

“ISO is listening”

Five regional workshops generate ideas of how best to encourage participation of developing countries in international standardization

Once the ISO/TMB (technical management board) had decided on the course of action in 2001, ISO/DEVPRO (ISO Programme for developing countries) set in motion the arrangements for five regional ISO/WTO (World Trade Organization) workshops, the first in Belgrade in December 2001 followed by others in Bangkok (Thailand), Nairobi (Kenya), Bogotá (Colombia), and Cairo (Egypt) in 2002 (see Box p. 18). The theme was: “Enhancing the Participation of Developing Countries and Economies in Transition in International Standardization”, and the aim, to see what were the obstacles and to look for solutions and new ways of encouraging deeper involvement of the developing countries in the technical work of standardization. Greater participation in the actual development of standards will help give more leverage to the international commerce of these countries, as International



Standards are one of the most important and effective tools for the facilitation of trade on a regional and international basis.

The results from these regional workshops will be reported to a global “wrap-up” workshop to be run jointly with the ISO General Assembly in Stockholm in September 2002.

The regional workshops were held in December 2001 and in the first half of 2002, as the results need to be analysed and the global conclusions drawn in time for this final “wrap-up” workshop. This latter workshop will then have the task of preparing a Programme of Action that can be presented to the national standards bodies, governments and technical assistance agencies for implementation. Such a Programme of Action will provide a good basis for future technical assistance activities, leading to well targeted and more effective and efficient technical assistance in the identified areas.

Now all the workshops are over, the workshop facilitator, Mr. Folke Herman-

son Snikars from SIS Forum International, is in the process of finalizing formal reports from the last workshops, and these will be developed in future issues of the *ISO Bulletin*, along with the global conclusions and a programme of action. At this point, we draw attention to the fact that the opportunity given to NSBs, industry, consumer and trade representatives to voice their needs and concerns related to standardization activities in their countries appears to have been

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The Regional ISO/WTO Workshop in Colombia brought together 44 participants from around the South American continent and the Caribbean. With Mr. Fabio Tobón, Executive Director of ICONTEC (Colombia) (standing, far left), and Dr. Anwar El-Tawil (Director, ISO/DEVPRO) (far left, kneeling), is Mr. Folke Hermanson Snikars (far right, kneeling), Business Manager, SIS Forum International, Stockholm, Sweden.

Mr. Folke Hermanson Snikars has been responsible for the international training programmes on “Standardization – Management & Techniques” which during a long time have been arranged with support from SIDA, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. He has also more than 25 years experience in international standardization. He has held positions in SIS, the Swedish Standards Institute, as Head, Public Affairs and Communication, and participated in the Swedish implementation of the WTO/TBT Agreement. He initiated SIS training activities, first in Quality and Environmental Management, then in Project and Process Management.

greatly appreciated, according to initial reactions received from participants, observers and resource persons, and look at some reasons why these workshops were successful, along with some general trends.

By a novel approach to generating the conduct of the meetings, Folke Hermanson Snikars, with Dr. Anwar El-Tawil, Director of ISO/DEVPRO, separated out, then recombined the different stakeholder groups in such a way that all groups talked to and communicated with each other. Using an innovative methodology, *the audience itself became the speakers*, and participated directly in the work, rather than simply listening. Within each regional

group, each set of stakeholders (government, standardizers, consumers, regulators, federations of industry, etc.) got to hear the points of view of the others. This meant that they “got down to business” right away – and ISO was listening to all they had to say.

Secondly, these workshops have shown their success by the remarkable number of attendants who were determined, despite all difficulties, to be present, (most workshops drew over 40 participants). The keenness and interest to take part was both significant and highly encouraging inasmuch as it showed the resolve of the countries concerned to be players in the development of interna-

tional standardization, and in deeper involvement, and not simply to be spectators.

Third innovation: in preparation of the workshops, DEVCO (ISO Committee on Developing country matters) circulated in advance a survey questionnaire to collect data from NSBs on “Problems faced by developing countries in the areas of standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures and their participation in international work in these fields”. The high response rate can be considered an indication of the interest generated in the developing countries by the TMB Task Force/DEVCO initiative.

