

# Quality infrastructure in the EAC

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**W**ell-developed infrastructure is essential for economic growth and trade: it not only facilitates economic prosperity; it strengthens a region's economic and political integration. But apart from the visible infrastructure of transport and communication, developed nations also have what might be called invisible infrastructure. This makes sure, for example, that screws fit screw nuts, mobile phones function, drugs are correctly administered, and food is safe for consumption. So-called quality infrastructure (QI) is essential to a modern economy. Environmental, health, and consumer protection are inconceivable without a well-functioning QI. The larger the number of enterprises with access to internationally recognised QI, the better their participation in global trade. QI is a combination of standardisation, quality assurance, metrology, and testing. Therefore, in the EAC it is often referred to as SQMT.

PTB (Physikalisch Technische Bundesanstalt), the National Metrology Institute of Germany, has worked in the area of QI since its foundation in 1887. As one of the leading metrology institutes in the world, with more than 1,800 staff, it is a global player. Its scientific research is in the vanguard (two Nobel Prize winners are board members), and its highly accurate and reliable measurements are not only vital for German industry, but also for the safety of consumers. PTB also works internationally. Since the commencement of German development assistance about 45 years ago, PTB has been active worldwide in developing countries. Today, its International Technical Cooperation division runs more than 40 projects globally.

Our work with the East African Community started in 2004. Its long-term goals are to:

- Contribute to the economic, social and ecological development of the partner states and thus to an improvement in their people's living conditions.
- Protect people and the environment through technical regulations and international standards.
- Facilitate regional trade and enable the participation in the international exchange of goods and services.
- Promote the reduction of technical barriers to trade.

Much has been achieved recently toward the free movement of goods, as well as the development of environmental and consumer protection. Together with the EAC Secretariat and the Directorate of Customs and trade, PTB activities focused in the beginning on

the project on the establishment of a legal framework for a regional QI. The main challenges were – and still are – to harmonise national regulations and legal procedures on a regional level, and to involve the private sector in QI-related activities such as standards development.

A major milestone, the EAC SQMT Act entered into force in 2007. The act provides for ensuring standardisation, quality assurance, metrology, and testing of products produced or traded in the EAC to facilitate industrial development and trade. It also makes provision for ensuring the protection of the health and safety of society and the environment in the community, and establishes the East African Standards Committee and the East African Accreditation Board. The National Standards Bureaus (KEBS in Kenya, TBS in Tanzania, UNBS in Uganda, RBS in Rwanda and BBN in Burundi), through the East African Standards Committee (EASC), are the institutions mainly responsible for implementing the provisions of the act, and to develop a functioning and comprehensive QI based on international best practices. They work with private sector associations, testing laboratories, certification bodies, regulative authorities, and consumer organisations, which all receive consultancy and technical support from PTB.

To remove technical trade barriers within the community, 1,102 Standards have been harmonised and declared EAC Standards to date; product certification marks issued by one country are recognised in other countries and should avoid double testing; the competence of metrology and testing laboratories has increased, and cooperation between national QI institutions has increased. These achievements are all contributing to the functioning of the EAC, in particular the free movement of goods. But challenges remain. While many of the voluntary standards in the EAC are harmonised, compulsory standards (technical regulations) still differ from partner state to partner state, to the detriment of trade. In addition, still-existing TBTs hamper the negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements and international trade.

It is therefore imperative that the EAC Secretariat makes sustained efforts to improve and harmonise the regional QI system: PTB is looking forward to further assist this endeavour. This is a process that took decades to implement in the European Union: it is amazing to witness what has been achieved in East Africa within just 10 years.