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## Afghanistan consumers top priority in World Bank - UNOPS - UNIDO Quality Programme

Vienna, Austria, 18 - 21 October, 2004



A market in Afghanistan

(photo from [Rebuilding Our Nation: 6 National Priority Sub-Programmes](#))  
[larger version of photo available here](#)

Representatives of the Afghanistan National Commission on Standards, Metrology and Quality (NCSMQ), the World Bank; the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in Afghanistan, the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to UNIDO Vienna; and UNIDO technical experts in standards, metrology, food and pharmaceuticals, met together with UNIDO staff at its headquarters in Vienna 18 - 21 October. The gathering was a final meeting of the minds on phase one of the joint World Bank - UNOPS - UNIDO Project to establish the Afghan National Standards and Metrology Authority.

Among the participants at the meeting were: NCSMQ Chairman, Dr. Akram Fazel; Task Manager for World Bank activities in Afghanistan, Amer Durrani; UNOPS Country Coordinator in Afghanistan, Gary Helseth; Abu Reza of UNOPS Afghanistan; Counsellor from the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to UNIDO, Amanullah Zeweri.

UNIDOScope spoke to Messrs. Fazel and Durrani and asked them how the project was going.

"The outcome of our meeting in Vienna has to be seen as a major achievement", said the World Bank's Mr. Durrani, "when we look at where we were in November 2003, when the Government discovered that the plan they had chosen for the establishment of national conformity assessment infrastructure, which was based on worldwide experience, would not give them the direction needed to ensure the protection of consumers ASAP."

"When we look at that experience, what is so wonderful about what we have been doing in the last days is that we have found a way to resolve this. We have found a way to do something we have not been able to

do in the last two years, since the government came into existence: we have found a way to protect the consumers as soon as possible."

"The Government understood from the very beginning that protecting consumers had to be a number one priority, because however impressive the flow of funds is to implement the reconstruction, it is easily possible that an equal amount is lost because the consumers are suffering the costs of sub-standard infrastructure in the areas of health, pollution, and other aspects of daily life relating to the quality of goods and services. These losses suffered by consumers also represent losses to the economy."

"The plan we have come up with here is to have two tracks running in parallel: the "state building" track and the consumer protection track. For the consumer protection track, we will use the first seed money to make sure, using what Dr. Fazel calls the 80-20 rule, that we pick up what is most important to the consumer and the Afghan economy, whether it is in construction, or relating to petroleum or lubricants, or in health or in food. Based on this, the Government will establish a system so that by March or July 2005, the message will start to spread: "be warned, don't sell a sub-standard product in Afghanistan". That is the immediate target."

"The "state building", or institution building track will consolidate our work on the consumer protection track, so that in ten years from now we will have a functioning set of institutions that ensure our promise of standards for the consumer becomes a normal part of every day life in Afghanistan."



A construction site in Afghanistan

(photo from [Rebuilding Our Nation: 6 National Priority Sub-Programmes](#))  
[larger version of photo available here](#)

Chairman of the Afghanistan National Commission on Standards, Metrology and Quality, Dr. Akram Fazel gave some details of the approach: "Temporarily, we will accept products coming from different countries on the basis of whether they meet the standards of the country of origin. Any product that comes from Iran, for example, has at least to meet the standards of Iran. Products from Pakistan will have at least to meet the standards of Pakistan. We will be unilaterally declaring that we accept the standards of the country of origin. Then we will have to identify laboratories in these countries that can serve as reference laboratories for us, and set up a system based on product tests performed in these reference laboratories. That will enable us to have a "seal of approval" system whereby, based on that documentation, Afghanistan customs would to allow that product into Afghanistan.

"In conjunction with this system, we will have a monitoring system of mobile laboratories, which we can take to the border and which we can take to marketplaces in various cities. We can go to the shop, pick up some samples and do a "first check" analysis. To discourage products that do not meet requirements, we will have sanctions, so that it is clear to people this dynamic is taking place. If we can do this with this project it will be a fantastic achievement. The project is already proving to be one of awareness development. We are quickly learning what are the most important things to do."

"We have bilateral trade relationships with Pakistan, with Iran, but we don't know each other well enough, we know each other on a commercial basis, but we don't know each other on a "quality basis", and that is the relationship what we have develop. The first sign of this will be that the quality of products that come into Afghanistan are at least in conformity to the standards of the countries of origin. A National Decree will be issued by the President, announcing the adoption of the temporary standards, conformity assessment, and enforcement policies."

"In parallel, we will be developing and adapting international standards. Having the two systems running in parallel will also give us time to do things properly, to approach this learning curve in the right way. We cannot have a national institution established and operational tomorrow. This parallel approach will buy time for us to train. It is critical for us to have management training and technical training, and later on to provide training to the commercial sector, to producers and importers."

We have four sectors: food; construction materials and construction; health and drugs; and energy: petroleum, oil and lubricants. In each of these sectors we have identified, or are in the process of identifying priority products, based on consumption and imports. On the top of the imports list is edible oil. In November / December this year (2004), we will carry out a "rapid assessment" baseline survey on the situation of these products in the market, that is, collect products and have them tested, so that at the same time in 2005 we will be able compare the situation and show the tangible benefit to consumers and the economy.

The first of the mobile labs should be on the road by March 2005. But this will not be the most important first achievement. The most important first step will be that those who export to Afghanistan know what they can send to Afghanistan, that goods coming into Afghanistan are accompanied by certificates from laboratories in the countries of origin. The basis of this system will be for us to identify laboratories in these countries of origin that can serve as reference laboratories for us.