These questionnaire results were compiled and presented at the start of each workshop by Dr. Anwar El-Tawil, so that the issues and needs thus ascertained could serve as a basis for the discussions, for sharing experiences and developing ideas on how participation in interna-

Getting off the ground

In September 2001, the ISO Technical Management Board (ISO/TMB) resolved to set up a Task Force (TMB/TF) whose first mission, in conjunction with DEVCO, was to launch a survey and gather feedback on the question of what developing countries needed to participate more deeply in international standardization, what was holding them back. It was decided to launch a series of regional workshops to mobilize direct and personal contributions of the leadership of developing country NSBs, industry associations/federations, consumer associations and governmental trade organizations. These workshops were to identify as specifically as possible and analyze the problems encountered by their countries in participating more actively, and to propose effective solutions to those problems.

It was agreed to target high-level practitioners with a good understanding of the role of national and international standardization where half of the participants would be representatives of national standards bodies and the other 50 % equally divided between stakeholders from the industry, consumers associations and governmental trade organizations.

The workshops were funded with the support of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the ISO/DIN Endowment (Germany), JISC (Japan), SIS (Sweden), and SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). Beneficiaries of the ISO Programme for Developing Countries (ISO/DEVPRO) in the countries that constitute the particular region nominated participants that were then selected by ISO and the donor organization with a view to constituting a balanced participation, taking into account national differences (at least one participant per country) and different stakeholder views (e.g. industry, trade, consumers).

DEVCO worked in close collaboration with Consumers International (CI) to identify consumer representatives for the workshops, and a CI representative attended all workshops.



tional standardization work could be improved in the future. This proved a highly effective way of setting the discussions off, since the survey results were “regionally” valid; the survey also revealed the slightly different regional problems. It was thus easier to orientate discussions for each group and to propose measures for their solution.

The figures speak for themselves: of ISO's 140 members, more than 100 are included in the “developing countries or countries in transition” bracket; of these a mere 2 % hold TCs, SCs or WGs, going to show that, for an equitable division,

there is a long way to go. Until more developing countries participate more directly in technical standards development, there is likely always to be an impression of imbalance, with International Standards more weighted in favour of developed economies and with its potential negative impact on trade and economic development.

A wealth of valuable information has been collected through the survey questionnaires and workshop discussions. The trends to emerge were often common, with regional differences. Lack of appreciation – of the importance of the issues involved on the part of governments, authorities and industry in the regions, of standardization in general and International Standards in particular, within the general public, in administrations, among students at faculty level – proved recurrent problems. Lack of support, of equipment and funds, insufficient experts with the technical competence as well as in conformity assessment, and the weakness of industry in certain areas were much cited. Increased coordination between donors' technical assistance programmes would make the aid provided more effective. Thus the actions being proposed centred round improving awareness, influencing governments, developing competence, technical support, improving transparency, and industry influence. Other areas concerned included items such as getting national standards availability onto Internet, linking to national development programmes, more meetings to be held outside the developed countries, reducing fees, increased representation in ISO technical committees, and encouraging international testing labs to set up labs with local partners.

There will be plenty to discuss at the General Assembly Workshop in Stockholm in September, and maximum attendance at – and participation in – the workshop is likely to help to make the event of crucial importance to the future development of ISO. □

The programme of regional workshops Where and when



Co-sponsored by ISO, WTO (World Trade Organization), SIS (Swedish Standards Institute), and SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), the first regional workshop on “*Enhancing the Participation of Developing Countries and Economies in Transition in International Standardization*” took place in **Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, 3-4 December 2001. Sixteen delegates from 11 Eastern European countries attended (Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Romania, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia).

Bangkok hosted the second workshop 14-15 February 2002. Forty-four participants from Asia took part (Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Korea DPR, Kyrgystan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vietnam). The workshop was sponsored by ISO, WTO and JISC.



The workshop for Sub-Saharan Africa was held in **Nairobi**, Kenya, 18-19 February 2002. A total of 46 participants attended the workshop (Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe). The workshop was sponsored by ISO and WTO.

The workshop held in **Bogotá**, Colombia, 16-17 April 2002, involved a total of 44 participants (Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Rep., Ecuador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela). The workshop was sponsored by ISO, WTO and DIN.



The last in the series of regional workshops took place in **Cairo**, Egypt, 28-29 May 2002. Participants from Algeria, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq,



Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia attended the ISO/WTO sponsored workshop.