



## **REPORT ON THE ANNUAL SADC SQAM MEETINGS HELD IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, 5 – 10 MAY 2008.**

This year's annual SADC Standardisation, Quality assurance, Accreditation and Metrology (SQAM) structures meetings were held in the beautiful city of Cape Town from 5 to 10 May hosted by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and were attended by over 70 delegates from SADC member states as well as international invited SQAM experts and observers from all over the world. The purpose of the meetings is to review activities carried out by each structure during the past year and to plan for items to be addressed in the coming year.

As usual the meeting started with an official Opening Ceremony where the guest of honour was the South African Minister for Trade and Industry the Honourable Mr Mandisi Mphahla. In his address to the delegates the Minister highlighted the role played by SQAM in industrial development and trade facilitation and called on the SQAM practitioners to translate their technical but important subject matter into a language that even the common person on the street would understand. The Minister chronicled the economic development of SADC and its vision for the future and emphasised the importance of harmonised standards and technical regulation framework as the basis for smooth movement of goods in a free trade area and customs union. The Minister also presented *Certificates of Appreciation* to five past members of the SADC SQAM programme who had rendered exceptional service to the SADC region in the area of standards, quality assurance, accreditation and metrology. In her opening remarks, the Acting Director of Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment (TIFI) at the SADC Secretariat, Ms Boitumelo Gofhamodimo, shared with the delegates the support the programme receives

from the Secretariat and how the programme also interlinks with other projects running within SADC.

As has become the norm, the Opening Ceremony was followed by a technical workshop open to the public where the theme was appropriately “Food Safety – 2010” in view of the upcoming World Cup soccer show piece to be held in South Africa in 2010. Five papers were presented at the workshop by internationally renowned experts and all of them demonstrating the complexity of dealing with feeding large numbers of people and the role that food safety standards and management systems can play. The sporting theme was also coined by the guest speaker at the SADC Cooperation in Metrology (SADCMET) meeting the following day where he delivered a powerful presentation on “Metrology in Sport”. ‘Metrology in Sport’ is in fact also the theme for this year’s international World Metrology Day (20 May) celebrations.

The meetings of the five SADC SQAM structures (SADCMET, SADCSTAN, SADCMEEL and SADCA) centred on advancing issues supportive of the regional integration agenda noting that the SADC free trade area (FTA) would be launched this year and that the Customs Union (CU) is targeted for launch in 2010. The main highlights of the meetings noted were:

- Report on the imminent adoption of the Sanitary & Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) annexes to the SADC Protocol on Trade which would further strengthen the enforcement of health, safety and environmental standards among others, when products are traded across our borders,
- Report on the operationalization of SADC Accreditation Service (SADCAS), a unique regional venture that will enable conformity assessment bodies in SADC countries to access internationally recognised and cost effective accreditation services within the region,
- Updates on the preparations for the implementation of the SADC/EU SQAM support project funded by the European Commission and intended to build capacity in regional SQAM institutions,

- Agreement on the efforts to be made to archive training materials coming out of the SADC/EU SQAM Project for further use in future,
- Report on the growth of the continental metrology organisation AFRIMETS as an internationally recognised Regional Metrology Organisation (RMO) in Africa where SADC MEL and SADC MET are key sub-regional metrology organisation (SRMO) stakeholders,
- Report on the other SADC projects that have links with SQAM such as the SADC/UNIDO Industrial Upgrading and Modernisation programme and the Food Safety – Residue Control capacity building project which is also funded by the European Commission. Members agreed to proactively prepare for the role they will need to play in the implementation of each of these projects.
- Agreement to start implementation of the SADC Quality Award scheme so that the first regional quality awards can be presented at the annual SADC SQAM meetings in 2009.
- The signing of a cooperation agreement between SADCSTAN and ASTM, a major standards organisation of the USA, and
- Reports, presentations and messages of goodwill and support were received from representatives of regional and international SQAM bodies.

The meetings however noted that the region was still experiencing challenges in the area of representation by its experts at international SQAM organisations which means that by and large SADC remains a “standards taker” rather than a “standards maker”. The WTO Agreements on SPS and TBT strongly encourage the participation of all stakeholders in the formulation of international standards so that their concerns are taken into account. Members also noted that more resources are required to translate documents into French and Portuguese so that experts from SADC countries that come from countries that use those languages can meaningfully participate in the regional work on standards and technical regulations harmonisation. More resources are also required to enable the various technical committees to travel to meetings and carry their SQAM activities.