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Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER  
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

# GLOBAL DIALOGUE



GLOBAL QUALITY  
AND STANDARDS PROGRAMME



On 25 August 2020, 116 participants from 16 countries within the GQSP engaged in a global dialogue to discuss challenges, share experiences, best practices and elaborate on opportunities for the future. The discussions focused on implications for trade, value chains, quality infrastructure, particularly standards and conformity assessment during the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. The global programme setup of GQSP allowed for a constructive exchange of ideas and experiences worldwide.

Watch GQSP Global Dialogue here



## BACKGROUND

The Global Quality and Standards Programme (GQSP), funded by the Swiss Confederation through the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), helps countries set up and improve their quality infrastructure systems, drawing on UNIDO and SECO's valuable expertise and best practice from their long successful cooperation. The new programmatic approach of the GQSP goes further than before by consolidating interventions on quality and standards within one programme, adding the benefit of a global component facilitating synergies and enhancing coherence among the interventions, through re-enforcing cross-linkages between countries to capitalize on experiences and overall knowledge.

The aim of the GQSP is to boost competitiveness of specific sectors in GQSP countries—Colombia, Costa Rica, Georgia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Ukraine and Viet Nam—to align with each country's national priorities. The approach spans across the private sector and public institutions through three key pillars of activity:

1. work with partners to enhance the institutions that provide quality infrastructure, including testing of products;
2. to support producers at every step of the value chain to enhance their production and to assist them access the services that help them improve compliance; and
3. to raise awareness and build a strong culture that establishes quality as the basis for sustainable economic growth.

To help achieve these objectives, knowledge from UNIDO and SECO's world class research and extensive experience working around the world is disseminated through an interactive online platform, the UNIDO Knowledge Hub, to provide news, information, and training material for a broad range of stakeholders.



## CONTEXT

On 25 August 2020, UNIDO, in collaboration with SECO and all GQSP countries, convened the first virtual Global Dialogue within the framework of the GQSP to share information, best practices and experiences among project teams, stakeholders and beneficiaries at country and global levels.

After an initial update on the status of the project, the discussions were split between two panels that focused on trade, value chains, and quality infrastructure, particularly standards and conformity assessment during the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. The speakers on the first panel shared their experiences and lesson learnt during this unprecedented time while those on the second panel elaborated on opportunities for the future.



## **BERNARDO CALZADILLA-SARMIENTO**

*Managing Director, Directorate of Digitalization, Technology and Agribusiness, UNIDO*

Despite the pandemic affecting GQSP countries differently, we have managed to find an alternative way to bring the GQSP agenda forward, which should be congratulated. Technology has allowed for the continuation of recruitment, implementation, and important project activities such as this dialogue. At the start of lockdown, UNIDO conducted a thorough analysis of the relevance of quality and standards for COVID-19, which was useful to show the importance of quality and standards not only for market and trade, but also more broadly for health, food and education. Continuing our work during lockdown allowed us to accomplish a lot in GQSP countries, for example, helping companies in Colombia to reopen by providing guidance. From a broader perspective, UNIDO has produced an SME guide for resilient business continuity, has been working to reshuffle production in some parts of the world, and now is focusing on recovery. Through the GQSP, we have been able to have technical dialogues about the relevance of our area of work since the pandemic's onset and to identify many opportunities for achieving our objectives in different formats in the future. While it has been challenging and a big commitment from everyone involved, the programmes have continued at a steady pace throughout the pandemic thanks to all stakeholders, particularly SECO. Part of the process is knowing that by working closely together, we can face all the challenges that lie ahead.



## **MONICA RUBIOLO**

*Head of Trade Promotion, SECO*

We are all aware of the impact of the pandemic on global value chains and the evolving challenges arising from such uncertainty. One thing that is certain is that global value chains will never be the same. There are a number of changes and disruptions that need to be assessed and understood if we want to make trade an engine of growth as was the case before the pandemic. The big question is, what is the influence of framework conditions, and important technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary issues, in order to allow value chains to work again? While we do not know exactly what the new normal is, we know one of its important features is the big push for digitalization, and this virtual meeting today is a good example of how to adapt and use new technologies. It is important that we use these opportunities to prepare for the next phase, whatever it is. From SECO's perspective, UNIDO together with the GQSP and its participants are doing a good job, evidenced by the swift analysis of the pandemic's impact on this quality infrastructure ecosystem and the search for answers to challenges around the pandemic and trade in general. We have seen the project adapting and providing specific solutions, which we hope will continue in the future, and we count on each of you to share your insights around the different ways the challenges are evolving.

# PANEL 1: EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Our lives have been disrupted abruptly by the outbreak of COVID-19. What kind of new situations did you encounter during this time and how did you manage given the changes circumstances? What are the lessons learnt?



## MS. MONICA VIVAS

*Director of Standardization, the Colombian Institute of Technical Standards and Certification (ICONTEC)*

“The support of this project was very important for us at this moment.”

