the FAO/WHO guide.

(7) Provide technical assistance in strengthening food safety and quality-control systems, with emphasis on traceability in the food supply chain, to enable recall of unsafe food.

**Expected outputs**

(1) Established preventive and control approaches to improve food safety and quality, through the application of good practices, including GAP, GAHP, GAFP, GMP, GHP, GSP, GTP, GRP, GSVP, GRTP and HACCP, wherever relevant.

(2) Established/upgraded national laboratory systems, including networking and accreditation of laboratories.

(3) Created suitable food laws and regulations.
(4) Developed food standards and related texts.
(5) Developed and disseminated standardized tools and techniques.
(6) Developed national guidelines for food traceability and recall systems and identified a focal office.
(7) Implemented food safety and quality-control systems, with emphasis on traceability and recall.

6.3 Strategic element 3

Addressing effective control and prevention mechanisms for foodborne diseases, including waterborne diseases, and establishing effective surveillance systems

Activities

(1) Provide technical assistance to Member States to establish effective control and preventive mechanisms for foodborne diseases.
(2) Facilitate the establishment of surveillance and alert systems for foodborne disease and appropriate systems for monitoring biological, chemical, radionuclear and physical hazards at different points of the food chain.
(3) Encourage Member States to establish linkages between the foodborne diseases monitoring and surveillance systems and data-collection and management systems.
(4) Promote activities to link data on foodborne diseases with those for food security and food aid programmes.
(5) Provide technical assistance to share information on outbreaks of foodborne diseases and data on food contamination with INFOSAN, the IHR network and other relevant alert systems.
(6) Provide technical support to Member States in responding to emergency outbreaks of foodborne diseases and climate-change-related environmental hazards relating/leading to foodborne diseases.

**Expected outputs**

(1) Established effective control and preventive mechanisms for foodborne diseases.

(2) Established surveillance and alert systems for foodborne disease and appropriate systems for the monitoring of biological, chemical, radionuclear and physical hazards at different points of the food chain.

(3) Established linkages between the foodborne diseases monitoring and surveillance systems and data-collection and management systems.

(4) Established linkages of data on foodborne diseases with those for food security and food aid programmes.

(5) Established mechanism for sharing information on outbreaks of foodborne diseases and data on food contamination with INFOSAN, the IHR network and other relevant alert systems.

(6) Provision of technical support to Member States in responding to emergency outbreaks of foodborne diseases and climate-change-related environmental hazards relating/leading to foodborne diseases.

### 6.4 Strategic element 4

Strengthening partnerships and networking for increased participation and contribution at standards-setting meetings of stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels
Activities

(1) Encourage Member States to establish partnerships between all national, regional and global stakeholders.

(2) Provide support to Member States to strengthen consumer involvement and consumer health protection, through spreading of awareness and dissemination of information in the whole food chain.

(3) Promote the activities of the national Codex committees and INFOSAN focal points and facilitate their participation at regional and global meetings.

(4) Encourage Member States in creating an enabling environment for food businesses to align their operating activities, and all other logistic elements involved in the food chain, with international standards.

(5) Support Member States to establish networks between consumers, food business operators and other relevant stakeholders.

Expected outputs

(1) Established partnerships between all national, regional and global stakeholders.

(2) Strengthened consumer involvement and consumer health protection through spreading of awareness and dissemination of information in the whole food chain.

(3) Effective participation in Codex committees and the INFOSAN network at regional and global levels.
(4) Alignment of operating activities of food businesses and all other logistic elements involved in the food chain, with international standards.

(5) Established networks between consumers, food business operators and other relevant stakeholders.
7. Multisectoral approach and partnerships

Ensuring safe food for the populations in Member States will require a multisectoral approach involving all relevant sectors, e.g. agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, water sanitation, environment, transport, education, food processing, food business operators, marketing, education, hotel and tourism industries, local governments, civil society, media, consumers’ organizations, members of parliament, enforcement authorities and United Nations specialized agencies and other international partner organizations. Therefore, the strategy calls for building an effective network and partnership among all relevant sectors for developing a national food safety policy and plan of action. A high-level national structure or body will need not only to endorse the policy and the plan of action, but also to monitor implementation and progress.

7.1 Member States

- Full government commitment is necessary to ensure the development of satisfactory and comprehensive national food safety policies and plans of action. The primary obligation of the Member States will be to provide leadership, establish supportive administrative mechanisms, and formulate, monitor and evaluate the food safety policy.

- Relevant sectors – agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, water sanitation, environment, transport, education, enforcement authorities, trade and customs – should be involved in the
formulation and execution of the national food safety policy and plan of action.

