

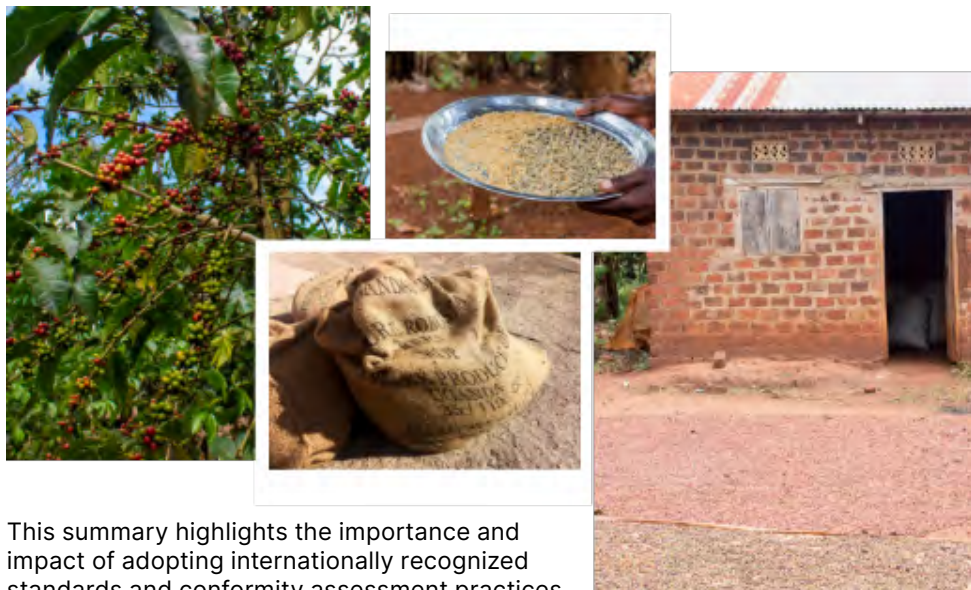


Market access

Case study on the benefits of using International Standards and conformity assessment in Uganda's coffee sector

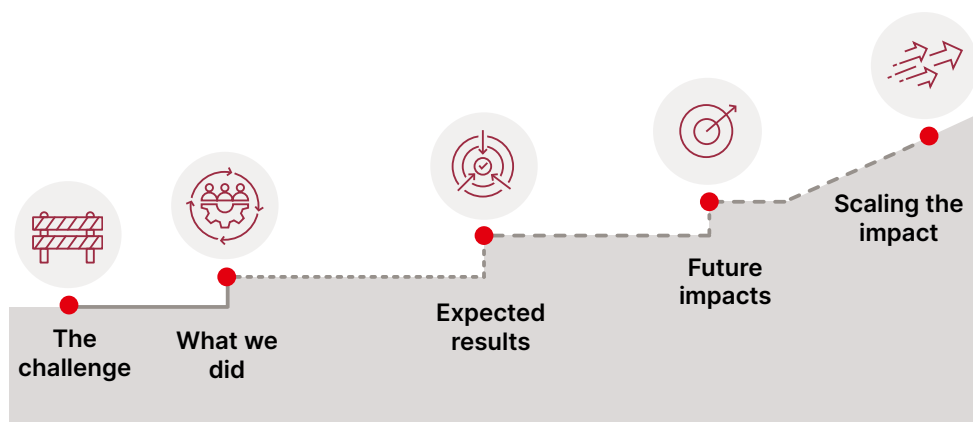
Case study summary

iso.org



This summary highlights the importance and impact of adopting internationally recognized standards and conformity assessment practices in Uganda's coffee sector.

It is structured around five key areas:





The challenge

Uganda's coffee sector is a major contributor to national exports¹ and rural livelihoods², yet it faces significant barriers in accessing and competing in international markets. These challenges include stringent and evolving global regulatory requirements, particularly in some of these international markets. Exporters must comply with the requirements in relatively complex regulatory frameworks that address issues that include food safety, product traceability, sustainability, and certification requirements.

The sector is dominated by smallholder farmers³ with limited technical capacity, making compliance with international standards difficult. Fragmented supply chains further complicate traceability, which is increasingly critical under regulations like the EU Deforestation Regulation. Additionally, exporters face high costs associated with certification, testing, and audits.

Institutionally, Uganda's quality infrastructure (QI) has gaps that include laboratory capacity, technical expertise, and coordination amongst domestic regulatory bodies. Limited awareness and understanding of standards and conformity assessment procedures amongst stakeholders further weakens compliance. These systemic challenges lead to export delays, product rejections, and reduced competitiveness in global markets.



¹ According to the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA), coffee export earnings reached approximately USD 1.9 billion in 2024/25, with exports exceeding 7 million 60kg bags. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) projects continued growth, estimating exports of approximately 6.5 million bags for the 2025/26 season.

² Estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UCDA indicate that more than 5 million Ugandans derive income directly or indirectly from coffee production, processing, transport, trading, and export activities.

³ According to UCDA and USDA estimates, approximately 1.7 to 1.8 million smallholder households are involved in coffee cultivation. Most coffee farms are less than one hectare in size.



What we did

To address these challenges, a structured, standards-driven approach was implemented focusing on strengthening Uganda's quality infrastructure and aligning it with international best practices.



