



ARSO UPDATE TO THE TBT COMMITTEE

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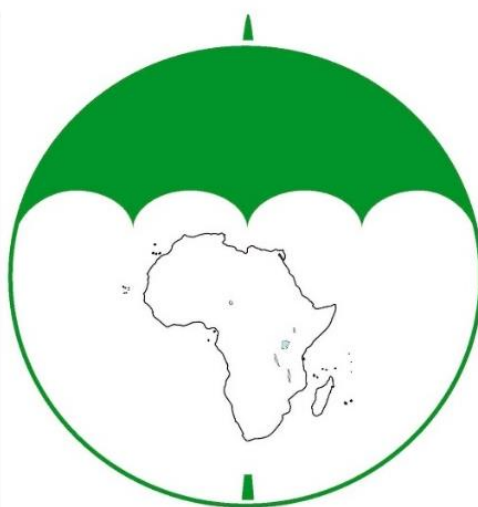
This document contains information provided by ARSO at the TBT Committee meeting of 8-10 November 2023 under Agenda Item 4 (Update by Observers).¹

¹ In original language only.



**REPORT OF ARSO TO THE WTO TBT COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 2023**

**ARSO ACTIVITIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WTO TBT
AGREEMENT.**



**ONE MARKET – ONE STANDARD
THE TBT CHALLENGE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE
AREA AND THE ROLE OF ARSO.**

NOVEMBER 2023

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1. Background Information.

1.1. Introduction

Since the conclusion of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1947) and the establishment of the WTO and the WTO in 1995 and its attendant TBT Agreement, together with the deepening of globalisation, Trade Liberalisation, integration and the related Free Trade Agreements, there has been a systematic reduction in the traditional trade barriers associated with tariffs, through the elimination of trade-quotas and the simplifying and lowering trade-tariffs, while a new family of barriers have been introduced to govern world trade, in terms of TBTs (e.g. regulations, product standards, Conformity Assessment (testing, inspection and certification) procedures), and sanitary and phytosanitary standards, and SPS (e.g. food safety and animal and plant health standards).

The TBT measures address human health and safety but also include environmental protection, consumer information, or quality and cover food and non-food traded products. The SPS measures are laws, regulations, standards, and procedures that governments employ to protect human, animal, and plant health from the risks associated with the spread of pests, diseases, or disease-carrying and causing organisms or from additives, toxins, or contaminants in food, beverages, or feedstuffs.

Given that the TBT Agreement takes into account the existence of legitimate divergences of preference, income, geographical and other factors between countries and accord to Members a high degree of flexibility in the preparation, adoption and application of their TBT and SPS measure, highlighting that “no country should be prevented from taking necessary regulatory measures to meet its legitimate Objectives” the number of TBT and SPS Measures developed and adopted by countries to meet their legitimate objectives, is growing significantly in Africa and globally and in turn, growing in economic and political importance and taking central place as instruments of Trade and Government policy in unilateral, regional, and global trade contexts, **this includes the recently concluded African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA).**

The AfCFTA Agreement which Came into force on 30 May 2019 for the 24 countries that had deposited their instruments of ratification by the African Union Commission, has currently been ratified, by **August 2023, by 47 of the 54 (87%) signatory State Parties (35 of which are ARSO Members)**, namely: Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Niger, Chad, Eswatini, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Namibia, South Africa, Congo, Rep., Djibouti, Mauritania, Uganda, Senegal, Togo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Rep., Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, São Tomé & Príncipe, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Mauritius, Central African Rep., Angola, Lesotho, Tunisia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Malawi, Zambia, Algeria, Burundi, Seychelles, Tanzania, Cabo Verde, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Morocco, Guinea-Bissau, Botswana, Comoros and Mozambique.

This therefore increases the scope for African countries, under the AfCFTA, to look for opportunities for greater collaboration among countries for a common regulatory framework. *As a policy instrument, the AfCFTA Agreement, under the TBT Annex 6 and SPS Annex 7, which is based on the WTO TBT/SPS Agreements, addresses the TBTs and SPS issues, and binds all State parties to commit to their progressive elimination and calls for cooperation in their development, harmonisation and implementation. Under the AfCFTA Agreement, TBT Annex 6, Article 3, on guiding principles, the State parties, have agreed that the WTO TBT Agreement shall form the basis of the TBT Annex 6 and under article 5, the Agreement calls on the State Parties to cooperate in the development and implementation of standards, technical regulations, conformity assessment procedures, accreditation, metrology, capacity building and enforcement activities in order to facilitate trade within the AfCFTA. Under its TBT Agreement, the WTO encourages Harmonization, use of equivalence and mutual recognition in the bilateral free trade agreements, such as the AfCFTA. The WTO TBT Agreement under Article 6.3 strongly also encourages WTO Members to enter into negotiations with other Members for the mutual acceptance of conformity assessment results through Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) and facilitate the international concept and goal of “Certified Once, Accepted Everywhere”.*