- The social policy sector should be involved, to ensure that safe food remains the core of all food security interventions.

- Research establishments could provide an improved understanding of safe food and its relationship with nutrition, food security and lifestyle in normal situations, as well as in humanitarian crisis situations.

- Provincial and local authorities within each Member State would need to be involved in ensuring better access to safe food for all population groups, such as in the following activities:
  - effective enforcement of relevant food legislation, food acts and laws in areas of responsibility and jurisdiction;
  - collaboration with street food vendors’ associations and consumers’ forums, to identify specific areas for street food vendors to operate and provide necessary amenities.

### 7.2 Civil society, nongovernmental organizations, consumers’ organizations, professional associations and food vendors’ associations

- Organizations can serve as a driving force in advocating the importance of the contribution of safe food to the nation’s health, development and progress; ensure the allocation of sufficient resources to national food safety programmes;
provide relevant information to consumers; and monitor the implementation and progress of various national and private-sector initiatives in promoting food safety.

- Civil society and consumers’ organizations can serve as watchdogs to encourage government to ensure that food industries and large businesses conform with Codex standards and ethical practices.

- Vendors and restaurant-owners’ associations could ensure appropriate food safety principles and practices at their facilities and adherence to the existing local and national legislation.

### 7.3 Food business operators

- Primary producers of food could improve the food safety and quality of their products, as well as the availability of such safe foods for consumers.

- Large-scale commercial producers of food could improve the safety and quality of their products; apply good manufacturing practices; adhere to the applicable Codex and related standards for ensuring safe foods; and practise responsible marketing of food products.

- Food retailers could improve the availability and promotion of their products with a safe food profile.

- Hotel and tourism industry could improve the safety and quality of their foods by applying among others good handling practices and good restaurant practices.
7.4 Media

- The media could support awareness-raising campaigns about food safety, food security and nutrition and consumers’ rights.

- Advertisers and clients need to comply with the existing recommendations and regulations for marketing of safe foods and providing accurate information to the population about the safety aspects of such foods.

- Aggressive advertisement of food products of questionable quality and safety should be discouraged.

7.5 Members of Parliament

- Members of Parliament, as lawmakers, should ensure the formulation and enforcement of appropriate laws, regulations and acts for promoting food safety in their constituencies and the nation as a whole.

- They should also ensure that all national, regional and local programmes in support of food safety are implemented properly in their constituencies.

7.6 United Nation’s specialized agencies, bilateral and other international organizations

- Key international agencies with the potential to contribute are the CAC, the FAO, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). They can heighten political awareness,
provide coherent policy advice in different areas, stimulate intercountry collaboration mechanisms, mobilize resources and provide the necessary technical advice, training and assistance.

• Several bilateral and international nongovernmental organizations are working in animal health and the prevention of zoonotic diseases. Their involvement could enhance the technical capacities of the national food safety programmes and generate awareness among the general population.
8. Monitoring and evaluation

8.1 Monitoring and evaluation programme

- Incorporation of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the food safety programme contributes to the establishment of evidence-based public health practices.

- Each Member State needs to establish dedicated monitoring and evaluation units at the ministry of health or at the appropriate line ministry responsible for the national food safety programmes.

- Staff working in food safety programmes for monitoring and evaluation purposes need to be appropriately trained in data collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination.

- Process, outcome and output indicators are necessary for assessing the impact and effectiveness of the national food safety policy and programmes.

- The monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques adopted should be simple and sustainable and, to the extent possible, aligned with internationally accepted protocols, analytical tools and databases.
8.2 Indicators for monitoring and evaluation of the strategic elements

- Formulation of multisectoral food safety policies involving the whole food chain and relevant plans of action.

- Incorporation of food safety issues in training curricula of general education and relevant training programmes.

- The number and types of food safety training programmes conducted.

- Inclusion of food safety is in the disaster-management programme.

- The number of appropriate quality-management systems implemented.

- Establishment of a national laboratory on food safety testing in each Member State.

- The number of laws and regulations promulgated.

- The number of food standards developed and harmonized with the Codex Alimentarius.

- The number of standard documents created for training of inspectors and other relevant personnel from food, health and other related sectors.

- Initiation and/or implementation of a system for traceability and recall of unsafe food.

- Member States have developed foodborne diseases surveillance and alert systems for monitoring all hazards in the food chain.
• Foodborne disease data are used in countries’ food safety management systems, including in food security and food aid programmes.

• Member States have developed effective national food safety alert systems and linked with relevant international alert networks.

• Member States have in place an emergency response plan for outbreaks of foodborne disease and climate-change-related food safety hazards.

• The number of partnerships established between national, regional and global stakeholders.

