

Boosting businesses in developing countries

ITC provides standardization-related support where it is needed most

by Khemraj Ramful and Ludovica Ghizzoni

For almost 50 years the International Trade Centre (ITC) has provided strong standardization-related support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries, helping to strengthen economic growth and alleviate poverty.

Since its foundation in 1964, ITC has facilitated the success of small-business export in developing countries by providing trade development programmes to the private sector, trade support institutions and policy makers.

The overarching goal of ITC, a joint agency of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations, is to help developing countries achieve sustainable development through exports. This involves activating, supporting and delivering projects while constantly emphasizing the importance of increased competitiveness.

Exporting challenges

Although quality products and services are needed to enter international markets, exporters, and especially SME exporters, also face the challenge of meeting technical requirements.

Compliance with International Standards is crucial for market access.

One of ITC's strategic objectives is to enable enterprises to access markets with the right products that meet International Standards.

According to ITC research, around 80% of the problems faced by exporters are in the areas of technical barriers to trade (TBTs) and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS)

measures. It has been found that SMEs in developing countries experience four main TBTs when trying to develop new markets:

- Obtaining information about the mandatory technical requirements and voluntary standards applicable in the importing country



- Adapting their products to meet these requirements
- Demonstrating that the products meet relevant market requirements
- Obtaining the necessary support at each step from national quality services, which are often inadequate

ITC publications

In response to these challenges, ITC has developed a comprehensive range of export-quality management services to assist SMEs in developing countries.

As compliance with International Standards is crucial for market access, ITC has partnered with ISO to develop a number of International Standards-related publications, including :

- *ISO 9001 for Small Businesses : What to do – Advice from ISO/TC 176*
- *ISO 22000 Food Safety Management Systems – An easy-to-use checklist for small businesses – Are you ready?*
- *ISO 14001 Environmental Management Systems – An easy-to-use checklist for small businesses – Are you ready?*



Assisting the fishery industry in the Philippines to meet technical requirements of international markets.

Moreover, several of ITC's export-quality management bulletins have been prepared to provide SMEs with additional tools to understand or comply with the above standards. These include : *ISO 9001:2000 : A workbook for service organizations, Introduction to ISO 22000 – Food Safety Management, Introduction to ISO 14000 – Environmental Management Systems, and the ISO 9001:2008 Diagnostic tool – Implementing Quality Management Systems.*

A second edition of the book *Export Quality Management : A Guide for Small and Medium-Sized Exporters* has been published by ITC in partnership with the *Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt* (the German National Metrology Institute) to help SMEs better understand quality and standards issues related to export.

This guide addresses around 100 questions frequently asked by exporters about quality management. It provides answers to queries on quality, technical requirements (such as standards, technical regulations and SPS measures), management systems,

conformity assessment (testing, inspection, certification), metrology, accreditation, the WTO agreements on TBTs, and applying SPS measures.

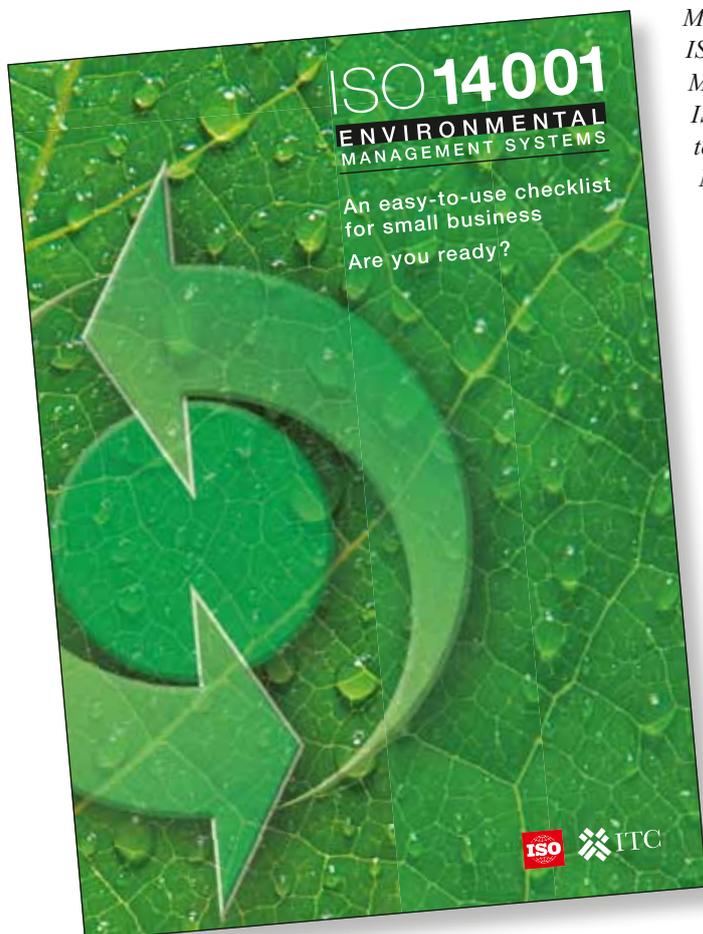
The first version of the book was tailored to the needs of 18 countries and subsequently translated into eight languages. ITC is now working with several countries to customize the second edition.

