ISO – A trusted partner for development donors

Q & A

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Solving the donor’s dilemma

Donor organizations with funds approved for assisting developing countries often have to wrestle with a dilemma: how to ensure that the aid is well spent, that it will make a positive and lasting difference? This dilemma can often be broken down into one of meeting the following criteria:

- Will the programme for which funds are donated really contribute to capacity building, achieving economic growth and alleviating poverty?
- Does the programme provider have a good reputation and a proven track record?
- Are the programmes offered driven by continual improvement so that their relevance to current development challenges is maintained?
- Is it the aid beneficiary who defines his requirements and helps shape the programme?
- What metrics are in place to measure the positive impact of the programme?

The purpose of this brochure is to demonstrate how ISO (International Organization for Standardization), through the ISO Action Plan for developing countries, has solid experience in meeting the above criteria. As an efficient and effective partner for creating and implementing technical assistance and training programmes for developing countries, ISO provides a solution to the donor’s dilemma.
ISO and developing countries

Because three-quarters of the 159 national standards bodies (NSBs) that make up the ISO network are from developing countries, the organization has a deep understanding of the needs of this group of countries. At the same time, the ISO standards development system can only be as strong as its members. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that the members from developing countries operate efficiently in order to play their roles effectively at the national, regional and international levels. In this way, the technical assistance provided to them by ISO also contributes to enhancing the global relevance of ISO International Standards. Many ISO members also provide technical assistance to other members from developing countries on a bilateral basis, thus complementing the work of ISO.

Developing countries and international standardization

There is increasing realization among policy makers in developing countries that international trade, which contributes to economic growth and alleviation of poverty, is underpinned by the adoption and application of international standards in all spheres of economic activity.

The importance of international standards is emphasized in the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, especially the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) agreement. The latter encourages WTO members to use, as far as possible, international standards as a basis for mandatory technical regulations. Regional integration efforts, which concern many of the ISO members, also rely on harmonization and mutual recognition of standards and of results of conformity assessment such as testing, inspection or certification.
There is thus a tremendous need for developing countries to understand and implement good practice in standardization, as well as to participate themselves in developing international standards.

**How ISO assists developing countries**

ISO has been implementing technical assistance programmes targeted at its members from developing countries since the early 1980s. Aligned with the *ISO Strategic Plan*, the *ISO Action Plan for developing countries* provides the road map for this support. The *Action Plan* defines five key objectives:

- Raise awareness
- Build capacity
- Foster regional cooperation
- Develop expertise in information and communication technologies (ICTs)
- Enhance participation in developing ISO standards.

The actions carried out include:

- National, regional and international seminars and workshops
- Sponsorships to attend ISO standards development meetings
- eLearning courses
- Implementation of ICT projects, with equipment and training
- Preparation of training materials and publications.

In order to provide opportunities to participants from as many regions as possible, geographical balance is taken into consideration when deciding where to hold activities.

**What ISO has done**

ISO has carried out more than 250 activities covering the five objectives of the *Action Plan* during the period 2005-2009 and more than 12,000 participants from developing countries have benefited.

Around CHF 6,000,000 has been spent directly on the implementation of these activities, excluding the operational costs borne by the ISO Central Secretariat and its dedicated team within the Development and Training Services (DEVT) unit which plans and executes them.
Which topics are covered

Awareness raising and training on technology and management system standards:

- ISO 50001, Energy management systems (under development)
- ISO 14001, Environmental management systems
- ISO 14040, Environmental management – Life cycle assessment
- ISO 14064, ISO 14065, Greenhouse gas accounting
- ISO 10015, Quality management – Guidelines for training
- ISO/IEC 27001, Information security management systems
- ISO/IEC 17025, Competence requirements for laboratories
- ISO 22000, Food safety management systems
- ISO 26000, Social responsibility (under development)
- ISO 22300 series, Societal security (under development).

