BUILDING LINKAGES FOR SUCCESS IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

A JOINT INITIATIVE BY ISO AND ITC

LINKING TRADE PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS AND NATIONAL STANDARDS BODIES
TPOs AND NSBs: WORKING TOGETHER FOR STRONGER SME SUPPORT ON QUALITY

WHY STRENGTHEN LINKAGES BETWEEN TPOs AND NSBs

Given the significance of quality as the key determinant of competitiveness in international trade, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) initiated a unique initiative to explore how collaboration between National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Trade Promotion Organizations (TPOs) can be reinforced to improve the international competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

It is recognized that consultations and collaboration between TPOs and NSBs are important to respond effectively to challenges SMEs face to comply with stringent technical requirements and to navigate the complexities of quality standards and regulations in the international marketplace. The NSB, as part of the trade support institution network, provides among others, information related to standards, compliance and conformity assessment. Meanwhile the TPO is the first point of contact for SMEs to seek help and access relevant services.

Therefore, beginning at a regional level, the initiative aims to link TPOs and NSBs to build a comprehensive and sustainable support system for long-term success of SMEs in international trade.

WHERE THE EVENTS HAVE BEEN HELD

To this end, three events have been organized successfully in Malaysia (2009), Cuba (2010) and Tanzania (2011) covering the regions of Asia, Latin America and English-speaking Africa. To date, 130 representatives from 58 countries have participated in the workshops. Participants rated these events very positively and confirmed the need for an active collaboration. Based on the success of past events, workshops are planned in francophone Africa, the Middle-East region, Central Asia and eventually a global event.

HOW THE SESSIONS TAKE PLACE

The regional workshop provides a framework to identify and develop best approaches to strengthen the cooperation between TPOs and NSBs. Within structured and moderated sessions, participants share experiences, consider common challenges, and discuss good practices. Through group work they identify initial action points for strengthening co-operation. The consultations are supported by papers developed by the NSB and TPO of each participating country, as well as those by ISO, ITC and international experts. Papers from past events are available on the ITC website at http://www.intracen.org/itc/exporters/quality-management/ under Events.

WHAT BENEFITS CAN PARTICIPANTS EXPECT

The participants benefit through:

- Deeper understanding of the roles and services of the participating TPOs and NSBs, and the relevance of collaboration;
- Sharing of experiences and good practices;
- Identification of common challenges and current areas of cooperation;
- Development of national action plans to reinforce collaboration; and
- Establishment of a regional network connecting TPOs and NSBs towards reinforced SME services in the area of Quality.
WHO ATTENDS

The workshop is aimed at senior decision makers of TPOs and NSBs with demonstrated involvement and experience in the field of standards and trade promotion. Selected participants from each country submit a joint paper according to a pre-set outline. Recommendations and action areas identified during the sessions are intended to help participants implement the collaboration at a practical level, regionally and nationally.

OUTPUTS FROM THE REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

- **ITC-ISO HANDBOOK ON “BUILDING LINKAGES FOR EXPORT SUCCESS”**

  As an outcome of the Malaysia workshop, ITC and ISO published a handbook that captures the highlights of forum discussions and provides additional information where relevant. The handbook was designed for those in NSBs, TPOs and government agencies supporting international trade to show the advantages of closer collaboration to assist exporters. The examples given are drawn from the shared experiences of participants, and can be used by developing economies in all regions to review local situations. This handbook therefore offers pointers which countries can utilise to open avenues for institutional collaboration between TPOs and NSBs.

  The handbook is available in English, French and Spanish languages at the ITC Website: [http://www.intracen.org/Building-Linkages-for-Export-Success/](http://www.intracen.org/Building-Linkages-for-Export-Success/)

- **CASE STUDIES**

  From the events held, a number of case studies have been gathered that highlight collaborative projects held jointly with success. These are being published in English and French language by the end of 2014.

EVENT CURRENTLY UNDER PREPARATION

The next workshop being organized is intended for francophone Africa and will be held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. 40 Participants from TPOs and NSBs in 21 countries have already confirmed their interest. Registrations are arrangements are underway. The event is planned for the first half of 2015.

EVENTS BEING PLANNED

It is planned to roll out the initiative to the Middle-east and Central Asian regions. A global event is envisaged for 2016.
CASE STUDIES

EXAMPLE: COLOMBIA

Colombian Institute of Technical Standards and Certification (ICONTEC) and the Tourism, Investment, and Export Promotion agency of Colombia, (PROEXPORT) developed a joint programme for development and implementation of standards nationally.

The collaborative work has generated advantages for ICONTEC and PROEXPORT as well as the exporting SMEs:

- Resource optimization for higher impact on companies using fewer resources.
- A higher probability of success when efforts and expertise are joined.

In general, for collaborative works, expectations were exceeded:

- More than 500 entrepreneurs have been made aware of the significance and benefits of standards through basic printed material produced, sectorial workshops, web sites, and articles in magazines and newspapers.
- More than 100 professionals and/or consultants were given both theoretical and practical training to provide assistance for the implementation of specific standards through a training program designed specifically for consultants, auditors and entrepreneurs, and a registration program for consultants and auditors which involves qualification by practical observation of their performance, and verification of experience and education records.
- 600 companies technically assisted for the implementation of standards of interest, with the assistance of consultants trained and qualified in the frame of the registration program mentioned above.
- More than 550 companies certified against the relevant standard through audits conducted by auditors trained and qualified in the frame of the registration program mentioned above.

Additionally, PROEXPORT carried out an impact assessment and concluded that for 2005, the exports increase in companies which had implemented ISO 9001 standard had been 35% higher than for 2002 (2002 being the year of implementation). Surveys showed that more than 95% of companies having implemented this Quality Management Systems standard, report a positive impact on their companies, results and competitiveness.

EXAMPLE: GHANA

GOOD PRACTICES

- Ghana Export Promotion Council (GEPC) participates in the technical committees of Ghana Standards Board (GSB), which in fact formulate standards for use by exporters. Both GSB and GEPC participate in the implementation of the National Export Strategy.

- Utilization of the enquiry point by GEPC which is hosted by GSB is also an example worth mentioning.

- Companies and SMEs which wish to export are informed by GEPC to contact GSB for assistance. Those who avail themselves of this opportunity and follow the correct export procedures do not end up having their goods confiscated and destroyed abroad. Their product does not also trigger EU alerts.
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Khemraj Ramful
Senior Adviser, Export Quality Management
Enterprise Competitiveness
International Trade Centre
Palais des Nations, CH-1211
Geneva 10, Switzerland
+41 22 730 0487
ramful@intracen.org