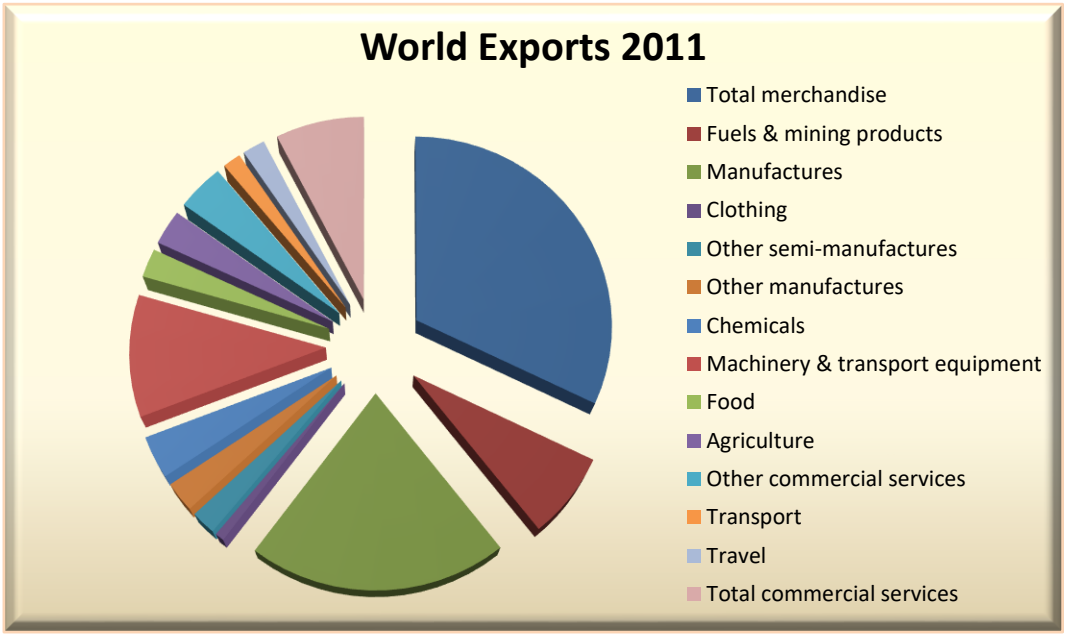
**Accreditation: Facilitating World Trade**

The global celebration of World Accreditation Day (WAD) on 09 June commenced in 2008. Since then the initiators of WAD, the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) have explored relevant and timely themes such as *Accreditation: Supporting safe food and clean drinking water* in 2012 and *Global Acceptance* in 2010. This year the trend continues as the theme focuses on *Accreditation: Facilitating World Trade*.

What exactly is accreditation? Accreditation involves the independent assessment of bodies performing activities such as testing, calibration, inspection and certification against internationally recognised standards to ensure their competence to perform these activities. These bodies are collectively referred to as Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs). Accreditation bodies are the authoritative bodies that conduct the independent assessment of CABs.

But what does accreditation have to do with facilitating world trade? When we go to the supermarket, a cellular phone store, the gas station, or even a clothing store, we often purchase items that have not originated from our country. Global trade has made it easy for a cellular phone made in China to be available for purchase in a store in Barbados or a shirt made in Bangladesh to be on a hanger of a Saint Lucian clothing store or gold from Guyana to be used to make a ring in the United States of America or bananas from Dominica being offered on a Mediterranean cruise ship. The World Trade Organization's (WTO) *International Trade Statistics 2012* indicate that world exports in 2011 totalled over fifty-five trillion United States dollars. Total merchandise, manufacturers and total commercial services contributed the most to world exports with US$ 17,816 billion; US$ 11,511 billion and US$ 4,170 billion respectively. At the other end of the spectrum were travel, transport and clothing which amounted for US$ 1,065 billion; US$ 860 billion and US$ 412 billion correspondingly. In the middle of the spectrum are agriculture and food with US$ 1,660 billion and US$ 1,356 billion respectively. That is the global picture.




What does the regional picture look like? According to data from the CARICOM Regional Statistics Programme, total CARICOM exports totalled US$ 14.19 billion in 2010. Intra-

regionally, a total of US$ 2.5 billion was exported among CARICOM Member States while US$ 2.4 billion was imported among the Member States in 2010.

With such a robust trade market, systems must be put in place to ensure the quality and safety of goods and services traded whether internationally or domestically. These systems often include the application of standards and regulations as well as the activities of testing, calibration, inspection and certification. Products, processes, systems, persons or bodies within the global trade market are subjected to these systems. This has become necessary to ensure that the goods and services traded do not pose any threats to human health and safety or the environment. However, these systems should not create unnecessary or burdensome barriers to trade. The WTO's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) speaks to this fact. It states that "*Members shall ensure that technical regulations are not prepared, adopted or applied with a view to or with the effect of creating unnecessary obstacles to international trade*". However, the Agreement adds, "*For this purpose, technical regulations shall not be more trade-restrictive than necessary to fulfil a legitimate objective, taking account of the risks non-fulfilment would create. Such legitimate objectives are, inter alia: national security requirements; the prevention of deceptive practices; protection of human health or safety, animal or plant life or health, or the environment. In assessing such risks, relevant elements of consideration are, inter alia: available scientific and technical information, related processing technology or intended end-uses of products*". Therefore, technical regulations are developed based on the need to ensure national security, honest practices, protection of human, animal or plant health and the environment.