Currently, under the ARSO Standards harmonisation Programme, Over 1,600 African Standards covering key priority areas, including International Standards, have been harmonized under 15 priority Sectors with 85 Technical Committees, and where African Experts are playing active role in the harmonisation process. This is a long with the ARSO Conformity Assessment programme being implemented by the ARSO Conformity Assessment Committee (ARSO CACO) through the ARSO Conformity Assessment Programme (ACAP) Developed in 2018, to provide for an African Certification System for goods and services produced in accordance with African and International Standards. **The ARSO DISNET, which currently works with the WTO Secretariat, to facilitate the Regulatory Notifications and implementation of the Transparency requirements, as per the WTO TBT and the AfCFTA Agreement.**

1.2. About ARSO

Admitted as an Observer member of the WTO TBT Committee in November 2015, ARSO is an intergovernmental Organisation established by the Organization of African Unity (OAU, currently African Union (AU)) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in 1977, with 21 African Governments as founder members, and hosted by the Government of the Republic of Kenya on Diplomatic Status. Currently, ARSO has 43 member States (Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Congo Brazzaville, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, New State of Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco,

Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sudan, South Sudan, South Africa, Eswatini, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and with Zanzibar being a paying member). Chad, Burundi and Somalia were formally admitted into ARSO membership by the ARSO General Assembly, during the 28th ARSO General Assembly Events held on 27th June -1st July 2022, after joining recently.

1.3. Mandate of ARSO

The principle mandate of ARSO is to harmonise African Standards and conformity assessment procedures, based on International standards, and best International practices, in order to reduce Technical Barriers to Trade in Africa, thus promote intra-African and international Trade. This entails the mandate to:

- (a) Harmonise national and/or sub-regional standards as African Standards;
- (b) Encourage and facilitate the adoption of international standards by member bodies as the basis of Regulations and Conformity Assessment procedures.
- (c) Initiate and co-ordinate the development of African Standards (ARS) with references to products which are of peculiar interest to Africa and where no international standards exist;
- (d) Develop tools for Good Conformity Assessment practices including Mutual Recognition Arrangements
- (e) Promote Capacity building and awareness creation in standardisation activities;
- (f) Avail relevant information on standards, Technical Regulations, Conformity Assessments
- (g) Co-ordinate the views of its members at the ISO, IEC, OIML, Codex and other international organisations concerned with standardisation activities;

Under the TBT Annex 6, ARSO has been mandated to develop the required standards to facilitate trade between State Parties, as the State Parties, on the other hand, have been urged to:

- (a) promote the adoption of standards developed by the ARSO and the AFSEC;
- (b) designate liaison focal points to ensure that all State Parties are well informed of the standards developed or to be developed by the ARSO and the AFSEC;
- (c) apply harmonized rules and procedures for the development and publication of national standards in accordance with international requirements and best practices; and
- (d) promote membership, liaison and participation in the work of ISO, IEC, ARSO, AFSEC and similar international and regional standardisation organisations.

2. Current ARSO Activities and Cooperation in fulfilling its Mandate and promoting the Implementation of the WTO TBT Agreement in Africa

2.1. Standards Harmonisation

ARSO continued to enhance the standards harmonisation work in Africa as per article 6 of the TBT Annex 6, which reiterates the Mandate of ARSO on the development and harmonisation of Standards under key priority sectors like Agriculture, Pharmaceuticals, Automative, Textile and Leather industries, with nominated African Experts, playing a key role, with highlights on the outcomes as indicated below.


Currently there are 15 priority Sectors with a Total of 84 Technical Committees, and various Working Groups, and the following areas are highlighted, where various standards, including international standards have been harmonised as African standards.

- (i) For Agriculture and food products, so far 287 standards and regulatory guidelines have been published, with 380, 260 outreach Materials, 50 Certified products and a capacity building Training for 30 Trainers and 180 auditors and producers, expected to be published within the year 2025, to support in the implementation of harmonized African standards.
- (ii) For Cereals, Pulses, Meat, Poultry and Food Packaging & Labelling, Currently, 53 standards for meat, poultry, eggs and food packaging & labelling were harmonized for uptake by Member States. These are including 12 International standards recommended for adoption and 41 standards for unique products for Africa.
- (iii) For the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Project, in a period of almost 2 years, ARSO has approved 272 standards and regulatory guidelines, and out of which adopted international standards (IS) being 236 IS (ISO, IEC, EN, ASTM), and published African standards (ARS) and technical regulation guidelines (ARS GL) being 23 ARS and 13 ARS G.
- (iv) For the Automotive Technology and Engineering Currently, 41 standards have been harmonised for implementation by Member States. Currently, a total of 18 New Work Items are being harmonised as standards for Unique products for Africa and 34 International Standards recommended for adoption by Member States to unlock trade among them.

