

Transforming Global Trade: WTO Workshop Showcases Collaborative Standards Development for Supply Chain Innovation

How pre-standardization collaboration is revolutionizing market access and implementation success

Our June workshop at the World Trade Organization marked a pivotal moment in international standards development. Senior trade officials, policymakers, and industry executives came together to explore how collaborative methodologies can accelerate standards implementation and enhance global market access—exactly the kind of systemic change COSSAF was founded to support.

WTO Leadership Affirms Collaborative Approaches

Validation came from the highest levels, with Erik Wijkström, Head of the WTO's Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Unit, participating to explore how collaborative approaches can address infrastructure challenges many countries face in demonstrating compliance with standards, reinforcing the workshop's core message: "International standards on traceability help avoid fragmentation in the market." With nearly one-third of TBT trade concerns relating to environmental protection, the timing for collaborative traceability standards couldn't be more critical.

Indeed, COSSAF's approach of collaborative, pre-standardization aligns with global trade facilitation objectives while addressing the practical implementation challenges that many countries face.

Breaking Down Traditional Barriers

The traditional standards development model faces a critical challenge: even excellent standards can take months or years to achieve widespread adoption. As Jeff Weiss, partner at Steptoe LLP and Chair of ASTM Technical Committee F49, emphasized during the workshop, "We don't want to develop something that's going to sit on the shelf. We want standards that can actually be implemented."

This sentiment perfectly aligns with COSSAF's mission to ensure standards work for all stakeholders—from day one—through inclusive, pre-standardization collaborations.



Real-World Impact: ASTM D8558 and Blockticity in Action

One standout case was presented by Mike Coner of Blockticity, showcasing a sugar distributor in the Philippines preparing for the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). By using blockchain-verified certificates of authenticity aligned with ASTM D8558, the company was able to secure a 20% price premium for organic sugar and prepare for compliance.

"This conformity assessment works for any product in the global supply chain," Coner explained, demonstrating how Blockticity's implementation of the D8558 standard enables customs authorities worldwide to reference internationally recognized verification methods, reducing legal risk and trade friction.

Blockticity's experience underscores the global applicability of ASTM standards, as well as the economic benefits of verifiable compliance pathways.

Smart Data Escrow: Open-Source Infrastructure for Inclusive, Global Access

Building on these proven commercial successes, the workshop highlighted Smart Data Escrow as an open-source approach to achieving similar selective data sharing capabilities. While Blockticity's platform demonstrates the business value through blockchain implementation, Smart Data Escrow offers complementary infrastructure that keeps sensitive data behind organizational firewalls while still enabling verification and transparency—in essence “sharing data with anyone without sharing it with everyone,” as Jaco Voorspuij from FixLog Consulting reminded the audience.

This open-source approach directly addresses Erik Wijkström's observation about developing countries needing accessible quality infrastructure for “standardization, certification, and inspection.” By providing open-source tools for selective data sharing, organizations can build the verification capabilities needed for international trade without requiring expensive proprietary platforms.

Similarly, Blockticity's Colombian Coffee Federation case study perfectly illustrates this principle—whether through commercial platforms or open-source tools, the goal remains the same: enabling 540,000 coffee growers to demonstrate EUDR compliance while protecting proprietary geographic and business data through selective permissions.

ASTM's technology-neutral approach ensures standards work across diverse economic and technological contexts, from legacy systems to advanced digital implementations—a core principle in COSSAF's collaborative methodology. By combining proven commercial platforms with open-source infrastructure tools, the initiative creates multiple pathways for organizations to achieve supply chain transparency regardless of their technological capabilities or economic

constraints.

Supply Chain of the Future: Global Momentum

The workshop prominently featured the Supply Chain of the Future initiative, COSSAF's foundational partnership that's driving unprecedented international collaboration. Martha King, COSSAF's co-founder, shared remarkable progress: ongoing and growing engagement from 250+ participants in dozens of countries across every continent are now engaged in technical working groups and collaborative efforts to improve supply chain infrastructure.

"We build the system with those who depend on it," King explained. "Collaboration doesn't slow us down, it actually speeds us up."

This momentum represents exactly what the global standards community needs: harmonized approaches that respect diverse regional requirements while enabling seamless international trade.

Harmonizing Global Standards, Not Reinventing Them

The workshop showcased active collaboration between ASTM International, GS1, and UN/CEFACT—exactly the kind of harmonization COSSAF advocates. Rather than competing, these standards bodies are building frameworks that leverage each organization's strengths while avoiding duplication.

