



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



Standards and Conformity Assessment Approaches in African, Caribbean and Pacific Regions: **FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19**

Virtual Seminar, 3 June 2020 | An Insight



THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is confronting each of us with unprecedented challenges. Every country is experiencing its negative impact on their healthcare systems, economy and the society as a whole. It is disrupting global trade, food supply chains and having serious, unintended consequences on industry, manufacturing, tourism, and travel. For African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries and their enterprises, the economic competitiveness will be severely affected not only in the domestic but also at regional and international level. The COVID-19 pandemic has destabilized the international order, which has been largely rooted in the progress of globalization and regional integration. Because of regional and global Value Chains, a slowdown in one country will have a ripple effect in the economic activity across the globe and this makes a renewed necessity for regional integration.

As such, the fight to contain the virus and slow down its spread is one that is global and calls for solidarity and a re-orientation of priorities amongst governments, institutions, manufacturers, donors, civil society organizations and individuals. Countries at national level have started to implement action plans to facilitate combatting the issues arising from COVID-19 in the areas of quality infrastructure, conformity assessment, innovation, investment, and trade. Nevertheless, given the widespread impact of COVID-19 that goes beyond national and regional borders, there is an urgent need for collective regional standards and conformity assessment approaches for sustainability that complements national measures implemented.