Standards Harmonisation activities and scopes covered
15 Sectors and 82 TCs - African Experts from NSBs and Industries

Technical Harmonization Committee	No. of standards published	Products (Goods)	Services	Tests, analysis, sampling	Codes, glossaries, units
Sector 01, Basic and General Standards (1 TC)	143	63	5	28	47
Sector 02, Agriculture and Food Products (24 TCs)	308	166	50	80	12
Sector 03, Building and Civil Engineering (7 TCs)	328	77	32	207	12
Sector 04, Mechanical Engineering and Metallurgy (4 TCs)	117	79	3	30	5
Sector 05, Chemistry and Chemical Engineering (12 TCs)	95	35	3	50	7
Sector 06, Electrotechnology (7 TCs)	64	32	8	15	9
Sector 07, Leather and Textile Products (3 TCs)	182	100	2	74	6
Sector 08, Transport and Communications (5 TCs)	65	57	2	0	6
Sector 09, Environmental Management (6 TCs)	25	1	10	10	4
Sector 10, Energy and Natural Resources (5 TCs)	3	0	0	1	2
Sector 11, Management and Quality (1 TC)	6	0	3	0	3
Sector 12, Services (6 TCs & 1 PC)	16	0	1	0	0
Sector 13, Traditional and Complimentary Medicine (1 TC)	10	4	4	0	2
Sector 14, Healthcare Technology (3 TCs)	251	69	1	42	1
Sector 15, Household goods and services					
Conformity Assessment Committee	25	0	25	0	0
Total	1,621	683	149	537	116

Lately, the 68th Council, held on 3rd – 4th July 2023 in Kinshasa, DR Congo, approved the following standards, including international standards, for adoption and implementation by member States:

- 
- (i) ARSO/TC 07, Meat, poultry, eggs and related
- 17 Unique African Standards
 - (ii) ARSO/TC 12, Cereals, pulses and derived products
- 11 Unique African Standards
 - (iii) ARSO/TC 59, Automotive technology and engineering
- 32 UNECE Standards
 - (iv) ARSO/TC 78, Medical devices and equipment
- 2 ASTM Standard
- 9 EU (CENCENELEC/EN) Standards
- 8 ISO Standards.
 - (v) ARSO/TC 80, Pharmaceuticals and medicinal products
- 12 ASTM International Standards
- 19 EU (CENCENELEC/EN) Standards
- 19 ISO Standards

2.2. ARSO Conformity Assessment Committee (ARSO/CACO):

The ARSO Conformity Assessment Programme (ACAP), scheme, launched on 8th March 2020, with the aim of establishing various tools and capacity building for Good Conformity Assessment Practices (testing, certification, inspection, market surveillance, laboratory accreditation and calibration) and facilitating Mutual Recognition Arrangements, to ensure that products and services conform to the recognised Standards and Technical regulations and thus facilitate intra-African Trade.

The ARSO conformity Assessment is being implemented, based on the following International Standards:

- Certification Bodies based on ISO/IEC 17065:2012 Conformity assessment: Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services
- Rules for qualification of Testing Laboratories based on ISO/IEC 17025:2005: General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories
- Rules for Auditing and Auditors Qualification based on Rules for qualification of Testing Laboratories based on ISO/IEC 17025:2005: General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories

It is highlighted that, in June 2023 the 68th Council and the 29th General Assembly of ARSO approved the following harmonized Conformity Assessment Documents/Guidelines based on International standards:

- Six (6) Conformity Assessment Requirement Documents :
 - (1) ACAP I-1:2023, Conformity assessment — Part 1: General requirements for the certification systems
 - (2) ACAP I-2:2023, Conformity assessment — Part 2: Special requirements for the certification systems

- (3) ACAP 1-3:2023, Conformity assessment — Part 3: Requirements for approval of certification bodies
- (4) ACAP 1-4:2023, Conformity assessment — Part 4: Requirements for approval of testing and calibration laboratories
- (5) ACAP 4:2023, Cosmetology and wellness certification framework
- (6) ARS GL 2030:2023, Guideline on dual marking of products with the ARSO quality marks and national quality marks after certification

Seven (7) Conformity Assessment Guidelines (ARSO/CACO SC 2 WG 5, Pharmaceuticals, medical devices and equipment):