The initiative began with capacity-building activities, including training workshops for three national experts on International Standards, conformity assessment, and regulatory frameworks. A comprehensive analysis of the coffee value chain was conducted by them to identify gaps in quality assurance, regulatory compliance, and institutional coordination.



Stakeholder engagement was central to the process. Workshops were held with both private sector actors (producers, exporters) and public sector institutions (regulators, laboratories, certification bodies) to gather insights on their challenges and needs. This participatory approach ensured that the suggested future interventions are practical and appropriately aligned with real market conditions.



The project also mapped relevant International Standards, including [ISO 22000 \(Food Safety Management Systems\)](#), [ISO 9001 \(Quality Management Systems\)](#), and [ISO/IEC 17025 \(Laboratory Competence\)](#), alongside regional and national standards. Conformity assessment frameworks based on the ISO CASCO toolbox were emphasized to ensure internationally recognized testing, inspection, and certification processes.



A key output was the development of a strategic roadmap outlining priority actions. These include strengthening laboratory infrastructure, enhancing accreditation systems, improving traceability, building local technical expertise, and increasing participation in international standards development.



Expected results



During the project, research undertaken by the local project team identified some important short, medium and longer-term results for the Uganda coffee sector that would materialize through the strengthened and deepened use of International Standards and associated conformity assessment.

These were:

Short-term results

- Improved understanding and adoption of International Standards and conformity assessment procedures will enhance compliance and reduce immediate export rejections and delays.
- Strengthened coordination among quality infrastructure actors will improve efficiency and reliability of conformity assessment outcomes.

Medium-term results

- Expanded national capacity in testing, certification, and accreditation will reduce reliance on foreign services and lower compliance costs for exporters.
- Enhanced traceability, quality management systems, and regulatory alignment will improve market access and competitiveness in key export destinations.

Long-term results

- A robust and internationally recognized quality infrastructure system will enable sustained access to high-value markets and increased export value.
- Systematic integration of ISO standards and credible conformity assessment will support sector resilience, premium pricing, and sustainable economic growth.



Future impacts

The adoption of International Standards and conformity assessment practices is expected to assist Uganda to obtain several significant economic and other benefits which will now be further elaborated.

1



First, **it enhances market access**. Compliance with internationally recognized standards reduces technical barriers to trade, enabling Ugandan coffee to enter demanding markets such as the EU with greater ease. It also minimizes the risk of product rejection and reduces delays caused by re-testing.

Second, **it builds trust and credibility**. Internationally recognized accredited certification and testing systems provide assurance to buyers that products meet the required quality and safety standards. This increases confidence in Ugandan coffee and strengthens its reputation in global markets.



2

3



Third, **it improves efficiency and reduces costs over time**. While initial investments in standards implementation and conformity assessment can be high, aligning with international requirements reduces duplication of testing and certification. It also streamlines export processes and improves coordination across institutions.

Fourth, **it drives quality improvement and value addition**. International Standards-based systems encourage better production practices, improved handling, and consistent quality. This enables producers to access premium markets and achieve higher prices.



4

5



Finally, **it strengthens institutional capacity and coordination**. The project highlighted the importance of collaboration among public and private stakeholders. Improved coordination leads to more efficient regulatory processes and better support for exporters.



Scaling the impact

To sustain and expand these benefits, several actions are necessary to scale the impact. These include:



Strengthening quality infrastructure remains a priority. This includes expanding laboratory capacity, ensuring accreditation of testing and certification bodies, and improving access to these and other conformity assessment services across the region. Decentralizing such services can make compliance more accessible, especially for smallholder producers.

Capacity building across the value chain is essential.

Farmers, processors, and exporters need continuous training on standards, quality management systems, and compliance requirements. Developing local expertise in auditing, testing, and certification will reduce reliance on external service providers and lower costs.



Enhancing traceability systems is critical, particularly in response to evolving international regulations. Digital tools and farmer registration systems can improve transparency and ensure compliance with sustainability requirements.

Increased, more strategic, participation in International Standards development to allow Uganda to influence the pertinent standards rather than react to them. Early engagement and sustained participation ensure that national interests are represented and reduces the risk of misalignment with global requirements.



Finally, **improving coordination and governance within the QI system** is key. Establishing clear regulatory frameworks, strengthening inter-agency collaboration, and providing accessible guidance to exporters will enhance overall system effectiveness.

Conclusion

The Uganda coffee case study demonstrates that International Standards and best practice conformity assessment are not merely technical requirements but strategic tools for enhancing competitiveness, market access, and economic growth. By shifting from reactive compliance to proactive system strengthening, Uganda can position its coffee sector for sustainable success in global markets.



The detailed version of the case study can be accessed via this [link](#).

References



- International Labour Organization (ILO) 2024, Uganda Coffee Value Chain Mapping Report, ILO, Geneva.
- Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) 2025, Monthly Coffee Report 2025, UCDA, Kampala.
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2025, Coffee Annual Report: Uganda, Foreign Agricultural Service, Washington DC.



**International Organization
for Standardization**

ISO Central Secretariat
Chemin de Blandonnet 8
1214 Geneva, Switzerland

© ISO 2026
All rights reserved
ISBN 978-92-67-11504-7

iso.org