

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AFRICAN ACCREDITATION COOPERATION

DOCUMENT OF INTENT

1. PREAMBLE

1.1 BACKGROUND

In Chapter XI Article 67 of the Abuja Treaty; (the treaty establishing the African Economic Community), African political leadership recognised the importance of quality issues in economic development and called on member states to cooperate in the area of Standardization and Measurement Systems as follows:

- (a) adopt a common policy on standardization and quality assurance of goods and services among Member States;
- (b) undertake such other related activities in standardization and measurement systems that are likely to promote trade, economic development and integration within the Community; and
- (c) strengthen African national, regional and continental organizations operating in this field.

Furthermore, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) . a technical programme of the AU, as a vision and Strategic Framework for Africa's renewal addresses current challenges facing the African continent such as the escalating poverty levels, underdevelopment and the continued marginalisation of Africa.

The proposed cooperation in accreditation will strengthen Africa's ability to deal with continental needs in

- (i) intra-African trade;
- (ii) Africa's trade with other countries and regions;
- (iii) industrial development and beneficiation
- (iv) improvement of the competitiveness of African goods and services
- (v) diversification of exports; and
- (vi) the protection of public health, safety and the environment.

These priorities have to be underpinned by well-designed and coherent technical infrastructure and capacity building.

Trade in particular increased market access for Africa's exports, is critical to the recovery and sustained development of the continent, and for its integration into the global economy. Africa's participation record in international trade over the past decades, however, has been in consistent decline. In addition health issues highlighted with the concerns of the high level of HIV and Aids, malaria and other diseases in the agricultural and veterinary sectors on the continent.

In order to lay the basis for Africa's effective participation in global trade; strengthen its negotiations with her major trading partners; ensure the acceptance of Africa's goods and services in exporting countries, recognition of Africa's conformity assessment infrastructure as equivalent to those in the importing country; and ensuring public health, safety and the protection of the environment, there appear to be urgent need for a strong, sustainable and integrated approach to the continent's quality infrastructure, encompassing metrology, standards, testing, accreditation and quality assurance.

1.2 PROMOTION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ACCREDITATION

Accreditation contributes to the development of African economies through ensuring existence of competence and recognition of institutions such as:

- Laboratories (testing, analytical, calibration, forensic, food and medical laboratories)
- Inspection bodies
- Certification bodies, and
- Organizations performing personnel and product certification.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF ACCREDITATION TO GLOBAL TRADE

Accreditation contributes to the development of a solid basis for effective participation in the global market and the management of legislation, directives, technical regulations and specifications is of fundamental importance to trade and industry, public health and safety, environmental protection and for the economy.

One of the effects of globalization of trade has been that confidence in the results produced by conformity assessment bodies in areas such as testing, inspection and certification, are now required not only to facilitate national and international trade and industrial development but also to protect the health and safety of the public and the environment. Products that are affected include almost all manufactured products, agricultural products and raw materials, such as fish and fishery products, foods and associated industries, chemicals, vehicles, electrical goods, health products and instrumentation.

This trend can be seen from examples such as the European Union (EU) requirement for accredited results for their importation of fish and associated products. The use of accreditation to underpin the granting of notification status to an organization in the EU is currently under discussion.

In general, there is now a demand for people to have confidence in the credibility of the results from conformity assessment bodies because decisions based on the data that come from conformity assessment bodies are increasingly seen to have a direct influence on the economy, human health and safety, environmental protection and welfare.

Globalization of world trade and requirements of the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBTs) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for the reduction of non-tariff barriers to trade urgently call for measures to develop, strengthen and consolidate accreditation structures. Furthermore, the implementation of trade agreements under the WTO recommends the existence of an internationally recognized system of accreditation for conformity assessment bodies. This requires the existence of an international network of national and/or regional accreditation bodies, recognized by regulators and legislators and in which trading partners can have confidence.

The need to have an internationally accepted and reliable accreditation system in place is now understood by governments, trade authorities and regulators. An internationally recognized quality infrastructure such as AFRAC across Africa is now a high priority.

Also, belonging to the non-tariff barriers affecting market access belong the Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary measures (SPS). These SPS measures address different aspects of quality of life, including plant protection, food (FAO), bio-safety (GMOs) and health aspects (WHO). Proper implementation of the Sanitary and Phyto-sanitary measures require reliable, internationally recognized accreditation infrastructure.

For Africa, the lack of a well developed and integrated infrastructure to address TBTs and SPS issues is hindering development as it raises the vulnerability to non-tariff barriers to trade, that in turn delays market access and impacts negatively on industrial and economic development.

AFRAC will complement related and existing continental cooperation arrangements in the areas of standardisation (African Regional Standardization Organization - ARSO) and metrology (Cooperation of African Metrology Systems - AFRIMETS). With a strong united voice in the area of accreditation, Africa will be able to engage international accreditation bodies such as the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation . ILAC, and the International Accreditation Forum . IAF more meaningfully on behalf of stakeholders of the African continent who would be too small on their own to make any significant impact.

This document therefore, states the delegates desire to establish an African Regional Accreditation Body, hereafter referred to as AFRAC, with its vision, mission, structure and membership as elaborated below.

2. VISION

To be the African Accreditation Cooperation Body recognised by the African Union and internationally, and accepted by African member states for serving the African economy and society.

