

SADCAS JOURNEY TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Background

The Southern African Development Community Accreditation Services (SADCAS) is a multi-economy accreditation body established in terms of Article 15 B of the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Annex to the SADC Protocol on Trade with the primary purpose of ensuring that conformity assessment service providers (calibration/testing/medical laboratories, certification and inspection bodies) operating in those SADC Member States which do not have national accreditation bodies are subject to an oversight by an authoritative body. Within the SADC region only South Africa and Mauritius have national accreditation bodies. The remaining 13 countries namely: Angola; Botswana; Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); Lesotho; Madagascar; Malawi; Mozambique; Namibia; Seychelles; Swaziland; Tanzania; Zambia; and Zimbabwe do not have national accreditation bodies hence serviced by SADCAS. By assuring technical competence through accreditation, SADCAS plays a key role towards the achievement of SADC goals in trade facilitation and in the protection of health, safety and the environment.

SADCAS was conceptualized in 1996 by a group of experts from the region with input from international accreditation experts. A good 10 years was spent developing the model and getting its approval by the region and acceptance by the international accreditation fora being the first multi-economy accreditation body in the world. The National Accreditation Focal Points who are responsible for promoting accreditation and marketing SADCAS service offerings, were established between 2004 and 2005. SADCAS was incorporated in December 2005 in Botswana. The first SADCAS staff took up positions in April and June 2008. The SADCAS office was set up by October 2008, launched in 2009 and SADCAS started offering services in October 2009. SADCAS provides accreditation services and training in accreditation associated activities. SADCAS is now in its 7th year of operation as a multi economy accreditation body. As at 31 November 2015 SADCAS had accredited 47 facilities in eight (8) SADC countries namely: Botswana (10); Mozambique (1); Namibia (5); Seychelles (2); Swaziland (1); Tanzania (13); Zambia (2) and Zimbabwe (13). Most of the accreditations fall under testing (ISO/IEC 17025) at 45%, medical testing ((ISO 15189) at 28%, calibration (ISO/IEC 17025) at 19% and inspection (ISO/IEC 17020) at 8%.

The Journey Towards International Recognition

The SADCAS Quality Management System (QMS) which provides the springboard for quality services was developed with assistance from Norwegian Accreditation and the South African national Accreditation System (SANAS) in order to ensure compliance with ISO/IEC 17011. SADCAS went through internal audits of its QMS in January 2013, July 2014 and March 2015. Management reviews of the results of the Internal Audits were undertaken in February, May and December 2013, June 2014, May 2015 and 12 November 2015. In October 2013, SADCAS submitted its applications to join the African Accreditation Cooperation (AFRAC) and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRA). The applications were accepted by December 2013 following which SADCAS successfully underwent a joint AFRAC/ILAC pre peer evaluation from 23 to 27 June 2014. The pre peer evaluation was designed to evaluate SADCAS readiness for a full peer evaluation. Proposed corrective actions on the 14

findings (2 nonconformities, 7 concerns and 5 comments) raised during the pre-peer evaluation were accepted by the evaluation team following which the corrective actions were implemented and evidence of implementation cleared by the evaluation team. The team subsequently submitted a final report to the AFRAC MRA Committee and ILAC Arrangement Management Committee (AMC) for consideration and who at their September and October 2014 meetings respectively concluded that SADCAS was ready for a full evaluation.

The peer evaluation of SADCAS was undertaken from 26 to 31 May 2015 with witnessing being carried out of initial assessments of 2 testing laboratories in Zambia and Botswana and reassessment of a calibration laboratory in Botswana. During the peer evaluation a total of 9 findings (1 nonconformity, 2 concerns and 6 comments) were raised for which corrective action accepted by the team and evidence of implementation cleared with final report and recommendation issued. The team's recommendation was then considered by the AFRAC MRA Committee and ILAC AMC who subsequently and respectively submitted their recommendation for decision by the AFRAC MRA Council and ILAC Arrangement Council at their meetings held on 8 October 2015 in Tunis, Tunisia and 4 November 2015 in Milan, Italy.

The Achievement

It is at these meetings that SADCAS was granted signatory status to the AFRAC MRA and the ILAC MRA for **Testing (ISO/IEC 17025)** and **Calibration (ISO/IEC 17025)**.



Mrs Mutasa and Mr Steve Bruce Sidney SADCAS Board Chairman proudly displaying the duly signed ILAC MRA Certificate with AFRAC members



From left to right Mr Boughalmi Moez, Chairman AFRAC MRA Council; Mr Ron Josias Chairman AFRAC; Mrs Maureen Mutasa, SADCAS CEO; and Ms Jeanne Ranorovelo SADCAS Technical Manager proudly displaying the signed AFRAC MOU

With this achievement the accreditation certificates issued by SADCAS for the testing and calibration accreditation programs are now internationally recognized thus enhance the acceptance of products across national borders and remove the need for retesting of products traded internationally. In line with its value proposition SADCAS is truly delivering confidence, assuring technical competence and guaranteeing quality.

In paying tribute to all those who contributed towards this achievement Mrs Maureen Mutasa, the SADCAS Chief Executive Officer quoted from an African saying, “When we stand tall it is because we stand on the shoulders of those that have gone before us, and those that surround us”, she added. She thanked “Team SADCAS” for their dedication towards goal achievement, the assessors who were witnessed during the evaluations for their professionalism and competence, and the SADCAS Board of Directors for their support and encouragement throughout the rigorous evaluation process. She also paid tribute to SANAS who through the Twinning Partnership Arrangement entered into in 2009, facilitated the transfer of accreditation skills to the SADCAS assessors, management and staff. Many thanks also go to the professional team of ILAC and AFRAC evaluators who timeously executed the evaluation and last but not least to PTB Germany who fully funded the peer evaluation of SADCAS.

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead and with the achievements so far, our thrust will be to achieve signatory status for the other accreditation programs on offer and of course to maintain signatory status for the testing and calibration accreditation programs.

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