

Sanas

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World class accreditation

Sanas has grown from its roots as a body that accredited laboratories into an organisation that works across multiple sectors including science, energy and industry

South African National Accreditation System (Sanas) chief executive Ron Josias says the organisation was created originally in 1980 with the establishment of the National Calibration Service (NCS) within the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

The NCS accredited laboratories that operated in the calibration field. It became the National Laboratory Accreditation Service (NLA) and then became a Section 21 company in 1994, which ensured it met international requirements that the accreditation body be independent.

In 1995 the new government, through the department of trade and industry (dti), recognised the need for a single accreditation body to oversee accreditation in the country and tasked the NLA with forming this body, which became the South African National Accreditation System (Sanas).

During July 1995 a working group was formed to finalise the organisational structure and constitution of Sanas and the new entity was registered as a Section 21 company in January 1996.

From 1995 the NLA accredited testing laboratories, assuming responsibility for laboratories previously accredited under a South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) system referred to as SABS 0259.

The new accreditation body was officially launched in August 1996 and the relationship with the government was formalised through a memorandum of agreement signed with the dti in December 1997. In terms of that agreement Sanas was recognised as the single national authority for accreditation.

In 2006 Sanas became a public entity through the promulgation of the Accreditation for Conformity Assessment, Calibration and Good Laboratory Practice Act, Josias says.

Today, there are about 1450 accredited bodies and Sanas is the largest accreditation body on the African continent, Josias says, and is the sole national body for conformity assessments. It falls under the dti and its executive authority is the minister of trade and industry.

The dti has the authority to widen Sanas's scope of activities. It is an independent body, run by a board, which is appointed by the minister of trade and industry, Josias says.

Accreditation

Accreditation is formal recognition of competence by an authoritative third party. It is about obtaining third party recognition for an organisation's competence in producing

consistent and reliable results or measurements for a defined set of methods or activities that is detailed in a schedule of accreditation.

In the case of certification bodies, it's a third party recognition that a facility can certify suppliers to the required standard, on a consistent and sustainable basis, or perform repeatable audits on a consistent and sustainable basis.

Josias says: "Sanas accreditation is a formal process of assessing and recognising whether a conformity assessment body (CAB) is technically competent to provide the services it offers. It is also an attestation that a CAB is competent to carry out specific conformity assessment tasks.

"Sanas recognition is used by such conformity assessment bodies to illustrate to their clients, regulators and government that they are competent to provide the services as stated on the schedule of accreditation issued by Sanas," he says.

CABs include calibration, testing and verification laboratories, certification bodies, inspection bodies, rating agencies and any other type of body that may be added to Sanas's scope of activity.

This is important for a country, says Josias, because if, for example, South Africa is producing goods and services for export, the countries of destination want to know that the goods being sent meet a required quality standard.

Or in the case of agencies, such as black economic empowerment certification agencies, government

wants to know that the agencies doing things such as certifying black economic empowerment credentials are doing so in a competent and consistent manner.

The results of accreditation give the assurance that the testers of quality in any given sphere are competent and capable of performing their role to a required standard.

This helps government to achieve its public safety objectives, as well as stimulate economic growth and development by enabling trade.

Energy savings

Sanas also plays a role in reaching our national socio-economic objectives, Josias says. It aligns its programmes to support the dti's Industrial Policy Action Plan (Ipap) programme. Ipap builds into the National Industrial Policy Framework and is a strategy to support growth industries, particularly industrial sectors, through incentives or as Sanas does, through accrediting organisations that can verify energy savings where such programmes are implemented by manufacturers.

The Energy Management Systems (EnMS) accreditation programme, for example, was specifically put in place to support organisations looking to improve their energy management and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It was launched in February.

This new accreditation programme for EnMS for certification bodies was the result of work done by a Sanas working group of technically knowledgeable experts who developed the Sanas technical requirements, says Josias.

The technical requirements address scopes of accreditation and the minimum qualification and experience in EnMS.

The standard developed — SANS/ISO 50001 EnMS — is a voluntary international standard. It applies to organisations of any size and gives guidelines for establishing, managing and improving their energy consumption and efficiency.

The SANS/ISO 50001 standard aims to do the following:

- Assist organisations in improving energy efficiency, energy use and consumption.
- Create transparency and facilitate communication on the management of energy resources.
- Promote energy management best practices and behaviour.
- Assist facilities in evaluating and prioritising the implementation of new energy-efficient technologies.
- Provide a framework for promoting energy efficiency throughout the supply chain.
- Facilitate energy management improvements for greenhouse gas emission reduction projects.

The purpose of SANS/ISO 50001 EnMS is to enable organisations to establish the systems and processes necessary to improve energy perfor-



South African National Accreditation System chief executive Ron Josias. Photo: supplied

mance, including energy efficiency, use and consumption.

The implementation of SANS/ISO 50001 EnMS is also intended to lead to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and other related environmental impacts and energy costs through the systematic management of energy.

Therefore, the implementation of EnMS by South African organisations will be beneficial to environmental, sustainability and energy conservation of the International Laboratory Accreditation Corporation and the International Accreditation Forum.

Josias says that Sanas is a signatory to a number of multilateral recognition agreements, which mean that bodies accredited under its accreditation is recognised in more than 110 economies around the world.

South African organisations, including manufacturers and exporters, often have to prove that their products and services comply with the compulsory technical regulations set by governments or the private specifications set by those who procure from them.

Clients of Sanas-accredited conformity assessment bodies use the certificates and test reports issued to prove that their products or services are competently

tested and comply with all relevant requirements.

This means that when a shipment of South African goods arrives at a European port, for example, it is immediately accepted and processed if certified or tested by a Sanas accredited conformance body, rather than being delayed on the dock for days while they are tested and certified by the local authority.

As a member of the global accreditation community, Sanas will be participating in the annual World Accreditation Day on June 9. The theme is "Accreditation support for Energy in the context of the world" and Sanas will be hosting a panel debate on the issue.

Key focus areas over the next five years

- Contribute to government's strategic objectives,
- Improve Sanas's external relationships and processes, and
- Increase Sanas's service quality and productivity.