



MALAWI:

Malawi's National Quality Infrastructure forges ahead

Context

With 85% of Malawi's population dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods and agricultural products accounting for 80% of total exports, food quality and safety are critical to the country's economic well-being. However, the Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS) does not have the capacity to meet the demand for standards, metrology and conformity assessment services. As MBS certificates are only accepted within the region, producers hoping to export globally have no option but to subcontract testing, inspection and certification services outside the country, incurring considerable expenses and time delays.

As a result, large businesses seeking to supply international markets have invested substantial resources to obtain certification from internationally accredited bodies. However, many small businesses simply choose to limit their market outreach to consumers who are unwilling or unable to pay higher prices for quality goods.

The limited quality infrastructure and the absence of an internationally recognized accreditation body significantly reduce access to global markets for agro-industrial products from Malawi.

Main approach

In view of these challenges, the Government of Malawi and UNIDO embarked on an ambitious upgrading of the National Quality Infrastructure (NQI). As a result, the competitiveness of Malawi's agro-based products on regional and international markets is expected to increase. In addition, the project seeks to enhance Malawi's export capacity, reduce trade costs and time delays, and build national capacity for product certification. It also puts particular focus on the modernization, strengthening and international recognition of the legal metrology functions of the MBS.

To facilitate the development and implementation of a holistic NQI, the national quality policy (NQP) was revised following consultative workshops with public and private sector stakeholders. Through technical assistance and trainings, UNIDO is strengthening the capacity of the MBS to deliver national auditing and certification services in compliance with food safety and quality-related international regulations.

In addition, the project is supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly women and youth-led businesses, to comply with quality requirements. The project is also providing assistance to the MBS to facilitate the dissemination of standards and technical regulation information to the private sector.

Impact and results

The project will help achieve internationally recognized accreditation for key conformity assessment services offered by the MBS, thus contributing to an efficient NQI. This will have direct benefits for Malawian enterprises, and indirect long-term benefits for Malawian citizens in terms of improved consumer safety.

The recently enacted NQP paved the way for Malawi to strengthen its NQI. The enactment is also a clear statement by the Government of Malawi of its commitment towards the modernization process. Under the guidance of the project, technical competencies and facilities will be upgraded at the MBS, in particular for the delivery of testing and calibration services. In addition, a comprehensive training plan was developed to enhance the metrology capacities of the MBS.

In parallel, a road map for a pilot accreditation programme focusing on laboratory testing for microbiology, pesticides, element analysis and food contaminants was established. Through workshops and training sessions, UNIDO is also helping Malawi to develop better technical regulations following the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) methodology on risk management in regulatory frameworks.

At a glance

Project title: Development of a robust standardization, quality assurance, accreditation and metrology (SQAM) infrastructure in Malawi; Market access and trade capacity-building support for agro-industrial products (MATCB)
Donors: European Union, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Budget: SQAM: EUR 2,794,592; MATCB: EUR 2,000,000
Country coverage: Malawi
Thematic areas: National quality policy, certification, metrology, laboratory accreditation, quality, standardization