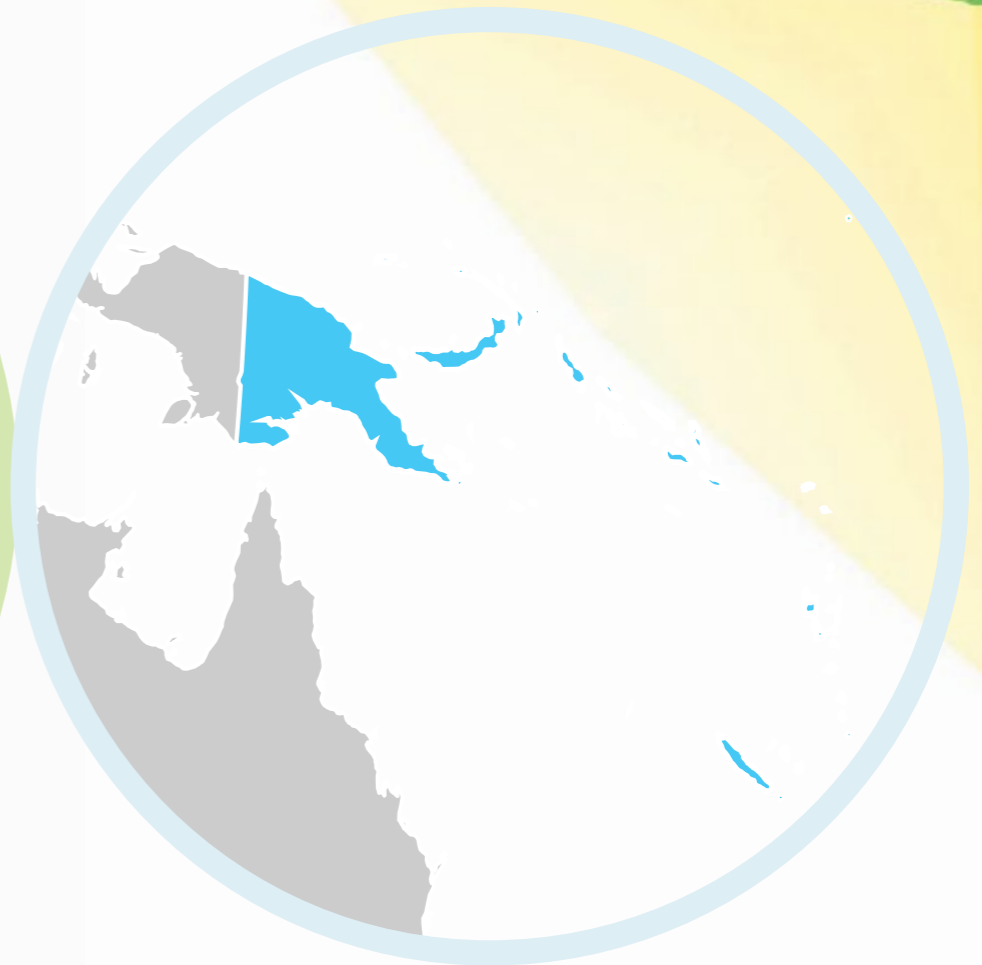
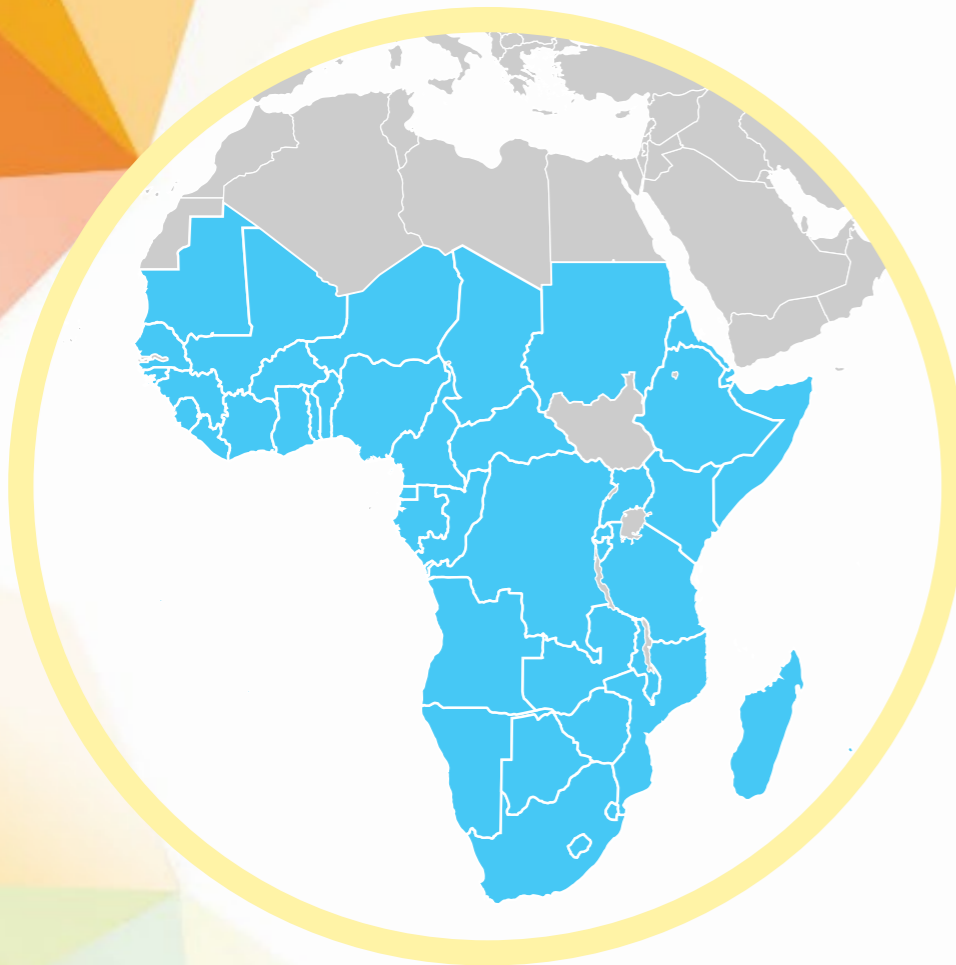
During these universally difficult times caused by COVID-19, it is crucial to understand and discuss what can be done on a regional level to minimize the effects of the pandemic both during the crisis and post-crisis and how these measures link to national activities. Given that the effects of COVID-19 will be felt long after countries have reached their peak in terms of number of people infected, and after the number of infections have subsided, it is important that the effective and sustainable management of the crisis is focused on the long-term, establishing the necessary infrastructure and services, and results in positive societal change.

