

# Collaborating on food standards in the Arab Region

CASESTORY

Timeframe: 2014 to date



## LED BY

### PUBLIC SECTOR

League of Arab States (LAS)

Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO)

Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD)

### PRIVATE SECTOR

Arab Federation of Food Industries

Union of Arab Chambers



## GOVERNANCE

The ATF was set up with the participation of member state governments, regional and international institutions, and the private sector. In 2019, AIDMO and AOAD signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), including guidelines for an Arab standard-setting mechanism, which was an essential step to put the ATF in place.

## FUNDING

Participating regional public and private sector stakeholders are contributing resources (expertise, time and financing) to this partnership, together with stakeholders in the beneficiary Arab countries. Initial financial support for this partnership came from the SAFE project, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), with cost-sharing between the regional private sector organizations and UNIDO to cover its core activities.



## PURPOSE

Improving food safety in a holistic way requires stakeholders to coordinate on a regional level, aligning to international standards. This PPP in the LAS region aims to enhance compliance with sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements through dialogue among stakeholders in 18 countries. This collaboration is a result of the "Arab Food Safety Initiative for Trade Facilitation" (SAFE) project, implemented by UNIDO with AIDMO and LAS, which established an Arab Task Force on Food Safety (ATF) to support harmonization of regional food safety standards, inviting participation from the private sector and consumers in policy processes.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### PUBLIC SECTOR

- Create and strengthen a regional mechanism on food safety for trade facilitation, including by providing technical inputs on SPS implementation.
- Establish an operational ATF with a representative of LAS as secretary, and representatives of AIDMO and AOAD as deputy chairs, to facilitate and manage the SPS regional harmonization process.
- Establish an Arab Task Force on Consumer Protection, under LAS, represented at the ATF to promote consumer engagement in regional food safety policy processes.

### PRIVATE SECTOR

- Leverage resources for policy advocacy, including through dialogue, networking and coordination to address SPS and market access issues that require food safety policy changes.
- Become an active player in policy processes for regional harmonization.
- Ensure private sector representation in the ATF.

## LESSONS

- Identifying relevant public and private sector representatives was important to ensure strong ownership and stakeholder participation.
- Engaging with the private sector from the beginning, including in planning and designing processes, was essential. The existence of recognized private sector organizations contributed to the partnership's success.
- Setting up and ensuring open channels for communication and participatory decision-making helped address challenges that emerged (such as different priorities or political instability).
- Given the number of different stakeholders involved and the political complexities across the region, UNIDO's role as a trusted international partner with a strong regional and country presence was valuable to promote engagement and build the trust needed for this partnership to flourish.

## UP-SCALING OPPORTUNITIES

- The mechanism for public-private dialogue could be replicated in other regions.

## RESULTS

THROUGH THE PARTNERSHIP, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY IN THE ARAB REGION ENGAGED IN FOOD SAFETY POLICY DIALOGUE WITH GOVERNMENT REGULATORS,

**SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO FACILITATE SAFE TRADE.**



For instance, the ATF provided guidance to address SPS issues in the Pan-Arab Free Trade Area (PAFTA) and to **AGREE ON NEW SPS AND TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE (TBT) LEGAL TEXTS.**



To ensure continuity of this PPP, the LAS Economic and Social Ministerial Council<sup>1</sup> established a resolution to **INTEGRATE THE ATF (including its private sector members) UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE LAS IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE.**

<sup>1</sup> ECOSOC:104<sup>th</sup> meeting in September 2019.