



**Opening Remarks by Mr Dhunraj Kassee:
Director – Industrial Development and Trade, SADC
Secretariat:
At the occasion of the 41st SADC TBT Cooperation
Structures meetings, Johannesburg 23 March 2026**

09:00 Johannesburg time

**Hon. Alexandra Abrahams, Deputy Minister, Department of
Trade Industry and Competition, of the Republic of South Africa**

**Directors and CEOs of Quality Infrastructure Institutions
across SADC Region**

Madame Eve Gadzinkwa CEO SADCAS

Dr Hermogene Nsengimana, ARSO General Secretary

Regional and International Partners

Representatives from Private Sector

Distinguished delegates

All Protocols Observed

Bonjour; Good Morning; Bom dia

It is an honour for me to welcome you to the 41st SADC TBT Cooperation Structures meetings, on behalf of the SADC Executive Secretary, H.E. Mr Elias Mpedi Magosi, on behalf of the Deputy Executive Secretary, Madame Angele Makombo Ntumba and on behalf on myself

Ladies and Gentlemen

Trade liberalisation in SADC is among the key priority areas to deepening regional integration, promote industrialisation and alleviate poverty as per SADC guiding instruments such as the:

- Regional Indicative Strategic Development (2020-30)
- SADC Vision 2050 and
- SADC Protocol on Trade.

Intra SADC Trade statistics are still at lower side, at about 23%, which is below performance of trading blocs such as ASEAN and the European Union.

Article 3 of the SADC Protocol on Trade calls for the elimination of barriers to Intra-SADC trade and ensure that Member States do not impose new ones. Furthermore, Article 17 recommends Member States to adopt International Standards as basis of their standards measures whenever necessary. These harmonised standards are deemed to be suitable to avoid unnecessary

obstacles and in order facilitate both regional trade and global trade. The SADC Council of Ministers, at its meeting in August 2025 noted with concern the lack of progress on industrialization in the region which, among others, is hindered by the imposition of trade barriers on one another, and thus, jeopardize the regional integration agenda. Amongst the most prominent trade barriers are those related to diverging conformity assessment practices and technical regulations, and these will require your full commitment for their resolution.

Distinguished participants

The current geopolitical situation, characterized by a number of unforeseen events such as imposition of high tariffs, endless wars, political and social instabilities, extreme climate events and others is directly contributing to a failure of our economies across the region. These call on us to better embrace the regional integration agenda and facilitate cross border trade through the harmonisation of trade.

You may wish to know that the SADC Council of Ministers directed the Secretariat in 2024 to undertake a regional study on top 10 most trade goods in SADC. The preliminary results show a huge potential that can benefit the region if certain unnecessary barriers are removed.

SADC Secretariat has realised that among the most critical issues contributing to persistent Technical Barriers to Trade in the region are:

- misalignment between national, regional and international policies;
- limited awareness of decision makers on the importance of quality infrastructure;
- huge gap in quality infrastructure development across the region; and
- limited qualified personnel and insufficient funding.

The ongoing exercise of reviewing the TBT Annex to SADC Protocol on Trade and development of Quality Infrastructure Strategy is to assist the region overcome these challenges. Therefore, I call for the experts, here present, to consider and agree on the two documents and then direct the Secretariat to submit it to the SADC Committee of Ministers of Trade in June 2026 for approval.

Ladies and gentlemen

In our effort to reduce trade barriers in the region, in the past 12 months SADC Secretariat, in collaboration with the German Cooperation Agency (GIZ) assisted a some Member States to resolve non-tariff barriers reported through the Tripartite Reporting mechanism. Amongst the concerned countries are

Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Therefore, let me take this opportunity to encourage you to raise awareness of business operators on the need to report any trade related challenges, especially those emerging from divergent Standards, Technical Regulations or conformity assessment procedures to ensure a timely resolution.

The Secretariat also capacitated two Member States, that is, Angola and Seychelles through awareness raising of the SADC existing instruments to in order to ensure a free trade area.

Ladies and gentlemen

The 41st SADC TBT Cooperation Structures meeting are being held after the Mid-Term Review of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030 was completed in December 2025. The Review was based on results-oriented evaluation approach that assessed the effectiveness, coherence, relevance, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the RISDP 2020-2030 since its adoption. Among the key findings of the Mid-Term Review is that the commodity dependence persists, while intra-SADC trade and manufacturing value addition remain below set targets. The industrialisation and

integration agenda remains relevant but requires deeper trade facilitation, investment, and corridor/value-chain development.

The above findings directly challenge us to double our effort in contributing to SADC objectives of industrialisation, by supporting improvement of quality of goods and services produced in the region. These can only be achieved with robust and functional quality infrastructure across the Member States as well as at regional level.

Dear Colleagues

As I conclude, let me remind you regarding the capacity constraints that the Secretariat continues to face. Following the Council decision in 2024 to halt recruitment of new staff, SADC Secretariat has frozen a number of positions, including those supporting SQAM and SPS programs in the region due to budget cuts. To minimise the impact of the decision, the Secretariat called on Member States, in September 2025, extended in December 2025 to consider seconding officers to work at SADC Secretariat. Unfortunately, so far, the intention has yielded no result. I wish to appeal to you to engage your superiors and assist in that regard.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you successful deliberations during your meetings of the SADC TBT

Cooperation Structures, including the 48th SADC TBT Expert Group meeting on 27 March 2026.

I thank you

Merci beaucoup

Muito Obrigado

Mr Dhunraj Kasse