- (1) ARS GL 2010:2023, Guidelines for drug donation
- (2) ARS GL 2011:2023, Guidelines for medication administration
- (3) ARS GL 2012:2023, Guidelines for regulatory audit of medical devices manufacturers
- (4) ARS GL 2013:2023, Guidelines for clinical evaluation of medical devices
- (5) ARS GL 2014:2023, Guidelines for post-marketing surveillance of traditional medicines
- (6) ARS GL 2015:2023, Guidelines for destruction of substandard, falsified and unsafe pharmaceuticals
- (7) ARS GL 2016:2023, Guideline on the registration pathway for non-prescription medicine
- (8) molecular testing for nucleic acids — Part 1: Terminology and general requirements for nucleic acid quality evaluation
- (9) ISO 23640:2011, In vitro diagnostic medical devices — Evaluation of stability of in vitro diagnostic reagents
- (10) ISO/TS 16782:2016, Clinical laboratory testing — Criteria for acceptable lots of dehydrated Mueller-Hinton agar and broth for antimicrobial susceptibility testing
- (11) ISO/TS 17518:2015, Medical laboratories — Reagents for staining biological material — Guidance for users
- (12) ISO/TS 20914:2019, Medical laboratories — Practical guidance for the estimation of measurement uncertainty
- (13) EN 12322:1999/ A2001 In vitro diagnostic medical devices - Culture media for microbiology - Performance criteria for culture media.
- (14) EN 1659:1996 In vitro diagnostic systems - Culture media for microbiology - Terms and definitions. For clarity.

2.2.1. Sustainability Standards and the Implementation of the Eco Mark Africa Certification Scheme

Under Scheme D, ARSO continued to implement the Eco Mark Africa Certification scheme which addresses the sustainability issues in the Sustainable Production and Consumption based on the SDG 2030, Goal 12 on Sustainable Production and Consumption, while addressing the climate change mitigation measures, through harmonised **Agricultural Sustainability Standards**, in addition **three standards on sustainable Cocoa**, and **six African Sustainability Standards on fisheries, forestry, tourism, tilapia and the African catfish** are being used for the certification, and through a **maturity model (silver, gold or platinum)** and focusing on the SMEs, as highlighted below:

1. ARS AES 1_2014 Agriculture — Sustainability and eco-labelling — Requirements
2. ARS AES 2_2014 Fisheries — Sustainability and eco-labelling — Requirements
3. ARS AES 3_2014 Forestry — Sustainability and eco-labelling— Requirements
4. ARS AES 4_2014 Tourism — Sustainability and eco-labelling — Requirements
5. ARS AES 5_2014 Aquaculture — African catfish — Sustainability and eco-labelling — Requirements
6. ARS AES 6_2014 Aquaculture — Tilapia — Sustainability and eco-labelling — Requirements

For awareness creation and outreach ARSO in cooperation with the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) has developed an African Continental platform on Voluntary Sustainability to promote the cooperation with national governments to launch national platforms on sustainability standards.

The label is currently registered with WIPO, EUIPO UKIPO and has been awarded to 10 companies across Africa ((Kabngetuny farmers co-op society, Kapkiyai farmers co-op society, Kofinaf Ltd, Coffee Management Services, Kamuthanga Farm Ltd (Kenya), Allied Timber of Zimbabwe, Quarcoo initiatives (Ghana), SON Fish Ltd (Uganda), Ralphyam Ng Ltd (Nigeria), with both KEBS and KENAS playing key roles.

- There has also been Training initiatives for the NSBs, Labs, CBs (9) , Service providers, Farmers, producers and auditors (56) on the implementation of ACAP Schemes. This include training of eleven (11) Trainers of Trainers (ToT); Training and sensitisation of twenty one (21) companies and SMEs about EMA requirements for certification.

2.2.2. Dual Marking of Products with National and ARSO Quality Marks

For the dual marking scheme, ARSO has initiated a survey with the ARSO Member States to gauge their readiness for the implementation of the two Eco Label and the ARSO Mark labels. As already been highlighted, the Dual Marking System, based on harmonised ARSO Standards, and with the labels on the conforming products, will promote the visibility of quality marks, and:

- (i) *reduce of non-tariff barriers with wide acceptance of the product due to the guarantee of quality granted by the ARSO mark*
- (ii) *increase in volume and turnover of the company due to the lower costs of sanitary, phytosanitary controls etc.*
- (iii) *avoid or reduce unnecessary additional conformity assessment activities (Inspection, testing and certification),*
- (iv) *Save time in relation to export formalities, economies of scale, productivity and lower costs resulting from non-compliance, and*
- (v) *access new markets within AfCFTA, with increased intra-African Trade, among the member States.*

