

## First edition of the ECOWAS Quality Infrastructure Forum

DAKAR, 1 February 2018 - The first Quality Infrastructure (QI) Forum of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was held from 30 January to 1 February in Dakar, Senegal, with the support of the West Africa Quality System Programme<sup>1</sup> (WAQSP). It was attended by high-level government representatives, including five Ministers, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) project partners (ECOWAS, West African Economic and Monetary Union - UEMOA, European Union - EU) and technical partners (Intra-Africa Metrology System - AFRIMETS, African Accreditation Cooperation - AFRAC, ARSO), public and private sectors officials, as well as more than 200 other national, regional and international participants.

As a prelude to the Forum, the first meeting of the ECOWAS Community Council for Quality and the Constitutive General Assembly of the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Quality (ECOWAQ), the two governing institutions of the Regional Quality System, took place on 29 January. These meetings constituted the culmination of years of UNIDO's technical assistance in the region towards achieving a sustainable QI, conducive to improved product quality and compatibility, increased health and safety and reduced environmental impact. The time had therefore come for taking stock of lessons learned and reflecting on the way forward.

The first panel of the forum focussed on quality policy formulation and the implementation of a QI in a regional context. To this end, the experience of the ECOWAS, its Member States and Mauritania as well as the experience of the CARICOM and CEMAC were discussed and issues and challenges encountered analysed. The key recommendations of this panel pointed out the necessity of sharing inter-country experience as well as a high involvement of all national stakeholders for an effective deployment of quality policies.

The second panel entitled "Funding the QI" saw presentations from the World Bank, UNECA, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development and the Delegation of the European Union in Nigeria and ECOWAS. The objective of this panel was to better understand the mechanisms for funding quality infrastructure development from each of these institutions. As a conclusion, panellists stressed the importance of international cooperation as well as national commitment to cover the financial needs of developing countries.

The third panel on issues and challenges faced by the major QI components portrayed the state of play in the area of QI development as a whole and in the field of standardization, accreditation and metrology in particular. Panellists from UNIDO, ISO, AFRAC, AFRIMETS and PTB highlighted the importance of creating the demand for quality in order to ensure sustainability of the QI.

The fourth and last panel of the Forum was dedicated to the development of a quality culture in West Africa. State and civil society organizations such as Borderless Alliance, ISM School of Management Dakar and the National Institute of Consumption of Tunisia were invited to share their experience in the area, with the idea of advocating best practices among participants. Investing in students and quality education, strengthening private sector quality associations and introducing

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<sup>1</sup> The WAQSP is funded by the European Union and executed by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

requirements for quality certifications in public tenders were identified as strategic levers for the development of a quality culture in the region.

In addition to these four panels, a B-to-B event in the form of a trade fair in which 15 certified companies and accredited laboratories participated was one of the side attractions of the forum. The participants came from various sectors, such as agro-food, public accounting, laboratory testing, cement, telecommunication inspection, etc. Some of them were winners of national and regional Quality Awards.

The electronic directory of accredited conformity assessment bodies of the region was finally showcased in a second side event. New institutions were registered and feedback was shared for improving the tool.

Quality infrastructure has been at the heart of UNIDO's intervention in West Africa since 2001. From the initial observation of the overwhelming reliance on agricultural products, high rejection rates on import markets as well as the lack of capacity to implement WTO TBT and SPS agreements, UNIDO has implemented regional and national quality programmes aiming to support and strengthen institutional and human capacity throughout the region.

Three regional programmes have been implemented to date (2001-2005, 2007-2012, 2014-ongoing) with the objective of enhancing the competitiveness of the industrial sector and fostering economic integration of West African states through the development of a common quality infrastructure for ensuring compliance to international standards. Some national programmes have since been initiated to respond to specific national needs.