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Reimagining India's Quality Ecosystem

A Summary of RIS Discussion Paper #336

Authors: Rajeev Kher (Former Distinguished Fellow, RIS), Anil Jauhri (Visiting Fellow, RIS), and Om Stutee (Research Assistant, RIS)

This landmark 34-page strategic Discussion paper, published by the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), serves as a policy blueprint for upgrading India's National Quality Infrastructure (NQI). It addresses the critical structural challenges India faces in international trade—such as rising Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), overlapping inter-ministerial regulations, and recent global setbacks in export certifications. The document outlines a comprehensive roadmap to shift India's quality framework from a basic compliance hurdle into a core driver of global competitiveness, aligning closely with the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. By establishing a unified regulatory architecture, bridging technical measurement gaps, and integrating sustainability standards, this paper aims to ensure that Indian products and certification systems achieve absolute global acceptance.

1. Background and Rationale: The Trigger for Reimagining

Non-tariff measures (NTMs)—specifically those involving technical regulations, standards, and conformity assessments—have overtaken traditional tariffs as the single largest barrier to global free trade. For a developing economy like India, these measures pose severe structural hurdles.



The paper points out that while India has made major domestic regulatory leaps, it has recently faced highly publicized global setbacks. These include the withdrawal of recognition for India's organic certification system by the United States, the blacklisting of major Indian certification bodies by the European Commission, and recurring export rejections due to chemical purity and contamination challenges (such as Ethylene Oxide residues).

Concurrently, a deficit in robust domestic technical regulations leaves Indian consumers vulnerable to unsafe, sub-standard imports, while placing an unfair compliance and competitive burden on compliant domestic manufacturers. Reimagining the quality infrastructure is no longer just about compliance; it is an economic necessity to defend domestic markets and ensure seamless global market access.

2. Understanding the Quality Ecosystem

The paper defines a mature national quality infrastructure (NQI) as an interconnected "gear system" that operates across three core pillars:

- ★ **Standards Framework:** Defining transparent technical parameters across both the mandatory regulatory and market-driven voluntary sectors.
- ★ **Conformity Assessment System:** The practical checking mechanisms (testing, inspection, and certification) to verify that a product or service complies with established standards.
- ★ **Accreditation Framework:** The high-level verification process that audits and guarantees the technical competence of the testing laboratories and certification bodies themselves.



3. Systemic Governance & Architecture Challenges

The core of the 34-page document analyzes specific systemic bottlenecks currently limiting India's quality ecosystem:

- ★ Fragmentation and Overlapping Jurisdictions (Section 3.1): India suffers from a distinct lack of cross-sector governance and role clarity among ministries. Different administrative bodies independently roll out quality mandates, which occasionally leads to overlapping jurisdictions, contradictory compliance routing, and "regulatory cholesterol" for enterprises dealing with multiple bodies like CDSCO, FSSAI, BEE, and BIS.
- ★ The Metrology Deficit (Section 3.2 & 3.5): On the Global Quality Infrastructure Index (GQII), India ranks impressively high in accreditation (7th) and standardization (8th), but noticeably lags at 31st in Metrology (chemical and physical measurement traceability). This measurement deficit directly limits the accuracy of local testing, causing discrepancies when Indian laboratory data is re-tested and rejected in stricter overseas markets.
- ★ Decentralized Export Regulation (Section 3.3): Prior to the Food Safety and Standards Act of 2006, domestic food regulation was scattered across five ministries. While FSSAI consolidated domestic oversight, export regulation remains heavily fragmented across diverse, disconnected bodies like the Export Inspection Council (EIC), APEDA, Spices Board, and IOPEPC.
- ★ Voluntary vs. Mandatory Distinctions (Section 3.6): The paper highlights a structural confusion where government machinery frequently entangles itself in administering voluntary, private market



standards instead of leaving market-driven certifications to independent conformity assessment bodies and strictly focusing state capacity on statutory technical enforcement.

4. Proposed Policy Directions and Strategic Highlights

The white paper provides an actionable blueprint to correct these gaps through four major policy updates:

- ★ The National Authority on Quality (Section 4.1): Establishing a coherent, centralized national governing architecture on quality to harmonize regulatory oversight, align inter-ministerial policies, and definitively resolve overlapping mandates.
- ★ Consolidating Export Inspection Frameworks (Section 4.2): Recommending a structural evaluation to merge or tightly coordinate export clearance mechanisms under a single, simplified gateway to reduce transaction time and costs for exporters.
- ★ Proactive Global Standard-Setting (Section 4.3): Shifting India's international posture from a passive adopter of foreign standards to an aggressive, active participant in global standard-setting bodies (like ISO, IEC, and Codex) to protect Indian trade interests before international rules are passed.
- ★ Upgrading Lab Infrastructure for Digital & ESG Mandates (Section 4.4): Modernizing conformity assessment pathways to handle Quality 4.0 elements (blockchain traceability, AI data logging) and upcoming global sustainability and environmental mandates (such as carbon footprint tracking and life-cycle assessments).

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Why You Must Read the Full Paper and Share Your Comments

This paper serves as the foundational text for future amendments to India's Quality Control Orders (QCOs), lab empanelment protocols, and export-import regulations.

Every segment of our ecosystem is directly impacted:

- ★ Associations must analyze if export consolidation aids or disrupts current trade loops.
- ★ Manufacturers must evaluate if the proposed National Authority streamlines their cross ministry compliance hurdles.
- ★ Consultants & Auditors must ensure the rules for private conformity assessment bodies foster a strong, independent, and locally protected consulting ecosystem.

Download the Full Document:



<https://www.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/Publication/reimagining-india-quality-ecosystem.pdf>

Shape the Policy:

Do join us in the upcoming webinar on July 24th to share your insights .

After attending the webinar, you can submit your point-by point observations, segment challenges, and recommendations to the Andhra Chamber of Commerce at : andhrachamber1@gmail.com , to be included in the national consolidated representation
