

TERMS OF REFERENCE
VOLUNTARY FOOD QUALITY CONTROL IN WEST AFRICA
STDF/PPG/770

I. SPS CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Trade in agricultural products is of the utmost importance to the member economies of West Africa. As at 2020, the agricultural sector value is estimated at USD 43 billion amounting to 30% of the West African Economic and Monetary (UEMOA also known as EUMOA) Gross Domestic Product (GDP)¹. The sector employs on average 66% of the total workforce of which 68% of employees are woman. It is anticipated that by 2030 agriculture will reach 34% of UEMOA's GDP. The European Union (EU) represents 31.4% of West Africa's international trade with international partners in 2019, and there is potential for other markets such as the United States². Thus, UEMOA member states' economic welfare is heavily reliant on establishing trade links and to penetrate regional and international markets for their major agricultural commodities and horticultural crop (herbs and spices, pineapple, mango, cassava, nuts, seeds, among others).

Despite some potential growth prospects, West African countries face challenges when it comes to increasing agricultural exports and to protecting consumers' health. These include the ability to verify compliance with food safety standards and requirements and therefore, reduce the occurrence of rejection of exported agricultural products. SPS-related violations to enter the EU market from Africa accounted for about 500 cases in 2019³. As it concerns trade from the UEMOA member states, between 2010 and 2020, the European Union recorded 71 notifications of aflatoxins and pesticide residues in agricultural production from UEMOA member states.⁴

The availability of internationally recognised competent conformity assessment systems, such as food safety laboratories or product and management certification and inspection bodies, is crucial to protect consumer health and facilitate safe trade. The need for these services, in order to support producers and exporters, as well as the need to strengthen national SPS Competent Authorities is evident in the African continent. Furthermore, challenges posed by the COVID-19 as it concerns "onsite" verification of CABs and the increasing unease with the cost of compliance, has contributed to the scarcity of accredited CABs in the region. According to objective 4 of the SPS Policy Framework for Africa⁵: "Increase Political Support and Public and Private Sector Investment in SPS Systems", effective SPS measures are to be established to ensure food quality and safety in order to protect public health during food trade within the AU as well as overseas.

As a case in point, the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) recognises the importance of accredited conformity assessment bodies "as a tool to facilitate trade between States Parties"⁶. Similarly, the Economic Community of West African States

¹ Sahel and West Africa, 2020, West Africa Brief: <http://www.west-africa-brief.org/content/en/growing-potential-uemoa-food-economy>, 9 February 2020.

² Particularly under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). It is a trade preference programme that the United States of America grants to certain eligible countries. Its objectives are to increase U.S. trade and investment to sub-Saharan Africa, stimulate growth, encourage economic integration and facilitate the integration of sub-Saharan Africa into the global economy.

³ See the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, Annual Report 2019, page 42. Available here: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2c5c7729-0c31-11eb-bc07-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-174742448>

⁴ Compiled from data accessible on the EU Rapid Warning System for Food and Feed (RASFF) RASFF - Food and Feed Safety Alerts | Food Safety (europa.eu)

⁵ See document here, page 34: [40036-doc-au_sps_policy_framework_full_document.pdf](#)

⁶ Protocol on Trade in Goods, Article 8 of Annex 6

(ECOWAS) calls for the establishment of a network of laboratories and a network of training institutions.⁷ Furthermore, there is a great need in the region for mutual acceptance of results provided by conformity assessment bodies that have been recognized by the African Accreditation Cooperation (AFRAC), the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

As the custodian of all national SPS matter, the SPS Competent Authority provides importing economies the required confirmation that exported agricultural produce meets the importing economies requirements. Compliance confirmation is normally issued through various certificates including for instance phytosanitary certificates, veterinary certificates, food safety certificates, certificates of origin etc. The Competent Authority relies on conformity assessment bodies to provide the data to support assurance of compliance. Two challenges normally raise against the utilisation of accredited private conformity assessment bodies: transparency of the conformity assessment process and control of the private bodies.

