



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

“Without the support of the WAEMU-ECOWAS Quality Programmes, funded by EU and executed by UNIDO, the rapid progression of SOAC over the last years would not have been possible.”

Marcel Gbaguidi, Director-General, SOAC

Advancing accreditation in West Africa

Accreditation is one step in the chain of enhancing African countries’ competitiveness and access to markets. UNIDO possesses substantial expertise in capacity building and institutional strengthening within quality programming and supports African accreditation bodies such as the West African Accreditation System (*Système Ouest Africain d’Accréditation* - SOAC) to receive regional and international recognition.

UNIDO’S APPROACH

As part of the implementation of their industrial and trade policies, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commissions trusted UNIDO, through the Quality Programmes financed by the European Union since 2001, to support the development of a sound and internationally recognized quality infrastructure for West Africa. As a result, quality policies, standardization, accreditation and quality assurance services have been put in place or strengthened in order to ensure that healthy and quality products are delivered to local consumers and exported to foreign markets.

Until recently, accredited laboratories, inspection bodies or certification bodies in West Africa offered their services to economic operators within the region at prices deemed expensive as these bodies were obliged to obtain the accreditation from foreign agencies. This situation was a hindrance to the development of several sectors, including trade.

Thus, with a perspective of pooling resources and efficiency, one of the solutions brought by UNIDO was the establishment of the West African Accreditation System (SOAC), a multi-economy accreditation body (AB) based in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire and covering 8 Member States in West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea Bissau,

Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. Countries such as Cabo Verde, Guinea and Liberia are already exploring ways of cooperating with SOAC.

For Côte d’Ivoire specifically, SOAC’s operation coincides with the entry into force on 1 January 2019 of the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) signed with the European Union. The agreement allows free access to the European market for certain food products, provided that they comply with EU sanitary and phytosanitary standards. Laboratories involved in the range of products covered by the EPA may require accreditation from SOAC to offer their services to the economic operators involved at lower costs.

IMPACT

SOAC has been admitted as associate member of the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), and as a full member of the African Accreditation Cooperation (AFRAC).

Through the ILAC associate membership, SOAC can more easily deliver accreditation

services in accordance with relevant international standards, such as ISO/IEC guides and standards, as well as ILAC policies relating to accreditation of inspection bodies and laboratories. By 2019, 6 laboratories 5 of these have been directly supported by the West Africa Quality System Programme (WAQSP): 4 in the agro-food sector in Côte d’Ivoire one in the field of mass calibration in Benin, and 1 in medical biology in Togo.

WAY FORWARD

In the upcoming months, SOAC will expand and deliver more accreditation services in the region to benefit consumers and producers in the West African countries. There is growing demand for SOAC accreditation, particularly since 6 of the 8 UEMOA countries have adopted quality policies and 7 of the 8 ministers in charge of quality have officially requested conformity assessment bodies (CABs) to refer to SOAC for their accreditation needs.

“The presence of SOAC is a real relief. It is now possible to be accredited in West Africa and at advantageous costs,” said Dr. Ganou Leguet, Chief of Food Technology Department at IRSAT/DTA laboratory in Ougadougou, Burkina Faso.

AT A GLANCE

Project title	West Africa Quality System Programme
Thematic area	Advancing Economic Competitiveness
Donor	European Union
Project counterpart	ECOWAS
Budget	12,000,000 EUR
Duration	August 2014 – September 2019