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**TRADE  
HUB**  
SOUTHERN AFRICA

# SUCCESS STORY

## African Delegation Visits U.S.

**Officials from three Southern African countries traveled to the U.S. to learn about an Enquiry Point to enhance trade**



*The benchmarking mission was co-sponsored by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and hosted by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in the U.S. as part of USAID's Partnership for Trade Facilitation Standards Alliance technical assistance. NIST is the federal technology agency that works with US industry to develop and apply technology, measurements and standards, while ANSI is the voice of the US standards and conformity assessment system. Worldwide standards are central to the development and commercialization of new technologies as well as the facilitation of regional and international trade. Over 80% of world merchandise trade is affected by standards.*

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Consistent standards for products and processes help ensure smooth, free, open and fair trade. Harmonized standards throughout a region facilitate easy access to markets, increase compatibility among products and provide better information. When consistent standards are applied, consumers can have confidence in the quality, safety and health features of the product.

However, Southern Africa currently only enjoys 94 harmonized standards across the region, with each country maintaining thousands of their own standards that do not translate well across borders. Some countries have no published standards at all. The wide variety of standards makes it difficult for the private sector to do business in the region or expand operations to other countries.

USAID's Southern Africa Trade Hub is assisting the governments of Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia with the critical issue of improving the standards development process. One of the ways the Trade Hub is helping is to assist the countries in establishing effective Technical-Barriers-to-Trade Enquiry Points in each country. In addition to responding to all enquiries for information concerning state and private regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures, an effective Enquiry Point maintains a reference collection of standards, specifications, test methods, codes and recommended practices for all World Trade Organization (WTO) member countries. Housing a library of standards in the same location streamlines product and process development, enabling the private sector to make products compatible for the region.

The Trade Hub, in conjunction with the American National Standards Institute, organized a five-day benchmarking mission to the United States with a delegation of eight officials from the national standards organizations of Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia. The trip was designed to give the delegates an up-close, comprehensive understanding of the functioning of an Enquiry Point and Notification Authority as they prepare to launch similar initiatives in their own countries. During the visit to the U.S., the delegates spent three days at the National Institute of Standards and Technology Complex learning about and observing the operations of the US Enquiry Point.

"Before the US visit, I thought an effective Enquiry Point required at least two full-time employees and huge library space," explained Fred Sikwese, MBS Director, Standards Development. "I now realize that the Malawi Bureau of Standards can operate effectively using existing staff, and once fully computerized, all we would need is a small office and internet."

The trip was very successful at opening the eyes of the delegation to the requirements and inner workings of an effective Enquiry Point, which, once adopted in Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia, will give users access to crucial information and help facilitate trade throughout the region.