The West African Accreditation System (SOAC) is a regional accreditation body solely responsible for accreditation in the eight Member States of UEMOA. SOAC is also one of the cornerstones of the ECOWAS accreditation scheme which to date is composed of three bodies (in addition to SOAC, GhaNAS which is the accrediting body of Ghana and NiNAS which is the accrediting body of Nigeria).⁸ One of SOAC's missions is to ensure that the accreditation needs of conformity assessment bodies, primarily those of its member states, are covered in the region as quickly and affordably as possible.

A number of international organizations and donors have been (or are) working with national authorities on related initiatives⁹. These include:

- The UEMOA Quality Programme (PQAO), a programme of the UEMOA Commission, funded by the European Union and executed by UNIDO (2001-2005);
- The West Africa Quality Programme (WAQP), a programme of the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions, funded by European Union and executed by UNIDO (2007-2012)
- The [West Africa Quality System Project \(WAQSP\)](#), a programme of the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions, funded by European Union and executed by UNIDO (2014-2019)
- The [West African Competitiveness Programme \(WACOMP\)](#), funded by the European Union and implemented by a pool of agencies in UEMOA and ECOWAS member states, active since 2019. The regional component of the WACOMP on Quality Infrastructure called The West African Quality Infrastructure Project (WAQIP), is executed by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in partnership with UEMOA and ECOWAS.
- The Europe-Africa-Caribbean-Pacific Liaison Committee (COLEACP) cooperation agreement with ECOWAS on the Innovative Regional Fruit Fly Control System in West Africa ([SyRIMAO](#)) since December 2020.
- The [STDF/PG/665](#) programme "Piloting the use of voluntary third party insurance (VTI) in the horticultural sector in Senegal and Mali to improve food safety performance to protect public health and improve trade".

⁷ See: Regulation C/REG.21/11/10 on the harmonization of the structural framework and operational rules on plant, animal and food safety provides in Article 17.

⁸ The 5 States remaining without an accreditation body (Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) can turn to GhaNAS, NiNAS or SOAC to cover their accreditation needs, according to their choice. It is within this framework that the Republic of Guinea has submitted a request to join SOAC which is currently being processed.

⁹ Please visit project's websites for main objectives and deliverables. In addition, find related information in SOAC's original project application.

II. BACKGROUND TO PPG

The Project Grant (PG) application originally entitled "Post-COVID-19 voluntary food quality control in West Africa through digitisation" (STDF/PG/770), was submitted to the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) by the West Africa Accreditation System (WAAS/SOAC) on behalf of nine (9) countries: the eight UEMOA members (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo) and Guinea. UNIDO was proposed as implementing partner.

..... The STDF Working Group, at its meeting on 1 April 2021, considered this PG application¹⁰. The Working Group acknowledged that the PG submitted was interesting, relevant and with high potential, also in the context of COVID-19. Yet, members identified several risks (in terms of the feasibility of a digitalisation program in the region) and indicated areas requiring further clarification (budget, implementation arrangements, among various others). The project application was therefore not approved. Instead, the STDF Working Group approved a "Project Preparation Grant – PPG" (up to a maximum of US\$50,000) in order to help the applicant conduct a feasibility study and, if deemed feasible, submit again an application addressed to the STDF Working Group.

III. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

This document sets out the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the implementation of the Project preparation grant (PPG/770). The work will be carried out by an International Consultant. He/she will work closely with SOAC, UNIDO, the relevant public and private sector stakeholders in each beneficiary country and in the region. The consultant shall work under the supervision of the STDF Secretariat.

IV. OBJECTIVE AND EXPECTED RESULTS

The main purpose of this project preparation grant (PPG) is to prepare a feasibility study that identify the challenges, opportunities, and needs to use digital and IT tools to strengthen the delivery, performance and processes of the conformity assessment system and the accreditation system in 9 countries in West Africa -which supports consumer health protection and food trade facilitation-. The analysis will provide detailed information on each country level as well as at a regional level. Depending on these results, and subject to discussion with the STDF Secretariat, the International Consultant may be asked to prepare a project proposal.