Jeff Grove from ASTM International highlighted their memorandums of understanding with 127 national, regional, and international standards bodies, emphasizing how inclusive processes ensure "every voice matters... every individual has a vote."

The success of this collaborative approach is evident in the exceptional F49 team at ASTM, including Jeff Weiss, Drew Zabrocki, Jaco Voorspuij, Mike Coner, Michael Darden, Robert Rosenberg, Jack Crumbly, Rob Handfield, Jennifer Tursi, Jeff Grove, Craig Updyke, and Len Morrissey—each bringing unique expertise to ensure standards serve stakeholders worldwide.

Technology Meets Human-Centric Design

Drew Zabrocki, the workshop facilitator and experienced agricultural technology entrepreneur, brought unique insights from scaling solutions across millions of acres on five continents. His emphasis on "proven methods" and continuous innovation through feedback loops demonstrates how technology serves human needs rather than the reverse.

But Zabrocki's role extends beyond technology expertise—as part of Totem, alongside Martha



King, they represent a new model of facilitation for complex, multi-stakeholder innovation. Totem specializes in bringing together diverse participants in non-competitive, pre-commercial collaboration projects that create meaningful societal impact. Their approach addresses a critical challenge: how do you get farmers, technology providers, standards bodies, government agencies, and multinational corporations to work together effectively?

"We build, test, learn, and iterate with the actual people who will use these systems—because the best standards are the ones that work in the real world," became the workshop's unofficial motto, reflecting Totem's philosophy of iterative development with real-world validation at each step. This approach has enabled them to facilitate initiatives spanning continents and cultures, from agricultural technology deployment to international standards development.

The success of complex collaborations like the Supply Chain of the Future initiative demonstrates Totem's expertise in managing what many consider impossible: getting competitors to collaborate, bridging public and private sector priorities, and ensuring that technological innovation serves operational realities rather than creating new barriers.

This human-centric approach to standards development—bringing farmers, buyers, sellers, transport providers, and technology companies into the design process—ensures standards actually work in operational environments. It's the difference between standards that look good on paper and standards that farmers can actually implement at 5 AM in a field, that customs officials can efficiently process, and that small businesses can afford to adopt.

Building Sovereign, Interconnected Data Systems Through Open Collaboration

The workshop's focus on sovereignty and interconnected data systems reflects COSSAF's vision for global agriculture and food systems. Through a combination of commercial innovations like Blocktivity's platform and open-source infrastructure including Smart Data Escrow, the initiative enables countries to maintain control over their data while participating in global supply chains that require transparency and verification.

This multi-pathway approach—offering both commercial and open-source solutions—directly addresses the infrastructure challenges Erik Wijkström highlighted for developing countries. Open-source collaborative toolkits provide accessible alternatives for building quality infrastructure, ensuring that the benefits of supply chain transparency aren't limited to organizations with significant technology budgets.

This balance between national sovereignty and international cooperation, supported by diverse technological approaches, represents the future of global trade—facilitated by standards that respect local contexts while enabling global connectivity through both proprietary and open-source solutions.

Join the Transformation

COSSAF is proud to support this collaborative transformation through the Summer Workshop Series, offered by our Technical Service Providers. It's a complimentary hands-on experience with these methodologies. The three-part series covers:

1. **Stakeholder Mapping & Engagement Design** - Learn to identify and engage all affected parties across value chains
2. **Human-Centric Standards Workshop Facilitation** - Master collaborative problem-solving methodologies
3. **Implementation Readiness Planning** - Design standards for day-one adoption success

Register now: www.collaboratoryaf.org/standards

Looking Forward

The June WTO workshop underscored how early-stage collaboration in standards development can drive global trade facilitation and support practical implementation across varied economies and cultures. The combination of proven methodologies, real-world case studies, and unprecedented international engagement points toward a future where standards truly serve all stakeholders.

As we continue building the Supply Chain of the Future through partnerships with ASTM International, GS1, UN/CEFACT, and the International Fresh Produce Association, we're proving that collaboration enhances rather than complicates standards development.

The path forward is clear: inclusive, pre-standardization collaboration that brings stakeholders into the early design process, ensures implementation readiness, and respects the diverse needs of our interconnected global economy.

Learn more about COSSAF's collaborative standards work and the Supply Chain of the Future initiative at www.supplychainofthefuture.org

