

An Introduction to and the History of AFRIMETS

1. Background

There is an increased understanding of the importance of metrology to the economy and to society as a whole. Accurate measurement forms the backbone of technical regulations, written standards and legal metrology, thus the prerequisite for free and fair trade between nations and citizens inside the country. In every institute, company or other commercial organization, concepts such as safety, security, efficiency, reliability and precision are of paramount importance in designing systems, which provide guarantees of product quality. Accurate and widely accepted measurements are important in ensuring that market transactions can take place and that consumers can feel confident that the goods they buy are of the quantity and quality they require. Importantly for Africa, accurate and internationally accepted measurements allow market access for food and commodity exports.

Technological innovation depends on accurate measurements. New ideas and products often can only be implemented if accurate measurement systems are in place. At a social level, protection of the environment requires that pollutants are accurately monitored. Patients receiving medical treatment need confidence in their test results and the dosage of treatment, even that the ingredients of the drugs they take have been measured properly. Similarly, industrial and commercial standards such as those regulated by the International Standards Organization (ISO) create a demand for measurement. Case studies have shown that there is a strong relationship between the adoption of international standards and the extent of trade in measurement and testing equipment, and these studies prove that a good metrology system ultimately contributes to the GDP of a country.

Unfortunately, the measurement system in Africa at present does not fulfil the requirements. Many countries lack basic metrology infrastructure and especially a Scientific and Industrial metrology institute. In those with a Legal metrology and/or Scientific and Industrial metrology representative body or institute, there is a general lack of equipment and skills. In many instances it operates in silos, is fragmented and is not always recognised internationally.

As a response, the sub-regions and nations of Africa came together to establish an intra-Africa Metrology System, AFRIMETS, with as main goal to harmonise accurate measurement in Africa, establish new measurement facilities and gain international acceptance for all measurements critical to export, environmental monitoring and sanitary and phyto-sanitary issues.

2. AFRIMETS

To harmonize metrology activities in Africa, an intra-Africa metrology system (AFRIMETS) was established, based on the Regional Metrology Organisation (RMO) of the Americas, SIM (Sistema Interamericano de Metrologia). The initiative is supported by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Physikalisch Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB), the National Metrology Institute of South Africa (NMISA) and Legal metrology at the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS).

The first AFRIMETS workshop, held in March 2006, was attended by delegates from more than 25 African countries and representatives from APMP, SIM, EUROMET, the BIPM and other interested parties such as ECOWAS, COMESA, the African Committee of Metrology (CAFMET), the South African National Accreditation System (SANAS), the Bureau of Standards (SABS) and the National laboratory Association of South Africa (NLA). A draft MOU was prepared and a second workshop was held in September 2006. The first General Assembly meeting was held in July 2007 at the premises of the NEPAD. The MOU was finalised and signed by 5 sub regional metrology organisations (SRMOs), namely SADC MET, EAMET, CAMET (later changed to CEMACMET), SOAMET and MAGMET, representing 37 countries in Southern, Eastern, Central, Western and North Western Africa. In addition, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire have signed on as individual (Ordinary) members. It is expected that Egypt and Ethiopia will sign during 2008.

The following strategic objectives were identified at the first GA meeting, classified into four groups:

CUSTOMER objectives:

- Satisfy and sensitize customers and stakeholders, which include the recipients of services, the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM), African countries, NMIs, RMOs, Governments, industry and consumers;
- facilitate trade;
- deliver value for money for measurements;
- increase number of services;
- facilitate consumer protection, health, safety and the protection of the environment;
- integrate the needs of members / stakeholders;
- sensitize customers and stakeholders about international requirements.

FINANCIAL objectives:

- Reduce cost of metrology development by use of internal institutions in Africa;
- sustain regional resources;
- ensure financially strong sub-regional metrology bodies;
- transfer traceability to end users in a cost-effective way;

- make sure AFRIMETS will be self-sufficient;
- maximise scarce financial resources.

3. INTERNAL PROCESS objectives

- Regional interactions and exchange of members;
- harmonisation of regulations and policies;
- put quality systems in place and comply with ISO 9000 and 17025;
- facilitate the removal of TBTs;
- put in place continuous improvement strategies;
- improve capacity of members;
- improve standard of metrology.

4. EMPLOYEE LEARNING & GROWTH objectives

- Training people at lower cost;
- establishment of databases for use by members;
- use of African experts for training;
- become a forum for exchange between metrology organisations;
- facilitate the technical competence of personnel;
- share of expertise and awareness;
- develop world-class metrologists;
- establish a culture of continued learning.

5. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

An Executive committee was elected, representing all the sub-regions in Africa, with members as follows:

Chairman	Dr Wynand Louw	(SADCMET)
Vice-Chair (Legal)	Mr Geraldo Albasini	(SADCMET)
Vice-Chair (Ind/Sci)	Dr Mohamed Berrada	(MAGMET)
Members		
	Ms Noura Laroussi	(MAGMET)
	Mr Joel Kioko	(EAMET)
	Mr Oumarou Yankine	(SOAMET)
	Mr Kimon Zulu	(SADCMET)
	Mr Lionel Ngwessy-Malaga	(CEMACMET)
	Mr Stuart Carstens	(Head: Secretariat)
	Mr Karim Khalil	(NEPAD representative)

The second General Assembly of AFRIMETS will be held in July 2008 in MAGMET (Tunisia).