V. KEY ACTIVITIES & DELIVERABLES

A. Feasibility study

Make an analysis of the existing situation, challenges and opportunities to use digital and IT tools to strengthen conformity assessment and accreditation systems in the region. This analysis should broadly contextualize the situation and challenges facing conformity assessment and accreditation system at a regional and national level in West Africa, including linkages to the implementation of international standards (Codex, IPPC, and OIE) and SPS measures to promote trade, while focusing on the opportunities and needs (including aspects related to IT infrastructure, accessibility, costs, etc.) to use digital and IT tools to strengthen capacity in accreditation, conformity assessment and capacity development processes. Tasks may include (non- exhaustive list):

¹⁰ See Summary Report [here](#)

- a. Review previous studies related to the accreditation and conformity assessment system in West Africa (including the original project document submitted by SOAC, as relevant but not necessarily as the starting point)
- b. Review similar experiences in other regions in which a regional organization (similar to SOAC) is making use of IT tools and digitalization to strengthen conformity assessment processes and systems.
- c. Review SOAC experiences regarding digital / virtual training/assessing in West-Africa in order to identify lessons learned as well as areas of complementarity
- d. Review previous and existing programs in West Africa and their experiences regarding the use of digital / virtual tools in West-Africa in order to identify lessons learned as well as areas of complementarity.
- e. Consult stakeholders in the West African Region to get their views about the potential for using digital tools in conformity assessment (including aspects related to accessibility, costs, performance, quality, etc.) and to identify gaps and needs for improvements. In particular, the following stakeholders should be consulted:
 - i. The private sector, by country and at the regional level, including exporters, industry associations and any relevant associations; as well as existing bodies, on conformity assessment and accreditation in the region.
 - ii. National authorities and agencies charged with the implementation of conformity assessment/ the promotion of accreditation and involved in food safety and trade more generally
 - iii. Training organisms related to and/or which could contribute to conformity assessment in West Africa
 - iv. Consumer Organizations
- f. Clearly identify and analyse the options, potential and challenges of using different digital and IT tools for the strengthening of accreditation and conformity assessment systems in West Africa, meaning the optimisation of digital technology in the accreditation, conformity assessment and capacity development processes. This may include distance on-line training as well as on-line verification of CABs but is not limited to these (other on-line procedures that could be done remotely should be assessed (e.g. data standardization or harmonization, if appropriate). This will include the following:
 - i. Conduct a baseline survey of the IT / Internet infrastructure and access needed for the strengthening of the conformity assessment system in West Africa, in each one of the 9 countries, including:
 - Internet access in the country (including energy shortages) and specifically at the CABs
 - Availability of existing IT platforms/infrastructure at the CABs to support a potential project involving digitalisation
 - ii. Assess SOAC's digital platform (particularly its "augmented reality technology") as well as ECOWAS' digital platform (for a potential exchange of experiences) and their inter-operability with each of the 9 countries.
 - iii. Describe if/how data standardization or harmonization (or how to use the existing data) would need to take place at the regional level (forward looking for a potential project proposal).
 - In case of standardization, harmonization, check if the national CAB's system would be interoperable with a regional system (SOAC's)
 - Understand SOAC's data confidentiality management policy and concrete examples on how it is implemented during assessments and training for member states.

- v. Describe COVID implications, challenges and opportunities of using digitalisation for the strengthening of accreditation and conformity assessment systems in West Africa. Explain if a potential regional project based on digitalisation may be considered a cost-effective contribution to addressing the SPS problems identified, compared to alternatives (including no action). See Qn. 15 (p) of the Guidance Note.

According to these results, and subject to discussion with the STDF Secretariat, the international consultant may be asked to prepare a project proposal, which should assess the following areas:

