

Case study n°3

Implementation of the Eco Mark Africa Certification System through the Eco Mark Sustainability Standards

Organisation: African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO)

Level: Continental Program

SDG Addressed: SDG 13 – Climate Action



Summary

Led by the African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO), the Eco Mark Africa (EMA) aims at promoting the associated ecolabel across the African continent for sustainably-produced products and services, and advocating their certification via four standards concerning the domains of agriculture (ARS/AES 1:2014), fisheries (ARS/AES 2:2014), forestry (ARS/AES 3:2014) and tourism (ARS/AES 4:2014). The EMA seeks to foster sustainable production and consumption, while eliminating conformity assessment issues that might result in deterring trade among African countries and the international community at large. Ultimately, the EMA addresses the detrimental effects of climate change and population pressure on the continent's natural ecosystem, thus indirectly contributing to the achievement of SDG 13.2 "Integrate Climate Change Measures into National Policies, Strategies and Planning." Considering the volume of Africa's intra- and extra-regional trade, should the EMA take hold, it would contribute to significantly reducing the threats posed by climate change across the African continent and beyond.

Background

The Eco Mark Africa (EMA) is a certification recognition system for sustainability standards arising from the growing global concern for environmental protection on the part of governments, businesses and the public. African economies are among the most heavily affected by the detrimental effects of climate change,

with mitigation and adaptation strategies becoming vital for the continent. Sustainably producing goods and services represents a suitable means of adjusting to climate change and meeting the associated consumers' rising demand worldwide.

In this context, ecolabelling is an effective market-based instrument to enhance access of African products to international markets, while at the same time fostering sustainable consumption and production patterns. This would prove beneficial to businesses, as ecolabelling provides them with a way of measuring performance and communicating the environmental credentials of products; to consumers, as ecolabelling guide their purchasing decisions by supplying information about what "the story" of the products; to governments, which could use ecolabelling to encourage behavioral change of producers and consumers towards long-term sustainability.

Strategy

The EMA seeks to promote the certification of sustainably-produced goods and services through the following four standards:

- ARS/AES 1:2014 "Agriculture — Sustainability and Eco-labelling — Requirements," providing requirements for the sustainable production, processing and trading of agricultural products, including food, beverages and non-food products; livestock and livestock products, bee

products; wild harvested products; agricultural fibre products.

- ARS/AES 2:2014 “Fisheries — Sustainability and Eco-labelling — Requirements,” providing requirements for the sustainable harvesting of fish up to the point at which the fish are landed and applies to marine and inland capture fisheries only
- ARS/AES 3:2014 “Forestry — Sustainability and Eco-labelling— Requirements,” providing forest owners and managers with environmental, economic, social, and cultural criteria as well as requirements that support the sustainable management of forests. It is intended for application to any forests being managed for the production of forest products and services.
- ARS/AES 4:2014 “Tourism — Sustainability and Eco-labelling — Requirements,” establishing a common understanding of sustainable tourism, and specifies the minimum that any tourism management services wishing to be sustainable, should aspire to reach and promotes Eco Tourism.

Results and Impact

The EMA certification system is expected to have a beneficial impact on the following dimensions:

Producers, as the EMA would stimulate market demand for environmentally sustainable goods and services, export diversification, as well as international and regional market access. Additionally, it would contribute to fostering sustainable production methods, especially with respect to climate change adaptation;

- Consumers, because the EMA would improve transparency on the origin of products as well as on environmental and social conditions of production in Africa. Furthermore, it will enhance consumer safety by providing information on the environmental, social and economic impacts of selected goods and services;
- Trade and industry, as the EMA would allow for the integration of climate-relevant criteria into companies’ sustainability policies, while becoming a truly credible African brand to be incorporated into the marketing strategies of said firms;

- The African continent, since the EMA would provide the industry with the unique opportunity to tap into new sustainability supply sources in Africa and beyond, which is deemed to be a critical component to preserve, protect and improve Africa’s natural environment.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Two main challenges were identified during the implementation of the standards. First of all, high costs were associated with the certification process and other conformity assessment activities in Africa. This adds to the insufficient knowledge of and attention to the need and importance of ecolabelling, especially amongst government policy makers, industry/SMEs, consumers and the general public.

As far as lessons learned are concerned, these include a greater need of awareness creation about ecolabels as well as of benchmarking with other labels. Furthermore, the creation of partnerships to support the program would also be recommended.

Potential for Replication

The EMA Certification System can be replicated to other sectors, including mining and extraction, textile and leather, as well as building and construction (especially in relation to green buildings). Moreover, the EMA can apply to the benchmarking with other certification schemes, and to the development of capacity of Cleaner Production Centres (CPCs) aimed at facilitating the certification process itself.

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