Have you ever taken the time to see if the products you buy from the supermarkets meet any standards? How does a bottled water producer demonstrate that the sodium, chlorine or calcium content of the water is at the level reported on the label of the bottle? In what way can an inspector guarantee that there is an impartial and competent process in the inspection of goods entering a country? How can I be assured that the medical test result I received is accurate? Am I certain of the quality of a particular certified product?

Accreditation provides the answers to all these questions. Accreditation bodies around the world accredit laboratories that are involved in activities such as product testing and medical testing. The independent assessment of the competence of these laboratories to carry out specific tests is evaluated against the requirements of international standards such as ISO/IEC[1] 17025 for testing and calibration laboratories and ISO 15189 for medical laboratories. The ISO/IEC 17020 and ISO/IEC 17065 standards are the basis upon which inspection and certification bodies respectively are assessed.

[1] ISO/IEC: International Organisation for Standardisation/International Electrotechnical Commission

Accreditation bodies around the world are members of ILAC and/or IAF. Through evaluations and acceptance of members' accreditation systems, multilateral arrangements are established between members. This facilitates world trade through the international acceptance of accredited testing, calibration, inspection and certification results. The joint statement from ILAC and IAF in recognition of WAD 2013 summarises it well: "The primary purpose of both IAF and ILAC is to establish multilateral arrangements between their member accreditation bodies based on mutual evaluation and acceptance of each other's accreditation systems. These arrangements enhance the acceptance of products and services across national borders by removing the need for them to undergo additional tests, inspections or certification at each country of entry. This helps to reduce bureaucracy and the costs to businesses and contributes to operational efficiency".

But how does the regional accreditation framework stack up. To begin, the CARICOM Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) is the regional centre for promoting efficiency and competitive production in goods and services through facilitating the processes of standardisation and the verification of quality. CROSQ carries out this function in collaboration with the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) of the CARICOM Member States. A regional mechanism, the Caribbean Cooperation for Accreditation Scheme (CCA), has been established to address the accreditation needs of the region. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have National Accreditation Bodies (NABs) – the Jamaica National Agency for Accreditation (JANAAC) and the Trinidad and Tobago Laboratory Accreditation Service (TTLABS). JANAAC and TTLABS signed a Technical Cooperation Agreement in April, 2012 to facilitate the harmonisation of their accreditation services. The NSBs are designated National Accreditation Focal Points (NAFPs). The NABs are the authoritative bodies that perform accreditations while the NAFPs serve as a link between the NABs and bodies seeking accreditation. Collaboration, coordination and information sharing are the hallmarks of the CCA. The Scheme was officially launched in April of this year with

the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the CROSQ Secretariat and the NABs/NAFPs.

The region stands to benefit tremendously from the CCA. First and foremost, accreditation services will be available right here in the Caribbean making them more economical and accessible. Regional CABs will no doubt welcome this initiative because it means less costs and time will be spent for the accreditation process with easier access to the services that are internationally recognised. Further, the need for costly additional testing, inspection or certification of goods and services by CABs in an importing country will also decrease. CABs also stand to benefit from enhanced access to important services such as training and proficiency testing. These benefits will be passed on to manufacturers and service providers who often utilise the services of CABs. Manufacturers and service providers will be able to utilise testing, calibration, inspection and certification services that are internationally recognised at economical costs. This will contribute in boosting consumer confidence in the quality of goods and services delivered. Further, the CCA represents a regional brand that we should be proud of and support as it seeks to provide economical and accessible internationally recognised accreditation services.

Regional goods and services will become more competitive as their conformity assessment processes will be recognised by international markets thereby improving trade facilitation and possibly market access. Accreditation aids significantly in improving intra and extra-regional trade and assists in developing the region's capacity to further integrate into the global economy through the production and provision of quality goods and services. The socioeconomic status of Member States stand to be developed as accreditation works to facilitate global trade.

These benefits reflect the overall objective of the Reducing Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) project of the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) Caribbean Regional Indicative Programme (CRIP) Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). The project seeks to facilitate intra and inter-regional trade, international competitiveness and sustainable production of goods and services within the Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific (CARIFORUM) States. CARIFORUM comprises of the CARICOM Member States and the Dominican Republic. CROSQ is one of three implementing partners for this project. Instituto Dominicano para la Calidad (INDOCAL), the NSB of the Dominican Republic, and Physikalisch Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB), the National Metrology Institute of Germany, are the two other partners. With this assistance from the European Union (EU), the region stands to benefit from an orientation based on quality driven goods production, services provision and consumer awareness. Quality is the pathway forward for the development of each Member States' economy and society within the region.

For additional information on the TBT project, please feel free to contact any of the following personnel:
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