B. Project proposal

- a. Clearly identify the main challenges, opportunities and needs regarding West African's accreditation and conformity assessment system and clearly explain how the strengthening of this system contributes to the development or implementation of international standards and SPS measures (as established mainly by Codex, IPPC, and OIE).
 - o Identify the capacity building needs of the national SPS authorities, CABs, SOAC, the national and regional private sector, etc.
- b. Clearly elaborate the purpose, expected outcomes, outputs and activities of the proposed project, based on a coherent theory of change and logical framework. The logical framework should include indicators to measure performance, sources of verification and any key assumptions.
 - o Describe the feasibility of a regional project which uses digitalisation and explain the linkages with REC's and national digitalisation objectives.
 - o Describe in detail if/how capacity building activities will take place (who, how, when) and clearly explain whether a train-the-trainers approach will be used.
 - o If digitalisation will be fostered/used, describe how it will be used for the accreditation, conformity assessment and capacity development processes. Describe other regions' experiences using digitalization in the ways proposed and include the main lessons learned for this project.
- c. Clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of all concerned public and private stakeholders, at the national and regional levels (e.g. regional economic communities and organizations, national authorities, national and regional private sector, etc.)
 - o Confirm the expectations of the countries and ensure that each country provide new compelling letters of support. Other supportive documents (e.g. recommendations report from stakeholders) can be added.
- d. Include a detailed activity-based estimate of the budget (MS Excel format) required to implement the proposed project, which includes virtual means, and reasonable management costs.
- e. Clearly define the project implementation set-up: explain the project's management structure as well as the organization chart and describe the project's internal governance. Specify the role of UNIDO's as proposed by the applicant to be the one responsible to ensure the smooth implementation of the entire project, and its collaboration with SOAC and ECOWAS.
- f. Clearly identify and map out linkages, synergies and complementarities to related activities and projects, supported by the government, donors and development partners, private sector investors, and direct beneficiaries (See SPS context section).
- g. Present the potential improvements to the domestic food safety situation / local consumption (spillovers)
- h. Include a detailed work plan and timetable for project implementation.
- i. Identify and assess the possible risks and challenges faced in the proposed project, as well as risk mitigation strategies to ensure its success and sustainability. Include risks regarding coordination between UNIDO, SOAC and ECOWAS as well as IT capacities in beneficiary countries.

- j. Consider cross-cutting issues related to gender and environmental aspects.
- k. Explain how the results of the project will be sustained in the longer-term, addressing financial and institutional sustainability.
- l. Identify possible donors and/or private sector investors that might be interested in co-financing a regional project.
- m. Present, discuss and validate project proposal/document with all public, private and academia stakeholders and relevant development partners during a virtual stakeholder workshop.
- n. Finalize successive versions of the project proposal based on feedback received from all stakeholders.

VI. DELIVERABLES

1. A feasibility study which addresses all areas mentioned in section V. A draft ideally drafted in French will be shared and consulted with stakeholders who provided inputs. However, it is required that the Consultant has also a good working level of English so she/he can integrate potential comments from other STDF partners.
2. If requested by the STDF, a full final Project proposal in the STDF format available [here](#) or in the format requested by a donor identified as a source for potential funding (in this case the International Consultant should inform the STDF Secretariat in due course).
3. A PPG implementation report: a brief report of the work carried out within the framework of the PPG, in the STDF format and that will include a bibliography of the consulted documents (with links and electronic copies where possible), estimated budget vs. actual expenses, a list of the people interviewed and their addresses, emails, main activities carried out, etc. The report will be provided within one month after the completion of the PPG.

VII. PROFILE

The International Consultant should meet the following minimum requirements:

Required:

- ✓ Knowledge and experience in accreditation and conformity assessment processes and systems.
- ✓ Knowledge and experience in programme/project formulation: technical assistance development projects (results-based project management, theory of change and logframe)
- ✓ Excellent analytical, drafting and communications skills in French and good working level of English.

Highly desirable:

- ✓ Knowledge and experience in accreditation and conformity assessment processes and systems in West Africa (preferably in French-speaking countries).
- ✓ Knowledge and experience in digitalisation from an end-user point of view (use of digital solutions and existing IT tools to improve the delivery of services and processes)*. No need for programming experience.
- ✓ Experience in feasibility studies, including data collection (through survey questionnaires, consultations and interviews involving multiple organizations and participants) and strong analytical skills.
- ✓ Experience with relevant multi-partner/beneficiary initiatives, including understanding of the political and diplomatic dimensions, and managing a review process in that context;

*The mandate is awarded to one lead international consultant. However, if needed, he/she may sub-contract, additional expertise to support him/her with his task. Such additional expertise could be for example a junior associate on IT tools, new technologies.