In the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions, UNIDO, together with the World Bank and ITC and with the financial support from the European Union, is implementing the project entitled “Supporting business-friendly and inclusive national and regional policies, and strengthening productive capabilities and value chains”. With the help of the project, which has a component on quality infrastructure, UNIDO has achieved to actively contribute to the Regional Quality Infrastructure Workshop organized by the Pacific Island Forum (PIFS) held in the Fiji in 2019 with the goal of designing a way forward to the QI in that region; participate in the work led by African Organization for Standardisation (ARSO) towards the development of an African Quality Policy; lead the development of a Guide for Laboratory Policy formulation to support the efforts to build sustainable Laboratory Infrastructure that is fit-for-purpose and aligned with current and emerging market needs and to which CARICOM Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) provided continuous support.





COUNTRIES IN THE AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONS



The webinar attracted an audience of **320** attendees from **78** different countries around the world, who turned to listen to the discussion and actively participated in the Q&A session following the discussion.



Link to view the session: www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlrjmfneoA



PANELISTS



Mrs. Merewalesi Falemaka

Permanent Representative and Ambassador, Permanent Delegation of the Pacific Islands Forum to the United Nations, WTO and other International Organizations in Geneva



Mr. Kemji Ajoku

Head of Industry Division, Department of Industry and Private Sector Promotion, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)



Dr. Hermogene Nsengimana

Secretary General, The African Organization for Standardisation (ARSO)



Mr. Deryck Omar

Chief Executive Officer, CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ)



Dr. Bernardo Calzadilla-Sarmiento

Managing Director, Directorate of Digitalization, Technology and Agribusiness, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)



INSIGHTS FROM THE PANELISTS

Mrs. Merewalesi Falemaka

Permanent Representative and Ambassador, Permanent Delegation of the Pacific Islands Forum to the United Nations, WTO and other International Organizations in Geneva

- » **At regional level, efforts are focused on the development of a Pacific humanitarian pathway, a coordination mechanism aimed at enabling the provision of medical and humanitarian assistance from regional international and development partners in a timely safe, effective and equitable manner. (...)The key challenge now is to promote recovery and to do so, quality infrastructure will have an important role to play.**
- » Regional cooperation on quality infrastructure is fundamental to overcome the limitations of small domestic markets which make it uneconomical to establish complex national infrastructure systems. Regionalism is also fundamental to stimulate trade within regional blocks through harmonization of standards, technical regulations and mutual recognition on conformity assessment procedures.
- » The pandemic has brought about new significance of our region and a renewed urgency to strengthen our quality infrastructure systems to support us in future crisis. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat will leverage the initiative of a new economic development, including QI systems in the region and lessons learned from COVID-19.
- » The Pacific Regional Quality Infrastructure Initiative gained new relevance and criticality in the current circumstances, and further supports towards its successful development is solicited from the donors' community as well as from the international organizations such as UNIDO, EIF, etc.

Mr. Kemji Ajoku

Head of Industry Division, Department of Industry and Private Sector Promotion, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

- » **The social economic impact of this pandemic is immeasurable. At regional level, ECOWAS organized an extraordinary summit to discuss the challenges faced by Member States during the pandemic and to call for a regional strategic approach to support each other.**
- » Trade restrictions and border closures have severely disrupted global supply chains and affected the industry. To support and sustain the economy and the private sector in the region, ECOWAS is cooperating with UNIDO on the development of an ECOWAS regional industrial recovery plan and strategy for the industrial sector.
- » To support the industry and the private sector in these difficult times, ECOWAS with the technical support from UNIDO, within the West Africa Quality Program funded by the European Union, supported ECOSHAM (the Standard Harmonization of the ECOWAS region) in its work on the harmonization of standards of Personal Protective Equipment, alcoholic hand sanitizers, and facial masks to address the most pressing needs associated with the crisis.