Training initiatives

Based on the publications listed above, ITC has held awareness workshops in several countries for policy makers, SMEs and officials in trade support institutions. These have been on issues relating to standards, technical regulations and quality.

ITC has partnered with ISO to develop a number of publications.

In addition, a one-week “training-of-trainers” course, based on the ITC guide *Improving and Maintaining Market Access through Standards and Conformity Assessment*, has operated at national and regional levels. The technical content in seven modules covers, among other things, the WTO agreements on TBTs and SPSs and their benefits for businesses, standards, technical regulations and SPS measures, conformity assessment, quality management, accreditation and mutual recognition agreements.





Training representatives of regulatory bodies and industry from the ASEAN region to implement the Harmonized Cosmetic Regulatory Scheme.

To help SMEs face the challenge of adapting their products to meet the requirements of technical regulations and standards, ITC works with trade support institutions in partner countries to ensure that outcomes are sustained after the intervention.

A “trainer-cum-counsellor” approach has been adopted in several interventions for the implementation of quality management systems based on ISO 9001, or food safety management systems based on ISO 22000, where a pool of trainers – or potential consultants – have been trained under the guidance of an international expert.

Such interventions have helped to increase exports. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, for example, ITC advisory services on the implementation of ISO 22000 standards have enabled the export of agro-processed foods to Germany. This approach was further refined in Bangladesh where trainer-cum-counsellor competencies were upgraded to enhance post-project sustainability, and some companies were certified to ISO 22000:2005, *Food safety management systems – Requirements for any organization in the food chain*.

Stronger conformity assessment

However, SMEs in many developing countries also need access to standards or to competent conformity assessment services. ITC has provided technical assistance to review the quality or SPS infrastructure in several countries, including Armenia, Bangladesh,

Chad, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, that aims to develop roadmaps for improvement.

With a view to enabling SME access to competent testing and certification services, ITC has assisted several countries in reinforcing their conformity assessment services to meet the accreditation requirements of ISO International Standards (ISO/IEC 17025:2005, *General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories*, or ISO/IEC 17021:2011, *Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems*).

About the authors



Khemraj Ramful is Senior Adviser in charge of the Export Quality Management programme at the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Geneva. Before joining ITC, he was

Director of the Legal Metrology Services in Mauritius, Director of the Mauritius Standards Bureau, and Board Member of the Mauritius Research Council, and has been a member of the Mauritius Accreditation Service Advisory Council. He has also been very active working on different assignments in the field of standards and quality. Mr. Ramful holds of a degree in Physics as well as an MBA.

For example, one certification body in Uzbekistan has been assisted to become an accredited ISO 9001 certification body, while two laboratories for the testing of food and agricultural products in Tajikistan have been accredited to ISO/IEC 17025.

SMEs play their part in alleviating poverty.

Another example of ITC’s support to SMEs is the assistance it provided to the competent authorities of certain countries making it possible for small businesses in the fishery sector to export their products to the European Union. This has been the case for the competent authority in the Philippines.

Vital role for SMEs

Although SMEs have an important role in poverty reduction programmes due to their potential contribution to economic growth, they also face challenges in finding and entering markets. But by improving their access to information on technical regulations and standards, assisting them with meeting the requirements of International Standards and improving their access to competent conformity assessment services, SMEs can thrive in an increasingly competitive global market and, at the same time, play their part in alleviating poverty. ■



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implemented training programmes and advisory services to enterprises and conformity assessment bodies in developing countries to help them meet requirements in export markets and overcome technical barriers to trade. Ms. Ghizzoni has a Bachelor’s degree in Environmental Engineering.