3. MISSION

Cooperate in building capacity in African accreditation with the goal of sustaining an internationally acceptable mutual recognition arrangement.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the African Accreditation Cooperation are the following:

- To support trade in Africa and enhance global market access by removing technical barriers to trade, and in both the voluntary and regulatory areas
- To improve the competitiveness of African goods and services, and
- To facilitate health and safety of the public and the environment.

4. FUNCTIONS

- 4.1 To foster collaboration amongst member states having national or multi-economy accreditation bodies;
- 4.2 To assist and support the establishment of national or multi-economy accreditation bodies as needed;
- 4.3 To create and maintain a system for the recognition of accreditation bodies in member states or multi-economy states within the framework of and consistent with global MRA/MLA international requirements;
- 4.4 To coordinate, cooperate and liaise with regional and international organisations concerned with accreditation such as the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), Inter American Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC), Asian Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC), Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (PAC) and European Accreditation (EA);
- 4.5 To promote and expand the recognition and acceptance of the mutual recognition arrangement in Africa and internationally in both the voluntary and regulatory areas;
- 4.6 To develop and manage training and technical assistance programs for transferring expertise and technical information, sharing of information and activities identified to assist new or developing accreditation programs, among present and potential members;
- 4.7 To harmonise accreditation practices within Africa in compliance with international requirements; and
- 4.8 To establish an information system (data base) including for example information on accreditation bodies, proficiency testing (PT) schemes and assessors, etc

5. STRUCTURE

AFRAC's organizational structure is made up of a General Assembly, an Executive Committee, a Chair, MLA Council, a Secretariat, committees and subcommittees.

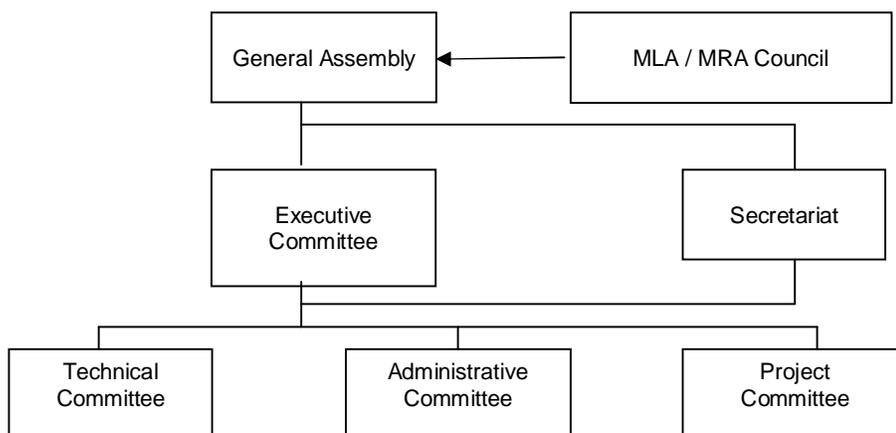


FIG.1: AFRAC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

6. MEMBERSHIP

AFRAC has six categories of Membership, namely, Full Members, Affiliate Members, Associate Members, Stakeholder Members, African Sub-Regional Accreditation Cooperation Bodies and Membership through Bi-lateral Arrangements.

6.1 Full Members

Full Members include: All accreditation bodies accrediting CABs, appointed or recognised by the Member State government or sub-regional block and legally established and operating in the African region that declare and demonstrate, that they are operating in accordance with the requirements of ISO/IEC guides and standards, the relevant international documents and the requirements of AFRAC, are eligible to become Full Members of AFRAC. All signatories of the AFRAC MRA are eligible to be Full Members.

6.2 Associate Members

Associate Members are: Accreditation bodies established in the Member States or blocks of Member States of the African Region, appointed or recognised by the Member State government or sub-regional block and legally established and operating in the African region, that does not yet operate according to the requirements of ISO/IEC guides and standards, the relevant international documents and AFRAC requirements for Associate Members.

Associate Members also include: Representatives of Member States or blocks of Member States of the African region that do not have an established accreditation body.

Associate Members are: not signatories to the AFRAC MRA.

6.3 Affiliate Members

Affiliate Members are: Accreditation bodies established in the Member States or blocks of Member States of the African region, appointed or recognised by the Member State government or sub-regional block and legally established that is not yet in operation or accredited any CAB, but has declared its intent to comply with the international standards and the AFRAC rules.

6.4 Stakeholder Members

Stakeholder Members include: certification or registration bodies, inspection bodies, and/or testing and calibration laboratories that are accredited, or are in the process of being accredited by AFRAC Full Members, business entities, or other users of conformity assessment services in the region.

6.5 African Sub-Regional Cooperation Bodies

African Sub-Regional Accreditation Cooperation Bodies are formally established sub-regional accreditation cooperations appointed or recognised by their sub-regional block and operating in the African region having objectives similar to and compatible with AFRAC, which are committed to the obligations of the AFRAC MRA and which consist of formally nominated representatives of the accreditation interests recognised by the sub-region.

6.6 Membership through Bi-lateral Arrangements

AFRAC may conclude a bi-lateral arrangement with Accreditation Bodies from regions that do not have regional accreditation cooperations, or not affiliated with any of the other Regional Accreditation Bodies. Bi-lateral partners may become a signatory to the AFRAC MRA and thus a Full Member, however they will not be eligible for nomination to any office of AFRAC and they do not have a vote in the General Assembly.