

## Capacity Building and Technical Assistance: Summary of Notes

**Actors present:** 57 individuals from US government agencies, standards development organizations, foreign representatives, private sector representatives. A number of individuals attended both sessions.

**1. Types of technical assistance activities described:** We heard from both public and private entities who delivered technical assistance to developing country governments. Some examples of ongoing activities include seminars with exchanges of experiences and best practices as well as the explanation of the U.S. standards system, publication/dissemination of materials, twinning activities (exchange of staff), and translation of U.S. standards into other languages (e.g. Chinese).

### **2. Agreement on the need for technical assistance activities.**

The groups recognized that technical assistance is beneficial to U.S. industry. Technical assistance activities promote U.S. interests by disseminating U.S. standards, facilitating trade, and opening markets. They also recognized the importance of helping developing countries modernize their own standards infrastructure in order to improve quality so that lower quality goods will not enter US market (and potentially compete with higher quality/higher priced U.S. products), and there would be fewer recalls. This latter point was emphasized by a representative of the U.S. Consumer Product Commission who described an innovative program they are carrying out in the manufacturing sector in China.

There was a broad agreement on the importance of technical assistance activities. In fact, there was a call for a public policy statement acknowledging the importance of standards-related technical assistance and capacity building for U.S. competitiveness, innovation, and security as well as for development in the recipient country. This could very well be one of our possible outcomes or options for action coming from this Summit.

### **3. Positive Aspects of current technical assistance activities.**

- Seminars seem to be working. There is great demand and great participation.
- The seminars and the other activities are bringing partners together to honestly address trade issues.
- Very successful training of US foreign and commercial service officers in standards issues.
- It is safe to say that all the activities were universally supported and the quantity of them should be increased.

### **4. Challenges faced in providing technical assistance:**

- The first challenge is to make the current very positive technical assistance activities sustainable. There needs to be continuous engagement and continuous follow-up to be successful. We heard stories of how these activities ultimately failed

to provide the permanent impact intended when this continuous engagement wasn't there.

- Lack of donor understanding about standards and their importance to U.S. competitiveness. We did hear of growing interest on the part of donor organizations in standards. For example, USTDA now evaluates their program impacts in part by the change in or development of new standards. However, some donors often do not understand utility of having standards incorporated in technical assistance programs. Some misunderstanding of standards probably arise from the suspicion that they may be helping countries to erect barriers to trade. Standards are not widely included as a trade facilitating issue. Clearly there needs to be more education for the donors.
- The need for education is broader than just the donors. We need it for the other countries, US government, and society as a whole. We heard about a very innovative education program in the curriculum of Catholic University where for the past 8 years the upper level engineering students have been given a course on standards and their use and importance in practice. There was an appeal from others, like a representative of FDA, that this not be limited to engineers. It is important for lawyers, business students, etc. We had a suggestion that the government act now and put this in the curriculum of the military academies this coming fall since many of these students ultimately end up in leading positions in business and society.
- Another aspect of needed education is at the highest levels of government. Bob Noth made a passionate point that prior to 1992 our economy was clearly dominant in the world and standards weren't as critical to our success as they are now. After the formation of the European Union, standards and other tools like them are critical to keeping the U.S. competitive in the world economy. Why aren't standards issues on the table for discussion at places like the G-8 Summit? Why do we never hear a discussion of our standards objectives when discussing foreign economic policy? This could also be considered in our options for action later today.
- Some agencies are not able to meet demand for technical assistance activities for lack of resources.
- We must find more effective means of delivering our technical assistance. There were several examples and suggestions for more robust use of the Internet in this delivery. We heard of an Asia Link Program funded by the EU and carried out over the internet by one or more German universities.
- I spoke of standards as a tool for industry in one of the items above. We have a challenge in creating other widely available tools to make standards more effective. There was an appeal for things like a robust data base of standards and standards activities that could be made available freely to everyone both here and abroad.
- We need much more effective coordination of our technical assistant activities. In this session, the public organizations were praised for their individual activities.

However, if they were more effectively coordinated, this would lessen or eliminate duplication, allow effective use of resources, and allow targeting of needs. Such an effort requires effective leadership at the federal level.

## **5. Other Issues:**

- Some thought there was not universal understanding of the term “technical assistance”?
- We seem to often bury the word “standards” when talking about the activities because “standards” perhaps implies a negative connotation. We need to work to make this a positive concept because it is a very important tool to insure innovation and support U.S. competitiveness.
- There was a suggestion to partner with other developed countries that have resources, like the EU, Japan, in cases where this is reasonable and would help promote U.S. interests. We are missing some opportunities by not doing this. There are already some positive examples of collaboration. Let’s build on this.
- There was a suggestion of implementing the practice of post-market surveillance in developing countries to cut down on transaction costs.