

South African National Accreditation System



Making the grade

They might not wear capes or have the status of super heroes, yet hard at work for the benefit of the country is a team of dedicated and highly qualified professionals who quietly ensure that public confidence in South African goods and services remains high, both locally, regionally and globally.

The men and women who power the South African National Accreditation System (SANAS) do not have super powers. What they do have is a range of technical skills that they diligently apply to ensure there is widespread trust in the reliability and integrity of business activities that have an impact on health, safety and the environment. SANAS serves the national and public interest by facilitating the provision of reliable calibration, measurement, testing, certification, verification and inspection infrastructure for the South African government, industry and the wider community.

If a South African exporter sends out goods that have been tested or certified by a SANAS-accredited conformity assessment body, the international community can breathe easy because SANAS is widely acknowledged as experts in what they do.

SANAS was one of the first accreditation bodies to sign the Multilateral Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) of the International Laboratory Accreditation Co-operation (ILAC) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

“The MRAs facilitate the concept of ‘tested or inspected once, accepted everywhere,’” says SANAS CEO Ron Josias. SANAS continues to cement its global standing by participating in

and contributing to accreditation arrangements, maintaining good international relations and expanding these relations to promote accreditation as a means of facilitating international trade. By promoting the competence and equivalence of accredited bodies and Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) compliant facilities, SANAS enhances South Africa’s economic performance.

In accordance with international requirements for MRA signatories, SANAS was re-evaluated in 2011 and subsequently had its status reconfirmed in October 2012. This means that South African goods and services will continue to be accepted in 61 economies across the world, and represented by 73 accreditation bodies that are also MRA signatories.

SANAS’s strategic partners include the Department of Trade and Industry, ILAC, IAF, the European Accreditation Co-operation, the Southern African Development Community Co-operation in Accreditation (SADCA), the African Accreditation Co-operation (AFRAC), the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Council of Trade and Industry Institutions as well as the various regulators.

SANAS’s international acceptance has very practical benefits – South African exporters do not need to have their products re-evaluated in each country they enter on a commercial basis, saving time and money.

Locally, clients of accredited test, inspection and certification bodies, such as South African food manufacturers and exporters, use the certificates and test reports to prove that their products or services comply with the technical requirements of compulsory or private



Ron Josias, chief executive officer of SANAS

specifications. Food manufacturers and retailers use accredited calibration and verification services to ensure that the scales they use weigh accurately, thus giving the consumer what they pay for.

Leading SANAS since June 2010, Josias has more than 14 years experience in accreditation and extensive experience in strategic planning, development, project management, national, regional and international liaisons and the assessment of quality management systems for private and public entities.

Josias is an advisor to the SADC Accreditation Service Board, a member of the ILAC Board, and

the chairperson of both AFRAC and the SADCA MRA committee. SANAS was in fact a founding member of AFRAC and acts as secretariat for both AFRAC and SADCA. It is also regional co-ordinator of the latter.

SANAS is thus well positioned to support South Africa’s objective of effective regional integration by playing a leadership role in the development of accreditation infrastructure in SADC and on the African continent.

“SANAS was the first African accreditation system to earn international recognition and Egypt and Tunisia are now also globally recognised. SANAS, however, remains the only organisation internationally recognised for the entire scope of accreditation systems,” says Josias, who holds an MPhil: International Management from the University of Pretoria, an MBA from the University of Wales and a National Higher Diploma in Mechanical Engineering.

The first meetings of the SADCA Technical and MRA committees were held in March and 24 accreditation certificates were issued to 16 conformity assessment facilities in six SADC countries under the SANAS/SADCAS twinning arrangement.

SANAS’s history started in 1974, with the establishment of the National Calibration Services (NCS), whose focus was on the accreditation of calibration laboratories. In 1992, the NCS became the National Laboratory Accreditation (NLA), when the accreditation of testing laboratories was included. In 1996, the NLA became SANAS and in 2007, recognition was formally enacted through the promulgation of the Accreditation for Conformity Assessment,

Calibration and Good Laboratory Practice Act, 2006 (Act No 19 of 2006), changing SANAS’s legal status to that of a public entity.

SANAS is the only national body mandated to issue accreditation in respect of conformity assessment in areas of calibration, certification, testing, and verification laboratories; medical laboratories; certification bodies; inspection bodies; and B-BBEE rating agencies. It is also tasked with monitoring GLP compliance against OECD principles.

“We have a role to play in increasing South Africa’s global competitiveness,” says Josias, explaining that the Industrial Policy Action Plan 2 (IPAP 2) identified SANAS as one of the country’s key technical infrastructure institutions.

Around 1 419 accredited facilities are available to service the South African economy but Josias says opportunities now exist in areas new to South Africa. SANAS itself has been hard at work with other stakeholders to ready itself for the provision of accreditation programmes in several key growth sectors, including nuclear energy, agro-processing and green industries. It has launched new accreditation programmes in Responsible Tourism, Energy Efficiency Measurement and Verification, and Risk Base Inspection for occupational health and safety programmes relating to pressure equipment in the petrochemical industry.

In January, SANAS launched an accreditation programme for Greenhouse Gases (GHG) Validation and Verification Bodies in accordance with ISO 14065, following a year-and-half of planning and consultation. “This is not a government programme, but was requested

by industry, which has to meet international GHG standards.

“Climate change has been identified as one of the greatest global challenges and as such, initiatives are being developed by business organisations to limit GHG concentrations. These initiatives rely on the quantification, monitoring, reporting and verification of emissions and/or removals,” says Josias.

As the global economic pinch forces trading countries to consider implementing tougher measures to protect their markets through strict, technical conformity assessment procedures, the challenge for SANAS is to keep promoting the value of accreditation for South Africa’s industrial development and economic growth.

SANAS, a skills-based organisation, is also challenged by the shortage of technical expertise in South Africa. To this end, it is partnering with educational institutions to address skills needs and is assisting with the creation of a pool of experts in the SADC region.

Josias says his team will be grown by 25% in the next five years to effectively support IPAP and the huge infrastructure investments being undertaken by government.

Believing that ‘you should leave something better than you found it’, he is not daunted by the responsibilities shouldered by SANAS, thanks in no small part to what he describes as a “highly competent team of knowledgeable professionals and a wonderful board of directors that appreciates the enormous responsibility of SANAS to contribute to our country’s economic growth and the welfare of our people”. ▲