2.2.3. Initiative on the Mutual Recognition Arrangements and Harmonisation activities of Technical Regulations - ARSO Conformity Assessment (ARSO CACO)

The WTO encourages the harmonisation of standards, Conformity Assessment systems, the recognition of Equivalence Standards and the, under article 6.3 Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) to address the challenges of the TBTs in the global trade. On the same note, the **AfCFTA Agreement, TBT Annex 6, Article 12, Cooperation in Conformity Assessment, calls on State Parties to “promote mutual acceptance of conformity assessment results of conformity assessment bodies which have been recognised under appropriate multilateral agreements between their respective accreditation bodies and the relevant mutual recognition arrangements of the AFRAC, ILAC and IAF”.**

Through the **ARSO CACO Working Group 1 on Technical Regulation**, which promotes regulatory cooperation between regulators from different Member States and seeking to leverage on the benefits of MRA, ARSO continues to implement the **Mutual Recognition Arrangement between six member States, of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zimbabwe, through a consultative process.:**

- A 2nd Consultative Forum held on 2nd December 2022 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during the 67th ARSO Council.
- A 3rd Consultative forum of the Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) meeting, that was held from 6th - 10th February 2023, in Kigali-Rwanda.
- Stakeholder Consultative Special webinar held on 18th May 2023 to facilitate discussions of the Draft Framework while encouraging benchmarking with the Best MRA international best practices.
- **Currently, there is ongoing National Stakeholder consultations in Participating Member States on the legal issues on the Mutual Recognition Framework Agreement (MRA), which are scheduled to end by end of October 2023, a head of the validation Workshop yet to be scheduled.**
- The key advantage of this proposed MRA Framework is that it provides an exporting Member State with the authority to carry out conformity assessment against the adopted regulatory requirements of the importing party, in its own territory and before export and as a result allow free flow of trade in goods and services.
- It contains elements of obligations on the piloting countries to recognise the results of inspections, tests, certifications and approvals, issued by qualified conformity assessment bodies of the exporting Member State, by the importing Member State. In addition, the MRA shall not be used as instrument to harmonise standards and technical regulations but should be used as a recognition of conformity assessment programmes of Member State.

2.3. Awareness Creation, Capacity Building and Notification activities

One of the problems in Africa is the lack of understanding among policy makers, SMEs, traders, consumers and the academia on the role of standardisation in sustainable development. In this case, the ARSO Central Secretariat, together with the member States have continued to organise various awareness creation activities, on ARSO Standardisation work and benefits, among the member States. This include:

2.3.1. Events in member States, on the harmonised standards.

- (i) Ethiopia - 1st - 2nd March 2023:
- (ii) Uganda – 27th – 31st March 2023
- (iii) Burundi – 17th – 18th May 2023
- (iv) Chad – 23rd – 25th May 2023.
- (v) Benin – 9th June 2023.

2.3.2. ARSO DISNET - Increased awareness creation on ARSO Standards

The ARSO Documentation and Information Networks (DISNET) has remained a key pillar in the implementation of the Transparency requirements as per the WTO TBT article 10 and 15 and the AfCFTA Agreement TBT Annex 6, Article 11 transparency, which require members to make Notifications on Technical regulations, Standards and conformity assessment procedures and other measures that may affect trade, as more transparency makes trade more inclusive and information on regulations and standards more accessible for all trade stakeholders.

It is in this regard the ARSO Documentation and Information Network (ARSO DISNET) programme, currently with 29 ARSO Members States, is being implemented through 3 Sub-Committees, (ARSONet – NSBs Information Centres Networks; ARSO DISNET NSBs TBT NEP unit – NSBs National Enquiry Points; and the DISNET ATWP – African Trade Web Portal) for the dissemination and Notification of Standards, Technical Regulations and Conformity Assessments adopted and being implemented by members.

- Currently ARSO and WTO are cooperating, also, in the implementation of the WTO Transparency Champions programme Workshop and Capacity building for African Countries (launched in October 2022 in Geneva and with a second regional workshop held in Nairobi, in April, 25th – 28th, 2023, co-hosted with Kenya).
- The programme aims at facilitating greater coordination between the National Notification Authorities and the National Enquiry Points, and promotion of Transparency in Africa's regulatory systems for the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement.
- Participating Members: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Eswatini, Tanzania, Togo, Zanzibar, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- *DISNET is a Platform for greater coordination of Transparency issues in Africa together with the AU (African Trade Observatory) and AfCFTA Secretariat (NTB platform).*