“The crisis has allowed us to know the value of technical standards to support the development of production processes, the generation of confidence, the opening of new markets, and, of course, the transfer of knowledge.”

“This pandemic is a challenge for us around the world. For us, the most important is to join and work together, support the policy and the government in order to improve the economy and to give the best patient care that is necessary because of this pandemic.”



## MR. PAK SUDARI PAWIRO

*National Chief Technical Advisor of GQSP Indonesia, UNIDO*

“So far, we do a lot of capacity building activities online and the response is really overwhelming.”

“We were lucky here in Indonesia during the pandemic. We have had very good collaboration with our partners...and now it's getting stronger.”

“This is a very important aspect—that our programme is running quite well, thanks to the support from our stakeholders in the ministry, and we are willing to collaborate with other programmes in other countries and exchange some experience that we have.”



## MS. MEERIM OSMONALIEVA

*Head of the Department of Accreditation Works, Kyrgyz Accreditation Centre (KCA)*

“By using information communication technology (ICT), remote assessment can improve the speed of accreditation work...as well as avoid infection of COVID-19.”

“The using and adapting of remote assessment of CABs by KCA can be done on the basis of mutual agreement.”

“Remote assessment of conformity assessment bodies can be conducted only in carrying out inspection controls over the activities of an accredited CAB without combining the process of expanding the scope of its accreditation under the current situation.”



## MS. VU THI TU QUYEN

*Acting Director International Cooperation Department, Directorate for Standards, Metrology and Quality of Viet Nam (STAMEQ); Chairman, ASEAN Consultative Committee on Standards and Quality (ACCSQ)*

“The first challenge for us related to the standards and quality for PPE...and the second challenge related to the meeting the requirements for export.”

“In the future, COVID-19 can be complicated and can maybe appear in another form, so there should be a global effort to develop the standards, best practice and guidance for all countries in the world.”



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » Technology is valuable for the development of our activities and to bring us closer to all stakeholders so that we can achieve synergies and active participation in the construction of standards for the benefit of society.
- » COVID-19 has shown that the development of standards is key to address shortages of medical equipment, PPE, and the availability of standards helps the medical supply chain.
- » The pandemic effects on the value chain include disruptions of production and consumption, and conformity assessment procedures are crucial in demonstrating that specific requirements of these products have been fulfilled.
- » The mutual recognition of accredited test results facilitates the trade in essential goods.
- » We need to enhance awareness about the application of the standards for PPE; the capacity of standards development and conformity assessment; the cooperation on the mutual recognition arrangement for PPE in the future; and the harmonization of the standards at the national, regional and international levels.
- » The most important lesson learned was the value of working together, with the government, companies, academics, and all the stakeholders. This is very, very necessary at this moment.
- » Sharing experiences, lessons learnt and best practices is crucial to avoid further contagion, and to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.
- » We have seen the importance of quality standards and conformity assessment beyond just trade and market access, to focus on health, which has shown that we need to consider quality assessment in a broader perspective.
- » We need to make the most of new technologies to share experiences, discuss, help to quickly develop and disseminate new standards, and deal in conformity assessment practices.

## PANEL 2: CAPITALIZE ON THE OPPORTUNITIES

While the global pandemic certainly poses a challenge to our global work, quality and standards play an important role in mitigating the negative effects of the global outbreak. What can we learn for the future?



### MR. RICARDO PAREDES

*Programme Coordinator GSQP Peru, UNIDO*

“As a project, and also in strong coordination with Peruvian authorities, we think these difficulties and challenges are also very big opportunities, or, at least, we prefer to face them in that way.”

“In the beginning, this mandatory protocol to restart activities (very strict in some senses) gave society a very clear message that protocols protect health and saves lives, and this creates, in the business community, in the public community, and in society in general an environment of acceptance of quality and technical protocols.”

“I would like us to finish with a message of hope. We will move forward, we will move better, we will end this pandemic stronger, and initiatives like the GQSP and the projects in each county will be a very important tool in this new situation, knowing which technical standards, quality regulations to improve the procedures, the products, I think will have a more important role in these circumstances.”



### MR. JOYCE OKOREE

*Director of the Standards Directorate, Ghana Standards Authority (GSA)*

“UNIDO GQSP played a critical role at this point...they provided us with all the necessary support to quickly adopt these standards and then also provide training for SMEs that were engaged in the production of the hand sanitizers as well as the reusable facemasks so that was a great intervention and very timely from UNIDO.”

“We’re going to continue to explore innovative ways of doing things, i.e. the remote conformity assessment processes. We’re also facing the challenges where we are unable to do physical inspections anymore, so we have to come up with innovative ideas around it. And then, of course, we need these standards disseminated to industry.”



### MS. KAREN SWANEPOEL

*Executive Director, Southern African Essential Oil Producers’ Association (SAEOPA)*

“For us, we make full use of the advantages that were offered by modern technology and all the opportunities that is in digitalization.”

“Record keeping and statistics are really made much easier utilizing all the benefits of digitalization.”