UNIDO Standards and Quality specialist, Gerardo Pataconi put it in a nutshell: "The most important thing about the approach we are taking is that we are able to place consumers at the centre of the picture and to have impact in the short term. The approach we are taking will have three important outcomes: number one, as I said, it will ensure the protection of consumers; it will show consumers the advantage of having standards in the marketplace and of having a government that cares about people; it will show traders inside and outside Afghanistan that the Afghanistan Government is serious about quality, that there is a rule-based system in place, warning off anybody who might think they can take advantage of the post-crisis situation."

The objective of the project as it is formally described in the project document is "To establish, through the NCSMQ (Afghanistan National Commission on Standards, Metrology and Quality), the legal and institutional framework for quality standardization, metrology and testing (including standards formulation, harmonization and dissemination, measurement and calibration, product quality and conformity assessment, testing, certification and accreditation) to ensure protection of consumers and of the environment and to facilitate trade (import and export)." The Project is part of the World Bank [Emergency Customs Modernization and Trade Facilitation \(ECMTF\) Project](#), therefore, the creation of the quality infrastructure is seen as contribution towards the achievement of the trade-related objectives of the ECMTF. The NCSMQ was set up prior to UNIDO's involvement, under the ECMTF Project.

The standards / metrology / quality project, with a budget of some US\$ 1 million lists the following seven specific objectives to be implemented by UNIDO in 15 months: Institutional and Legal framework for standards, metrology, testing and conformity assessment formulated and adopted in line with the accepted international practice; National Standards and Metrology Institute (NSMI) created as a national apex body supporting producers and trades for local trade and for exports with the capacity to adopt, adapt and elaborate and enforce standards and carry out conformity assessment systems in conformity with international practice; National Quality Policy elaborated and approved; Up to 500 Afghan standards to develop and adopted by NCSMQ through task forces on the four priority sectors; National product registration scheme and product conformity / quality mark developed and promoted; Basic National Metrology scheme established to serve both the legal and industrial metrology function; and lastly, an Afghanistan Consumer Association launched and strengthened to become a viable market force.

On current estimates, establishing a fully fledged Quality Infrastructure in Afghanistan would cost in the vicinity of US\$15 million. The NCSMQ, the World Bank, UNIDO and UNOPS are elaborating a comprehensive project document and holding preliminary discussions with interested donors.

Other stories on UNIDO's activities in Afghanistan are: [Low-Cost High-Impact Building Materials Technology](#)

[Transfer; Gender and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Lessons Learned and Good Practice from Afghanistan](#) (UNIDOScope 20 - 26 July, 2003); and [Options for Afghanistan's State Owned Enterprises](#) (UNIDOScope 29 September - 5 October, 2002).

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## UNIDO ITPO Tokyo features neem products at International Cooperation Festival 2004

*Tokyo Japan, 2-3 October 2004*



looking at neem products at International Cooperation festival 2004  
[see Photo Gallery of UNIDO ITPO Tokyo at the International Cooperation Festival](#)

The neem tree and byproducts were the feature of UNIDO Investment Technology Promotion Office's ([ITPO Tokyo](#)) participation in this year's [International Cooperation Festival](#) held in Tokyo 2 - 3 October at Hibiya Park. The neem tree, found mainly in India, is also in Southeast Asia and Africa. The tree is a natural insect repellent and therefore has great potential as a source of organic insecticide or pesticide products that could contribute to eradication of POPs, a target of UNIDO under the Stockholm Convention. As part of its promotion of environmental technologies, ITPO Tokyo is working on a neem project in India with [RENAP](#) (Regional Network of Pesticide in Asia and Pacific).

The International Cooperation Festival, billed as the only event of its kind worldwide focusing solely on international cooperation, attracted some 45,000 visitors over the two days, in spite of a very rainy second day. Approximately 200 governmental and non-governmental organizations and international organizations related to international cooperation participated. UNIDO ITPO Tokyo was one of ten UN organizations ([OCHA](#), [UNHCR](#), [WFP](#), [UNDP/UNV](#), [UNICEF](#), [UNCRD](#), [UNFPA](#), [WHO](#) and [the World Bank](#)) at this year's event.

The Neem Association of Japan ([Neem Japan](#)), an NGO, and its members were present at ITPO Tokyo's booth, and sold Neem trees as well as incense sticks made from Neem. Neem Japan also gave free samples of neem tree twigs, with instructions on how to use them as a tooth brush as they are in India, Pakistan and Africa.

In addition to the neem promotion, ITPO Tokyo's booth had UNIDO publications and other material available on UNIDO in general and ITPO Tokyo's current programmes in [Banana Paper](#), [Ecology Dry System](#), [Climate Change](#) as well as the [Delegate Programme](#). People from all walks of life visited the UNIDO booth, including students, diplomats and professionals. The number of undergraduate and graduate level university students expressing a strong desire to work at UN organizations was especially noted. The event was an excellent opportunity to let young people in general acquire more knowledge about UNIDO and UN organizations in general.

ITPO Tokyo's staff, Neem Japan staff, and [Mr. Silembo of Zambia](#) and [Mr. Manyangadze of Zimbabwe](#), participants in the ITPO Delegate Programme, manned the UNIDO booth. Messrs. Silembo and Manyangadze are both studying advanced technologies for the removal and utilization of [Water Hyacinth](#). Water Hyacinth has been causing serious problems in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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