2.3.3 ARSO Webinars

Started in 2020, to date, a total of Thirty-nine (39) Webinar sessions have been held between June 2020 – to November 2023 with the participation of Panelists and Experts from all over the world, including from AU, UNECA, Africa RECs, WTO, ISO, GSO, UNECE, ITC, UNCTAD, UNIDO, EU, CEN-CENELEC, BSI, QCI, ASTM International, NASI/PIVOT/USAID, QCI, SAC-China, IEC, ITU, AUC, AfCFTA Secretariat, Private Sector and Associations and ARSO Member States Experts.. WTO Officials have been highlighting the position of WTO in various Trade and Standardisation policies, as per the WTO TBT/SPS Agreements. For 2023, the following webinar series, co-hosted with member States, are highlighted:

- (i) Kenya: 25th January 2023 - Co-Hosted with Kenya/KEBS – 29th Session under the Theme: Digitization for Sustainable & Inclusive Development - ICT Accessibility Standards and Requirements.
- (ii) Cameroon: 22 February 2023: - Co-Hosted with Cameroon/ANOR – 30th Session under the theme “Project, Programme and Portfolio Management. Topic: Importance of standards for the quality and success of projects and programmes in Africa”.
- (iii) Uganda: 29th March 2023: - Co-Hosted with Uganda/UNBS – 31st Session: Theme: “Common Regulatory Framework and Sustainable Development”. Topic: Implementing harmonised standards for trade facilitation and sustainable development.
- (iv) Ghana: 26 April 2023 - Co-Hosted with Ghana/GSA – 32nd Session under the Theme: “Intra-African Trade and the AfCFTA Agreement Implementation”. Topic: Working together to make Trade faster and Transparent while making the most of the African Continental Free Trade Area for the growth of intra-African Trade and in considering the emerging sectors that the AfCFTA is prioritising.
- (v) Tanzania: 24th May 2023 - Co-Hosted with Tanzania/TBS – 33rd Session under the theme: “Standardisation and SMEs”. Topic: Recognizing the vital role of SMEs as engines for sustainable and inclusive Economic Growth and need for increasing their competitiveness in Africa through standardisation.
- (vi) Chad: 26th June 2023 - Co-Hosted with Chad/ ATNOR – 34th Session under the theme: “National Quality Policy and Development”. Topic: The inter-dependence between Trade, Sustainable Development and National Quality Policy.
- (vii) South Africa: 25th July 2023 - Co-Hosted with South Africa/SABS – 35th Session under the theme “Women in Standardisation and Trade”. Topic: The inter-linkages between standardisation, trade, public procurement, value chains and gender inequality in the context of SDGs 2030 and Africa Agenda 2063.
- (viii) Nigeria: 23th August 2023 – to be co-hosted with Nigeria/SON - 36th Session. - Theme: Trade Barriers in Agricultural Trade. Topic: Trade as the engine for sustainable development: the Impact of Regulations on Agricultural Trade and opportunities under the AfCFTA Agreement.
- (ix) Egypt: 23rd September 2023 to be co-hosted with Egypt/EOS- 37th Session. Theme: Sustainability in the Standardisation process. Topic: Developing standards with Sustainability tags as a means for promoting sustainable Trade, Production and Sustainable Development: The initiatives in making sustainability an integral part in Trade Policies and in standardisation both at the national and international levels.
- (x) Zimbabwe: 25th October 2023, to be co-hosted with Zimbabwe/SAZ - 38th Session. Theme: The potential of manufacturing and industrialization in Africa. Topic: Building Africa's manufacturing strength in the Textile and Leather Industry as backbone for Africa's economy - Creating a competitive value chain - Trends, opportunities, and strategies.
- (xi) Morocco: 15th November 2023, to be co-hosted with the Kingdom of Morocco/AMANOR: 39th Session. Theme: Towards prosperous and sustainable Africa - Renewable Energy and Industrialisation. Topic – Green Industrialisation – leveraging the new Energy technologies and investing in Africa's renewables (renewable energy sources - geothermal, wind-power and hydro- electric) to leap-frog towards a less energy-intensive economic growth and industrialisation.

2.3.4. ARSO Essay Competitions 2022/23

The ARSO Essay Competition is meant for Youth Empowerment through Standardisation. Given the opportunities provided for by the AfCFTA Agreement for the Youth, the Essay competition remains crucial. Currently the member States are undertaking the Essay on for the 2023/2024, the 11th edition, since 2013, under the theme “Empowering Consumers through Standardisation to achieve their rights to safe Quality Goods and Services” as approved by the 67th ARSO Council during its meeting held on 3rd – 4th July 2023 in Kinshasha Dr Congo. The theme recognises the influence of Consumers in the standardisation process, and the role of ARSO Conciliators Committee, benchmarked with the ISO COPOLCO.