### MR. JONAS BREIDENBACH

*Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)*

“I think we all agree that the very beginning, before strengthening the value chain, you need to understand the value chain.”

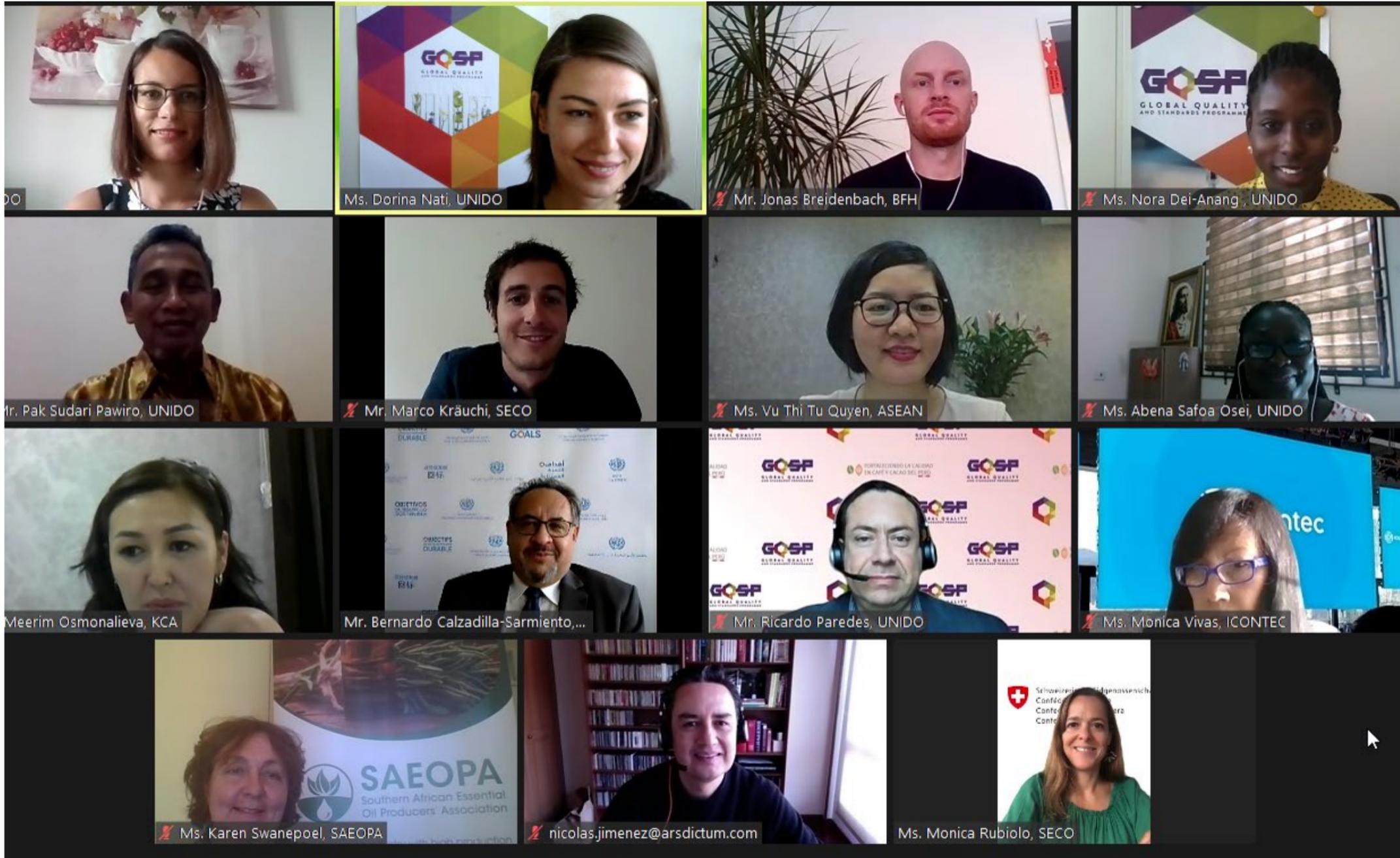
“We are convinced, on the offensive side, that only a strong linkage between the public and private sectors will strengthen value chains, and make them resilient against future shocks.”



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » Opportunities include the acceptance to work remotely and the respective tools, the acceptance of the mutual need to apply strict safety and health protocols within the broader population and the greater market requirements as a possibility to boost quality.
- » GSA put together 38 standards and made them available publicly, which contributed to the protection of the population.
- » Digitalization has offered many benefits that were never before explored, including cost savings on transport and accommodation.
- » There has been a large amount of flexibility shown and full use of digitalization tools made by combining and linking all the platforms available.
- » To build resilient value chains that withstand future shocks, understanding the value chain is key as well as the need for the public and private sectors to work together.
- » To a certain extent, the pandemic has brought us closer together by increased acceptance of new technologies and does seem to provide new opportunities for learning in several areas.
- » There is hope to rise from this pandemic better than before with innovative measures and the application of quality standards.







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