Dr. Hermogene Nsengimana

Secretary General, The African Organization for Standardisation (ARSO)

- » **The COVID-19 crisis underpins the need for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The interruption of imports coming from outside Africa, has pushed the whole African industry to look internally for availability of inputs and raw materials that before the pandemic were imported from the outside. The solution came from the SMEs, which are now producing masks and PPE and this is where ARSO plays a crucial role in the standardization process to protect the population and make sure PPEs are compliant with standards.**
- » ARSO has been working on the development of the African Quality Policy together with the members of the Pan African Quality Infrastructure (PAQI) and other QI partners (incl. UNIDO) which is crucial to build capacity to respond effectively and efficiently to the global crisis like the current one.
- » One of the key steps ARSO undertook to drive the standardization work was to review the African Standardized Harmonization Model.



Mr. Deryck Omar

Chief Executive Officer, CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ)

- » **In a pandemic situation, it is important to continue to treat quality infrastructure as a growing asset and resist the temptation of disinvestments. We cannot restructure economies without quality infrastructure. Building a robust and evolving quality infrastructure will help to: avoid costly private sector quality mistakes when said companies can least afford it; protect consumers' health and safety; protect consumers from substandard products and services; and, protect the environment.**
- » A big area of regional cooperation is developing quality promotion as an effective pillar of regional quality infrastructure. Especially in these times, there is a need to create a quality culture and show that quality is important and is accessible and affordable to all.
- » For regional cooperation to work, you need trust and quality infrastructure can demonstrate this trust; Quality infrastructure is an absolute foundation for solutions, for building cooperation and ultimately for creating resilience.

Dr. Bernardo Calzadilla-Sarmiento,

Managing Director, Directorate of Digitalization, Technology and Agribusiness, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

- » **This crisis has shown us that innovation and digitalization are helping us to really look into the future. There have been many examples of the use of AI to facilitate people's lives during the lockdown. Artificial intelligence will certainly be involved in the future. But the most important element is the development process and how these technologies can help business, especially SMEs.**
- » Digitalization can help job creation, gender balance in labor market, SMEs' development, etc. But the primary is to look at populations, and to develop their creative and innovative capabilities.
- » During this pandemic we have seen that testing laboratories and standards play an important role in responding to the crisis. UNIDO's response is through three key concepts: contain (contain the impact of disruption and protect supply chain business sectors and workers and advocating to maintain the flow of goods), adopt (promote digitalized innovative solutions, adopt to the digital space and ensure no one is left out) and recover (by rebuilding trust, coaching and supporting to companies remotely).
- » Partnership is one of the solutions to rebound from this crisis. We need collective decisions, we need networking, not only at regional level but also with partners in the area of quality infrastructure and with the private sector.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » Regional cooperation approach is fundamental to stimulate trade within regional blocks through harmonization of standards, technical regulations and mutual recognition on conformity assessment procedures. Tools such as Quality Policy and Laboratory Policy can be crucial contributors to building capacity for market access for the private sector and to respond effectively and efficiently to COVID-19.
- » The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new significance and urgency to strengthen regional quality infrastructure systems to support Asia, Caribbean and Pacific in future crisis. For example, the work at the regional level on the harmonization of standards of Personal Protective Equipment, alcoholic hand sanitizers, and facial masks to address the most pressing needs in the most efficient way is commendable.
- » In a pandemic situation, it is important to continue to treat quality infrastructure as a growing asset and resist the temptation of disinvestments. Building a robust and evolving quality infrastructure will help to: avoid costly quality mistakes when companies can least afford it; protect consumers' health and safety; protect consumers from substandard products and services; and protect the environment.
- » Regional partnerships on quality infrastructure is fundamental to overcome the limitations of small domestic markets which make it uneconomical to establish fit-for-purpose national quality infrastructure systems.
- » For regional cooperation to work, you need trust and quality infrastructure system can demonstrate this trust.
- » The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that innovation, artificial intelligence and digitalization are helping us to look into the future. But the most important element is how these technologies can help business, especially SMEs and quality infrastructure services to evolve and become more resilient.





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