2.3.5. Capacity Building for African Standardisation Experts

ARSO also Continued to engage with International Stakeholders in Capacity building activities for the African Standardisation Experts, including:

1. 14th February 2023 - ARSO CACO Training on best regulatory Practices.
2. 28th February 2023: Webinar/Workshop - Cosmetics Standardization Web-series: #7 Labelling Practices for Cosmetics.
3. April 2023 - ARSO CACO members/Experts - best regulatory Practices.
4. 4th – 8th September 2023 - 2nd AU MSMEs Forum – Training and Awareness programme for the participating SMEs.
5. 7th September 2023 – Virtual Training for over 230 African Experts on TBTs Challenges, ARSO Standardisation processes and best international Regulatory practices.
6. **ARSO Capacity Building on best regulatory practices for over 100 Member States** ((Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tchad, Tunisia and Uganda),) TCs Secretaries and Chairs, ARSO CACO/COCOA Chairs and convenors on **27th - 29th March 2023, in Kampala, Uganda** and **3rd – 5th July 2023 Kinshasa, DR Congo** on best international standards harmonisation and development process and principles.

2.4. Initiatives under PAQI. Promotion of Standardisation and Trade Policy Instruments

2.4.1. African Quality Policy.

ARSO, under the umbrella of the Pan African Quality Infrastructure Institutions (AFRAC, AFRIMETS, and AFSEC) have developed a stakeholder driven Quality Policy for Africa based on the AU member States decision (Abuja Treaty of 1991) to adopt a common policy on standardisation.

- The Policy Document was officially adopted as Africa Union document in February 2022 by the AU at its Heads of State Summit in February 2022, for its implementation, through the African Quality Policy Council.
- Currently, ARSO is working with the development partners to help members align their National Quality Policy to the African Quality Policy, where the process is being facilitated in Rwanda, Somalia, and Chad.

2.4.2. African Continental Technical Regulatory Framework (ACTReF)

Stakeholders under the PAQI also have continued with the development of a Continental African Continental Technical Regulatory Framework (ACTREF) for adoption by the African Union, to facilitate regulatory Coherence/Convergence in Africa for the implementation of AfCFTA.

- **Note: A joint Expert Workshop on the ACTReF was held during the 22nd PAQI Joint Committee meetings in Johannesburg on 23rd -24th February 2023.**

3. Technical Cooperation as provided for under the WTO TBT Agreement Article 11 and the AfCFTA TBT Annex, article 12, Technical Assistance and Capacity Building.

1. AAAM – Focused on Standards Harmonisation on Automotive technology and engineering.
2. Afreximbank – Focused on the harmonisation of Pharmaceutical and Medicinal devices Standards, and the in the Textiles and Leather Products.
3. African Development Bank (AfDB) –on the Harmonisation and Certification of African Standards for Dairy, Horticulture, Fisheries and Aquaculture Products.
4. African Union – AU – Focused on the promotion of standardisation and Quality Infrastructure in Africa through Policy, including the adoption of African Quality policy in February 2022 for adoption by members
5. ALLPI – Focus on the harmonisation of Standards & Conformity Assessment in the Leather Sector in Africa.
6. ANSI-USAID/PIVOT-PCPC – Capacity Building in Cosmetics Standardization Good Manufacturing Practices for Cosmetics
7. AOAC- Focused on the promotion effective Test Methods and Test Methods standards including for food safety in Africa.
8. ASTM International – Capacity Building Webinar Workshops, based on the members interests and priorities,
9. AU/AfCFTA Secretariat – Implementation of the TBT Annex 6 and SPS Annex 7, under the TBT Sub-Committee for Africa. The AfCFTA Business Forum in South Africa on 16th – 19th April 2023 with discussions on the role of Quality Infrastructure and partnerships and a session on 18th April 2023, on “Making Technical Regulations work for African Businesses”, is highlighted.
10. AUDA-NEPAD – Focused on the implementation of harmonised African Standards and Conformity Assessment Procedures to boost Africa's industrialisation, intra-Africa trade, regional integration and economic development.
11. BSI – Cooperation in standards harmonisation and in standardisation in support of the growth of emerging industries and enhancing the use of standards as a tool to support trade and policy.
12. CEN-CENELEC – Cooperation in Standards harmonisation and Capacity Building leveraged on the ongoing AU-EU Trade and Policy cooperations.
13. GSO/AIDMO – Focused on the Harmonization and Certification of African Standards for Clean Fuel Solutions for Cooking Products and Processes as well as Capacity Building.
14. IACO – Focused on the promotion of the development and harmonisation of standards and Conformity Assessment for the coffee industry in Africa.
15. ICIPE – Harmonisation of standards and conformity assessment in the field of insects for food and feed and bee farming.
16. IEEE – Focused on the implementation of the 4IR components under the ARSO African 4IR Standardisation Strategy, which was launched on 9th December 2021.
17. ISO – Cooperation in International Standardisation and Leadership.
18. ITC – Focus on the implementation of Made in Africa Criteria among the SMEs and aligning of National Quality Policies to African Quality Policy and Support to the Regional Quality Champions on capacity building/Training
19. PTB-Germany – Harmonisation of Standards in Automotive Sector and in the Agricultural Sector and support to the training in Quality Infrastructure for Sustainable Development (QuSP).
20. QCI – Focused on the promotion of Conformity Assessment and certification including promoting made in Africa products and implementation of Made in Africa Criteria.
21. Rockefeller – Focused on the Harmonisation of Standards for Insects for Food and Feed.

