



IRAQ:

Regaining international recognition through an upgrading of the National Quality System

Context

Since the lifting of UN sanctions in 2003, Iraq has strengthened trade relations with the regional and international community and is working to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). A vital step towards achieving this objective involves a comprehensive upgrading of the country's National Quality System (NQS).

The application of quality assurance and quality control techniques in the production, distribution and importation of products is essential for Iraq's integration into regional and global value chains, as well as for safeguarding the public against hazards of spoiled food and faulty appliances.

For years, Iraqi consumers have been subject to low quality products, commodities and household appliances, as neither locally manufactured nor imported goods meet adequate quality standards. The Iraqi Central Organization for Standardization and Quality Control (COSQC) has had no alternative but to subcontract foreign companies to implement the "Pre-import inspection, testing and certification programme of goods to Iraq" in order to protect domestic consumers.

Main approach

UNIDO is working with international and regional partners to upgrade the technical infrastructure and support institutions needed to ensure better trade performance while also protecting Iraqi consumers. The comprehensive technical support programme addresses all essential elements of the Iraq's National Quality System: quality policy and legal reforms, standardization, metrology, accreditation and conformity assessment services. It also aims to improve the trade policy framework and strengthen related institutions to support the country in its WTO accession process.

UNIDO conducted assessments of Iraq's institutional structure and the existing legal framework related to quality. The assessments are followed by national-level stakeholder consultations to support the establishment of a national quality framework, including a national quality policy and a strategic action plan for its implementation. The project also focuses on strengthening the COSQC's capacities as the national standardization organization. In addition, technical assistance is being provided to upgrade the national metrology system, including the COSQC's Metrology Department.

In parallel, UNIDO – in partnership with the Swedish Board for Accreditation and Conformity Assessment (SWEDAC) – helped set

up and operationalize an Iraqi national accreditation body, and is providing independent training courses to ensure the technical competency of staff and auditors.

Impact and results

As a result of the project, a regionally and internationally recognized Iraqi accreditation body – the Iraqi Accreditation System (IQAS) – is now operational and offering its services to national conformity assessment bodies, supported by an effective national metrology system. IQAS has already issued the first accreditation certificate to a local laboratory, opening the door to full membership to the Arab Accreditation Cooperation (ARAC) and associate membership to the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC).

With a more streamlined process of standards development, the COSQC is now better equipped to support the economic development of Iraq. Its quality management and governance systems were developed according to international best practices, providing greater opportunities for the private sector to engage in global trade. The overall effectiveness of the Iraqi food control system will also be increased through the upgrading of laboratory and inspection infrastructure, in particular along Basra borders, to the benefit of both consumers and the private sector.

The extensive package of initiatives launched within the framework of this project is an important step towards rebuilding Iraq's economy. By establishing key industry support institutions and restoring linkages with the international trading system, Iraq is now closer to becoming a WTO member.

At a glance

Project title: Strengthening the national quality infrastructure to facilitate trade and enhance consumer protection
Donor: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
Budget: USD 13,451,000
Country coverage: Iraq
Thematic areas: Accreditation, quality policy/legal framework, metrology, standardization, technical regulations, WTO accession, food safety