



Southern African Development Community Accreditation Newsletter

January 2006

**The Regional Accreditation Structure of SQAM
(Standardisation, Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Metrology)**

Building capacity in SADC to recognise accurate measurement

The lack of acceptance of laboratory test data and certification results across national borders is a significant barrier to trade. Developing countries in Africa realise the creation of a sound technical infrastructure as a key priority area for assistance and trade related capacity building. Recent initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) highlight market access as a key priority for developing countries. In particular, NEPAD cites standards, technical regulatory frameworks, metrology, and accreditation as key areas for capacity development.

According to the managing director of an African organisation, he thought his laboratory was performing correct measurements, however, since becoming accredited; "now he knows his measurements are accurate and recognised!"

Establishing accreditation systems based on international standards and linked with international accreditation agreements, provides assurance to trading partners that suppliers of tests and certificates are competent and at the same time overcoming trade barriers and complying with the requirements of the WTO/TBT Agreement.

Pictured right: SADC Technical Assessor group

While technical regulations, metrology, standards and conformity assessment procedures (including accreditation) are used by societies to optimise production, health, consumer protection, environment, security and quality, as well as to manage risk and areas of market failure; their sound development and effective implementation enable sustainable development, build welfare and facilitate trade.

In Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community Cooperation in Accreditation (SADCA) was initiated in 1997, subsequent to the signing of the SADC Trade Protocol. Since its initiation, SADCA commenced work on a project for developing accreditation services in all SADC Member States.

Whilst only one internationally recognised accreditation body exists within SADC Member States, the need to recognise Member States competence in testing, calibration, certification and inspection, as well as pursue international recognition for the regional accreditation arrangement; has culminated in the identification of technical experts across government, academia and industry. Funded by the PTB of Germany, 8 SADC and 2 EAC (East African Community) countries were hosted in South Africa, during September 2005, at specialist training workshops and the Test and Measurement Conference.

Representing Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Lesotho, Uganda, Botswana, Tanzania and Kenya, the 18 delegates were exposed to the latest technologies and participated in technology transfer in their various fields of interest at the Test and Measurement Conference. A paper on "Challenges of laboratory accreditation in the least developed countries," presented by Mr Dominic Mwakangale, highlighted a number of technical barriers to trade that thwart development of the Tanzanian economy. He pertinently stated that accreditation was the only manner in which exports could be increased and elaborated on the present application for accreditation.

Secondly, a three day training course on the implementation of an ISO/IEC 17025 system in a laboratory was



attended by the delegates. Presented by SANAS, the systems course provides an in depth analysis of each requirement of ISO/IEC 17025, the interpretation thereof and how to implement each requirement.

“Insight has been gained into numerous aspects of ISO/IEC 17025 including method validation and Uncertainty of Measurement,” Dr Hemraj - chief clinical scientist at the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life (Mauritius) commented. “In addition, the visit to a local plant pathology laboratory, situated at the University of Pretoria, has allowed the delegates to experience an operational accredited laboratory and witness ISO/IEC 17025 in practice.”

Lastly, the delegates attended a five day Technical Assessor Course. The course is geared towards teaching trainee technical assessors vital techniques in conducting assessments; including protocols, assessment documentation, gathering of evidence, roles and responsibilities of both technical and lead assessor and recording of findings. Finally, the course practically demonstrates how assessment techniques can be used to maximise accreditation benefits.

Marie Chilcott of the SADCA Secretariat commented that this initial training project is only the beginning of the process of training technical assessors that may be utilised in future assessments in SADC countries.

The delegates that attended the training courses included:

Country	Delegate	Field of expertise
Botswana	T C Losho	Veterinary
	S G Nfila	Medical (Biochemistry/Cytotechnology)
Lesotho	N I Raditapole	Biotechnology
	M Kanetsi	Chemistry/Biology
Malawi	D Chirembo	Chemical (Applied chemistry)
	A Moyo	Flow/Volume(Cal Labs)
Mauritius	B Jhamna	Chemistry (Water, toxic materials, pharmaceuticals)
	F Hemraj	Medical (Clinical biochemistry)
Namibia	C Hinda	Medical (Clinical pathology)
	A Beukes	Medical (Chemical pathology)
Tanzania	K Mbwambo	Chemistry
	D Mwakangale	Textiles
Zambia	P Chikoti	Agriculture (Sanitary & Phyto-sanitary inspections)
	D Hikeezi	Food Science / Technology (food/agriculture)
Zimbabwe	B Gabi	Certification (Chemistry / Bio Chemistry)
	A R Mandisodza	Medical (Medical technology)
Uganda	Yasin Lemeriga	Mass, volume and Flow
Kenya	Martin Nyakiamo	Microbiologist

SADC PMC meeting update

The Project Management Committee (PMC) of SADCA met twice during May 2005. The PMC meets on a regular basis to discuss strategic issues of SADCA.

According to Ms Marie Chilcott of the SADCA secretariat, a full committee met and discussed the SADCAS bylaws and obtained acceptance thereof. Subsequently, the SADCAS board of directors was elected.

The board of directors includes:

Mr R A Kaakunga, Namibia - Chairperson of Board of Directors

Mr C Mokhoro, Lesotho

Mr M Mukelabai, Zambia

Mr S Santos, Mozambique

Mr S Francisco, Angola

Ms M Chilcott, South Africa

Mr M A Peet, South Africa – Secretariat

Pictured right: SADCAS Board of Directors and PMC in Zanzibar

Subsequently, a meeting held in Zanzibar during November 2005 the Board of Directors discussed the articles of association, the proposed memorandum of agreement and the operational requirements of the SADCAS strategic and business plan.