22. SADC – Harmonization of fish value chain standards, quality assurance/control and packaging for sanitary conditions (SPS) and chain of custody/eco-certification under the SADC Programme for Improving Fisheries Governance and Blue Economy Trade Corridors in SADC Region (PROFISHBLUE), T
23. UL Standards –Capacity Building in Standardisation Webinar Workshops and Study on the Adoption of Intertional and ARSO Standards by African Countries for improvements.
24. UNCTAD – The Cooperation focused on Standards Harmonisation and Trade Policy , with the following highlights. Participation in the 2023 Economic Development in Africa Report entitled "The Potential of Africa to Capture Technology-intensive Global Supply Chains", 16th August 2023.
25. UNECA – With the focus on the harmonisation of African Sustainability Standards, certification guidelines and the facilitation of the Eco Mark Africa certification among the private sector/ SMEs in Africa.
26. UNECE – Cooperation in the creation of awareness on Gender Mainstreaming Standardisation, already ARSO being a Signatory to the UNECE Declaration on Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development, by 2018.
27. UNIDO – Cooperation on "Supporting quality and regulatory infrastructure, value chain-specific quality infrastructure services and quality culture promotion in the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States".

4. Cooperation with the WTO

ARSO appreciates the mutual cooperation with the WTO, which currently is promoting the creation of awareness in Africa about the challenges of the TBTs and the need for strengthening Quality Infrastructure in Africa. Currently, the following initiatives are highlighted:

- Transparency Champions initiative to facilitate the Transparency In Standards harmonisation process within the AfCFTA Framework, as per the WTO TBT Agreement and the AfCFTA Agreement, TBT Annex 6, Article, 11 on Transparency.
- The Programme will promote regulatory transparency, thereby increasing compliance with the Transparency Provisions of the WTO TBT/ AfCFTA Agreement and the uptake of good practices, coordination and dialogue through Champions network with DISNET as a platform for Coordination, Capacity building, Networking, Cooperations and development of regional initiatives under the AfCFTA TBT Annex 6, Article 11 on Transparency and 13 on TBT Sub-Committee.
- There are 28 African countries participating, 22 of which are ARSO members (Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe).
- The first workshop was held on 10th – 14th October 2022, and a second workshop is scheduled for April 2022. Currently there are ongoing online meetings and follow-ups, including a webinar held on 10th November 2022.
- There are greater focus on creating Awareness on the importance of Transparency in standardisation activities, Notifications and the use of E-Ping systems and coordinations between National Notification Authorities and National Enquiry Points.
- The 2nd Regional Workshop for Africa has been scheduled for 25th – 28th April 2023 in Nairobi Kenya.
- ARSO also discussed with the WTO- STDF, on possibilities of other cooperation in promoting Transparency and Notification issues and Awareness creation in Gender Mainstreaming in Standardisation during the AU-SPS COORDINATION FORUM MEETING 19 – 20 SEPTEMBER 2023 & SPS LEARNING EVENT ON USING GOOD REGULATORY PRACTICE TO FACILITATE SAFE TRADE IN AFRICA, 21 to 22 SEPTEMBER 2023, IN ACCRA, GHANA

5. Conclusion

ARSO remains focused under the five Strategic Plan 2022-2027 on the harmonising standards and Conformity Assessment procedures in Africa within the opportunity of the WTO TBT Agreement and the AfCFTA Agreement. Under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement, TBT Annex 6, Article 3, on guiding principles, the State parties, have agreed that the WTO TBT Agreement shall form the basis of the implementation of the TBT Annex 6 and, which under article 5, calls on the State Parties to cooperate in the development and implementation of standards, technical regulations, conformity assessment procedures, accreditation, metrology, capacity building and enforcement activities in order to facilitate trade within the AfCFTA. Under its TBT Agreement, the WTO encourages Harmonization, use of equivalence and mutual recognition in the bilateral free trade agreements, such as the AfCFTA, hence the basis of greater cooperation between WTO and ARSO.