How KENAS is watching your back

Chesire is leading an accreditation drive that will boost Kenya's exports, protect consumers and help attain the Big Four Agenda

By TEDDY LETING

Martin Chesire is a young, vibrant CEO, driving his role with utmost precision. He was appointed Chief Executive of Kenya Accreditation Services (KENAS) in March 2018, when the accreditation body was looking to expand its services across East Africa.

While he considers his position as transformative and one that is aimed at improving the accreditation standards in Kenya and East Africa, his style of operation involves "rebooting," where he spends most of his time learning the strengths and weaknesses of the body so as to give it sharper teeth in the industry.

The CEO banks on his vast experience in Standardization, Accreditation and Conformity Assessment, which he gained from his past stints working at ISO, the International Organization for Standardization (in Geneva, Switzerland) and at Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS).

His journey in transforming KENAS dates back to late 90's, when most citizens were vulnerable to contamination and open to health related hazards as standardization of products at the time had not been properly managed.

When the government introduced Kenya Bureau of Standards in 1974 to ensure manufacturers and producers adhered to international standards, the body created a small department that was mandated to ensure accreditation of organisations in terms of measurements and quality. However, while at a conference in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, senior officials at KEBS realized the department would be overwhelmed with the huge workload that comes with accreditation. They thus collapsed the department in 2004 and created KENAS, which was officially incorporated in May 2009 under the Ministry of Trade and Cooperatives to operate independently from KEBS.



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Martin Chesire. CEO KENAS

Over the years, KENAS has been offering Accreditation Services to Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) such as Laboratories (general testing, medical testing, veterinary testing etc.), Inspection and Verification bodies, proficiency testing providers and certification services.

The body ensures that these CABs and proficiency testing providers are competent to carry out specific conformity assessment tasks.

KENAS major concern has been to improve the accreditation sector by checking the technical competence and compliance by bodies that operate within international standards of accreditation.

"Accreditation is distinct from certification because certification focuses on an organization overall compliance with systems and products standards while accreditation focuses on the technical competence of a Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) such as an organization offering Certification Services," Chesire says.

"Therefore accreditation is a formal recognition that the CAB is competent to carry out the declared conformity assessment tasks."

In regards to the conformity standards, the CEO explains, KENAS ensures the range of measurement within Kenya and East Africa is of the same measure globally, giving room for transparent business and trading activities across the region.

The CEO says there is a developing system of international mutual recognition agreements between accreditation bodies, which enable accredited conformity assessment bodies to achieve a form of international recognition.

Courtesy of KENAS' accreditation services, companies have been able to easily market their products and services locally and across the globe. And most of these products and services are saved from undergoing additional tests in the overseas markets.

Contribution to the Big 4 Agenda

When government launched the Big 4 Agenda economic pillars in 2018, KENAS saw the dire need to seal the loopholes that could be exploited by unscrupulous traders and businessmen by emphasizing services and products offered met quality standards.

The services centered on the Big 4 sectors, including; Agriculture and food security, Manufacturing, Universal Health Care and Housing.

Partly due to its contribution in enhancing such ethical business practices, KENAS in June 2018 became signatory to the ILAC mutual recognition agreement as well as the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) multi-lateral arrangement.

Meaning, the body would now test reports or certificates issued by KENAS accredited laboratories and inspection and certification bodies would hence be accepted worldwide once tested, inspected or certified and accepted everywhere.

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Going forward, KENAS has partnered with The African Organization for Standardization (ARSO), an institution that enables certification bodies in Africa using the ARSO Eco Mark Africa (EMA), to achieve international recognition.

In Kenya, among the largest bodies accredited by KENAS include; Kenya Power and Lighting Company Limited (KPLC) meter testing laboratory, Kenya Airways calibration laboratory, Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) certification body, Nairobi Hospital main hospital laboratory and the Kenya Revenue Authority testing laboratory, among others.

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The body has so far accredited more than a hundred bodies and it hopes to accredit more than a thousand firms by the end of the year.

"Most people expect to work in safe environments and consume safe products and quality services. Unfortunately, such expectations are in most cases unmet. Closing this gap is a vital consideration for government, regulators, and businesses aiming to keep people safer wherever they are."

Role in the energy sector

As East Africa gears up to reap the proceeds of oil and gas boom, KENAS has partnered with the Energy Regulatory Commission-Kenya to promote ethical refining, manufacturing and trading of petroleum, oil and gas products.

The body is set to accredit fuel tanker inspection firms to run testing measures to ensure fuel accidents are curbed and regulated as well as to reduce the catastrophic cases brought about by such risks.

KENAS continues to focus on providing accreditation services that promote fair trade, health and safety as well as protection of the environment.

"I hope to see KENAS reform the manufacturing, production and marketing of services by maintaining standards in these industries through accreditation," the CEO says.

About Chesire, the CEO

Despite his recent appointment to head the accreditation body, Chesire has a water-tight resume and industry experience. The CEO holds a Bachelor's degree in Chemistry from Moi University, a Master of Science in Quality Management and Business Excellence from the University of Stirling (Scotland), and an Executive MBA in International Management from the Université de Genève (Switzerland). He is a Chartered Quality Professional, and a member of the Chartered Quality Institute-UK.

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