• The number of consumer organizations that have roles in generating a food safety awareness and food safety management system.

• Representatives of national Codex committees/other relevant stakeholders and INFOSAN focal points actively, effectively and regularly participate in regional and global meetings.

• The number of food business operators that have adopted and implemented food safety standards.

• A national/local food safety network consisting of relevant stakeholders is formally established.
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## Annex 1

### Major food safety activities in the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia Member States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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| Bangladesh    | • Regular drives against adulterated and unsafe foods by mobile courts with public and media support has led to increased public awareness about food adulteration and brought the issue of food safety to the attention of policy-makers  
                 • Expansion in the training of food and sanitary inspectors and development of communication materials on food safety has been achieved |
| Bhutan        | • Enactment and implementation of the Food Act 2005 and Food Rules and Regulations 2007, International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 22000 certification of four major food establishments, and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) certification of two major food establishments were achieved  
                 • Training of food safety staff (food inspectors, food handlers and laboratory staff) and development of training manuals and inspection checklists and technical linkages with other institutions  
                 • Establishment and operation of a fresh vegetable market and survey of food contaminants using rapid test kits at several locations |
| India         | • Establishment of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) under the Food Safety and Standards Act in 2006 and the Food Safety and Standards Regulations in 2011  
                 • Strengthening of food safety regulations and surveillance at state level  
                 • Development of the Strategic Plan of the National Codex Committee (2015–2019) |
| Indonesia     | • Involvement of the private sector and civil society in the development of the national food safety policy has been a success, as well as creating awareness for the practice and promotion of food safety, particularly in large cities  
                 • Appropriate training, monitoring and evaluation of street foods including food vendors, equipment, materials and location  
                 • Development of effective communication materials on food safety issues targeted to school children and households |
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<th>Country</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>• Accreditation of the national health laboratory and standardization of the fish factories (ISO 22000)</td>
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<td>• Drafting of the Food Act; development of legislation and standards</td>
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<td>• Training of food inspectors, food safety officers and food analysts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• HACCP certification of the export cargo area</td>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>• Market surveillance to detect and eliminate the use of non-permitted dyes and additives in foods</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Food sanitation and hygiene programme for restaurants and street foods</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Public awareness activities for food safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>• Formulation of Draft National Food Safety Policy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Enhancement of the harmonization of food law and food standards with international benchmark</td>
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<td>• Conduction of case studies on food safety issues in Central Food Laboratory</td>
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<td>• Strengthening the food safety monitoring and inspection in Hotels/ Restaurants of Highway and food industries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Consumer awareness programmes in food safety and quality control</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Enhancement of safety in street foods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>• Improvement in the inspection and certification process for the import/export of food items</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sampling and analysis of food items at retail ends, including street food</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• National strategic plan on food safety has been formulated</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Improvement of food hygiene – strategic programme for food safety 2013–2017</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Inspection and certification of food establishments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Identification of gaps in the existing legal framework and revision of laws and regulations</td>
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<td>• Public-awareness programmes in food safety</td>
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<td>• Regulation of the bottled-water industry to ensure safe supply of bottled water, for both the local and export sectors</td>
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<td>• Harmonization of food safety activities carried out by various agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
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| Thailand   | • Establishment of an integrated food safety plan with multi-agency involvement at the central and provincial levels  
              • Food safety surveillance activities in 76 provinces for seven key chemical contaminants and the promotion of test kits for inspecting food in the overall supply chain, including the household level  
              • Promotion of “healthy” and “green” markets; “clean food, good taste” restaurants and street food establishments  
              • Participation in INFOSAN, Codex and other global, regional and national standard-setting systems  
              • Community awareness and promotion of food safety knowledge in schools |
| Timor-Leste | • Promotion of “Five keys to safer food” messages  
              • Development of monitoring guidelines for food safety and monitoring of restaurants and street food vendors |
The World Health Organization’s Regional Office for South-East Asia has been working closely with its Member States to improve the national food safety programmes, through technical assistance and collaborative activities. A regional food safety strategy has been prepared with the intention of assisting Member States to identify and prioritize food safety actions in relevant national sectors. The goal of the regional food safety strategy is to encourage Member States to initiate, develop and sustain multisectoral approaches and measures for the promotion of food safety among all the population groups. In reaching this goal, four strategic elements have been formulated, related in particular to food safety policies and plans of action; food control systems; control and prevention of foodborne diseases, including waterborne diseases, and establishment of effective surveillance systems; and partnerships and networking. Each strategic element has specific activities with clear expected outputs. The progress of achievement of Member States in each strategic element can be monitored and evaluated, based on clearly defined indicators.