Awareness raising and technical support on infrastructure-building:

- Enhanced participation in international standardization
- Stakeholder involvement in standardization
- Role of international standards in economic development and trade
- Adopting and referencing international standards
- Conformity assessment
- Consumer involvement
- eLearning for experts in international standardization
- Use of ISO eServices for participation in international standardization
- ICT training and provision of equipment
- Marketing and promotion of standards.

ISO continues to improve the contents of its technical assistance deliverables in light of the needs expressed by its developing country members each year through a survey questionnaire. For example, the range of topics is currently being enriched to include workshops on the financial sustainability of national standards bodies and formulation of national standardization strategies.
How performance is measured

ISO’s technical assistance programme is driven by continual improvement. To achieve this, two principal metrics are employed.

1. Every participant in an activity in the programme provides written feedback in order to find out:
   - To what extent the activity provided tools enabling the participants to perform their work better in the future (a feedback analysis has revealed a satisfaction range of 87% to 100%)
   - Whether their expectations were met (feedback analysis – 67% to 100% satisfaction).

2. Six to eight months after the activity, further feedback is sought from every participant as well as from the national standards body which hosted the event. The objective is to assess whether the ISO activity has had a multiplier effect at the national level and whether the NSB has undertaken steps to ensure a wider dissemination of knowledge gained by the participants it designated to attend.

   For example, a survey of this type carried out in 2009 revealed that 79% of participants had been able to apply the knowledge gained within their organization and 76% considered that their participation had enhanced their involvement in national standardization work. With regard to NSBs, 73% considered that hosting an ISO event increased awareness within industry regarding the importance of applying standards.

ISO will continuously monitor the technical assistance it provides to ensure that it is pertinent, value-adding and responds to the needs expressed by the ISO members from developing countries.
How ISO’s actions are financed

The Action Plan is financed through ISO member contributions to the organization’s funds-in-trust, the ISO/DIN Endowment (set up by DIN, the ISO member for Germany), and by external donations by national development agencies and government ministries.

The volume of ISO’s technical assistance programme nearly quadrupled between 2005 and 2009 to reach more than CHF 2.2 million in 2009 (see chart). Much of the increase was thanks to the generous support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

In addition to Sida, external donors have included the government of Finland, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). In addition, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and International Trade Centre (ITC) have contributed funds to publish a number of very helpful brochures and handbooks – see back page.

The path forward

ISO’s technical assistance programme has been guided by the ISO Action Plan for developing countries 2005-2010. Consultations of all ISO’s developing country members worldwide are now going on to shape the Action Plan 2011-2015. These consultations will provide via a bottom-up approach, not only the strategic objectives for the plan, but also identify the specific areas in which developing countries need assistance.

The process will thus form the basis for deploying targeted technical assistance to developing countries over the next five-year period. ISO is confident that it will continue to benefit from the goodwill it has enjoyed up to now on the part of donors and ISO member contributors to fund the implementation of the next Action Plan.
Publications

ISO offers manuals and handbooks which support its technical assistance programme for developing countries. A number have been published in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), or the International Trade Centre (ITC). They include:

- ISO 22000, Food Safety Management Systems – An easy-to-use checklist for small business – Are you ready?
- Fast forward – NSBs in Developing Countries
- Standards work on the Web – The ISO solutions
- Building trust – The Conformity Assessment Toolbox.

Further publications are planned on the following topics:

- NSBs – The path to financial sustainability
- GHG schemes addressing climate change – How ISO standards can help
- The road to ISO 26000 – Social responsibility
- ISO 14001, Environmental Management Systems – An easy-to-use checklist for small business - Are you ready?
- Linkages between trade promotion organizations and NSBs in developing countries
- Market surveillance – A handbook on best practice.

For more information on ISO’s activities and resources for developing countries:

Developing countries section on ISO’s Web site:

www.iso.org

ISO Focus+ magazine
www.iso.org/isofocus+

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