NAFPs gain momentum across SADC

Developing nations in SADC are currently not fully benefiting and gaining access to international markets, for reasons amongst others, a lack of internationally recognised conformity assessment practices in the region. According to WTO estimates, a staggering US\$ 400 million of food exported by 33 African countries was rejected by the international market during 1990 to 1992.

Accreditation is synonymous to proof of technical competence recognition and can therefore be a tool for removal of Technical Barriers to Trade. It provides for the acceptance and recognition of the results of conformity assessment procedures among trading partners with the objective to allow for free flow of goods and services from one country to another.

The creation of a regional accreditation body in Southern Africa - SADCAS, is intended to support and supplement current and future SADC accreditation activity. Whilst it is not intended to compete with current or future national accreditation bodies, SADCAS offers a low risk alternative to determine Member State needs and addresses these in the most cost effective and sustainable manner.

A key to the successful working of SADCAS is the appointment by each SADC Member State of a National Accreditation Focal Point (NAFP) – the technical specialists responsible for the day-to-day activity associated with accreditation.

Through SADCA, Member States have been encouraged and assisted to set up a NAFP with the objective of signing a SADCA Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a SADCA mutual recognition arrangement (MRA). Subsequently, NAFPs of the Member States were all officially nominated by their respective governments.

A lack of awareness of world trade, conformity assessment and accreditation in the SADC region, necessitated a 5 day training course to provide NAFPs with a good basis for understanding the future important role they would play in SADC and enabling them to participate in awareness workshops in their own countries.

Furthermore a 14-day Attachment Training was provided at four internationally recognised accreditation bodies, where the NAFPs actually witnessed all aspects of the operations of an accreditation body. This included attending assessments as observers, attending specialist technical committee meetings, approval for accreditation meetings and also meeting with government and regulators. Two NAFPs attended training in Brazil, two in Australia, two in Norway and two in South Africa.

At a Feedback Workshop, the NAFPs shared the experiences obtained during the attachment training. The NAFPs each prepared a 30-minute presentation and paper on the theoretical and attachment training received.

Finally, a Workshop on Requirements for Assessors and Trainers, NAFPs received an overview of the contents for a technical and lead assessor course. In addition, they developed the criteria for selection of technical experts in their respective countries who would attend a technical assessor course and afterwards be attached to a national accreditation body to observe actual assessments as further training.

To date, NAFPs have successfully been launched in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius and Zambia.

SADCA shares experiences with international community

A SADCA representative, Mr Ron Josias, has attended the 10th General Assembly of the Inter American Accreditation Cooperation [IAAC] and related technical committee meetings in Costa Rica, during May 2005, and visited the Caribbean Regional Epidemiology Centre [CAREC] in Trinidad to initiate the technical

cooperation agreement between IAAC and SADCA.

At the IAAC meeting, Ron presented an overview of SADCA during the inauguration ceremony, which was attended by the Minister and Deputy Minister of Science and Technology and representatives from APLAC, ILAC, IAAC and COPANT. Supporting the SADCA speech, the Deputy Minister emphasised the need for cooperation with other countries so as to share experiences.

During the MLA Committee meeting, it became apparent that a number of specific roles and functions within SADCA need to be clarified. He added that consideration should be given for combined evaluations to ensure the cost effectiveness and recognition of other regional bodies' evaluation for acceptance into MLAs. Membership of the various committees, especially those where confidential issues will be discussed, need to be addressed and agreed upon prior to the establishment of these committees.

The IAAC / COPANT Seminar included presentations on standards, certification and accreditation. He added that a presentation on the use of accreditation in the regulatory domain, clearly illustrated the difficulty most countries find to sell accreditation to the regulators. This highlights the role of the subsidiary status for SADCAS. In addition, it highlights the need for deeper commitment from the SADC Ministers to recognise and utilise the services of SADCAS within the regulatory domain.

Ron believes that SADCA has the opportunity to set some international precedents in a regional context, which could probably supply some guides to the challenges of dealing with accreditation the regulatory area.

During the Laboratory Subcommittee meeting, proficiency testing results compiled from laboratories in the IAAC region were discussed. The cost of proficiency testing was highlighted as a problematic issue.

The Inspection Body Subcommittee meeting focused on the acceptance of ILAC / IAF A4 Guidance for the implementation of ISO / IEC 17020.

The Working Group on Proficiency Testing schemes discussed the results of proficiency testing performed on Chocolate Powder in which two SADC laboratories also participated. The group aimed to have the results available by September 2005.

Ron believes that SADCA will have to play a more prominent role within the decision-making structures of ILAC and IAF. Issues discussed during the week will have an impact on the operations of SADCA and SADCAS and therefore needs SADCA input from the beginning.

Lastly, his visit to CAREC in Trinidad was to determine whether SADCAS can learn from and utilise some of the experiences of CAREC in the implementation of a regional infrastructure.

The SADCA model for creating a regional accreditation infrastructure is currently being investigated by CAREC to determine suitability of the model for their region due to the similarities in the SADC region including the size of the accreditation market and sustainability of national accreditation bodies.

Ron said the Caribbean countries experience similar technical infrastructure challenges as experienced in the SADC region. With regard to the accreditation infrastructure, CAREC offers vast experience and expertise that SADCA would be able to utilise. In addition, SADCA could contribute to the knowledge pool of CAREC, especially the accreditation infrastructure.

“This visit was a very fruitful experience, giving guidance to some of the issues that needs SADCA’s attention as well as highlighting the difficulty with donor funding, which could be of assistance to SADC Secretariat” Ron concluded.

