

Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards Systems

ISEAL Code of Good Practice

Version 2.0 – December 2014

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Foreword

ISEAL Alliance is the global membership association for sustainability standards. ISEAL is a non-governmental organisation whose mission is to strengthen sustainability standards systems for the benefit of people and the environment.

ISEAL is the global leader in defining and communicating what good practice looks like for sustainability standards through guidance and credibility tools such as the Codes of Good Practice. The four goals of ISEAL are to:

- Demonstrate and improve the impacts of sustainability standards systems;
- Improve the effectiveness of sustainability standards systems;
- Increase the adoption of sustainability standards systems; and
- Define credibility for sustainability standards systems;

ISEAL's membership is open to all multi-stakeholder sustainability standards and accreditation bodies that demonstrate their ability to meet the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice and accompanying requirements, and that commit to learning and improving. ISEAL also has a non-member, subscriber category to engage with standards systems in development and other stakeholders with a demonstrable commitment to the ISEAL objectives. Further information about the ISEAL Alliance and its membership is available at www.iseal.org

ISEAL Codes of Good Practice build credibility

The goal of all ISEAL Codes of Good Practice is to support standards systems to deliver positive social and environmental impact. ISEAL Codes of Good Practice work together to achieve this:

- The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards (Standard-Setting

Code) supports the development of standards that are relevant and transparent and that reflect a balance of stakeholder interests;

- The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards (Assurance Code) helps to ensure accurate results from assessments of compliance and to encourage the use of assurance to support learning; and
- The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards Systems (Impacts Code) supports standards systems to measure and improve the results of their work and to ensure that standards are delivering the desired impact.

Individually, each Code is useful in strengthening a component of a standards system. However, only when the Codes are taken together do they provide end users and other interested parties with confidence in the effectiveness of the standards system as a whole.

Implementation

This version of the Code (v2.0) was approved by the ISEAL Board of Directors on 10 December 2014. It becomes effective from 1 January 2015. Organisations who wish to apply for ISEAL Associate Membership can apply using either v1.0 or v2.0 of the Impacts Code up to 31 March 2015. Applications received after this date must relate to v2.0 only.

For more information on implementation timelines for v2.0 of the Code, please visit the ISEAL Alliance website: www.isealalliance.org/our-work/defining-credibility/codes-of-good-practice

Code Review Process

The public review and revision process for the Impacts Code takes place every four years. The next review is scheduled for 2018. For each review and revision process, the ISEAL Secretariat prepares the draft revisions and coordinates the revision process.

The ISEAL Technical Committee, a permanent multi-stakeholder governance body, is responsible for monitoring the Code revision process, signing off on drafts, and recommending approval to the ISEAL Board of Directors of the revised Code based on both the content of the Code and on the quality of the revision process.

The ISEAL Alliance welcomes comments on the Impacts Code at any time. Comments will be incorporated into the next review process. Please submit comments by mail or email to the address below. You can choose to use the comment submission form that is available on the ISEAL Alliance website: www.isealalliance.org/our-work/defining-credibility/codes-of-good-practice

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Introduction

ISEAL Alliance facilitated the development of the Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards Systems (Impacts Code) in 2010 as a means to guide the development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) programmes by sustainability standards systems.

M&E systems track progress toward achieving intended outcomes and evaluate the contribution that the standards system makes toward achieving long-term social, environmental or economic impacts.

There are a number of reasons for standards systems to monitor their performance and evaluate their contribution to impact:

1. Improve the standards system and its effectiveness in achieving its stated social, environmental and economic objectives;
2. Build capacity by learning from experience, not only for the standards system but also for clients and others involved in the standards system;
3. Inform strategy regarding policy decisions;
4. Provide accountability to stakeholders and to those who are affected by, and are meant to benefit from the activities of the standards system;
5. Earn credibility through willingness to be open about the results (good or bad) of the standards system; and
6. Enhance societal learning by feeding results into the sustainability tools landscape to understand the cumulative impacts of sustainability standards systems.

The ISEAL Impacts Code normative *Requirements* are structured around *Desired Outcomes* in sections 5 to 10 in this document. The *Desired Outcomes* are the results that standard-setting organisations should seek to achieve. Complying with the *Requirements* that are linked to each *Desired Outcome* should lead an organisation to achieve those outcomes.

The Impacts Code includes a number of *Aspirational Good Practices*. While these practices are recommended, they are not mandatory *Requirements* for complying with the Impacts Code. To make this distinction clear, the *Aspirational Good Practices* are presented separately from requirements in green shaded boxes.

The Impacts Code also includes *Guidance* that provides supplementary information to the *Requirements*, as well as interpretation of key phrases in the *Requirements*. The *Guidance* is an important non-binding supplement to the Impacts Code and should be taken into account when undertaking monitoring and evaluation. The *Guidance* can be found in a separate column adjacent to the *Requirements*.



1. Scope

The ISEAL Impacts Code specifies general requirements for the development and implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system by sustainability standards systems.

The Impacts Code applies to all social and environmental standards system owners (the scheme owner). Additionally, the logic and requirements in the Impacts Code could be applied equally well by other actors within a standards system (e.g. accreditation and certification bodies) or to other complex, ongoing development processes (e.g. development organisations).

2. Referenced Publications

3ie (International Initiative for Impact Evaluation) Impact Evaluation Glossary: 2012

ISEAL Credibility Principles: 2013

ISEAL Standard-Setting Code: 2014. Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards

ISEAL Assurance Code: 2012. Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards.

ISO 26000:2010. Guidance on Social Responsibility

OECD Glossary: 2002. OECD Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management

Rainforest Alliance Glossary: 2013

3. Definitions

Attribution

The extent to which the observed change in outcome is a result of the intervention, having allowed for all other factors that may also affect the outcome(s) of interest. (3ie Impact Evaluation Glossary, 2012).

Causal Pathway

The logical and causal relationships between inputs, activities/support strategies, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. (Adapted from Rainforest Alliance Glossary, 2013).

NOTE: This is also sometimes referred to as a results chain or impact pathway.

Counterfactual

The state of the world in the absence of the intervention. The situation or condition which hypothetically would prevail in the absence of an intervention. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002 and 3ie Impact Evaluation Glossary, 2012).

Effects

Intended or unintended change due directly or indirectly to an intervention. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

Entity

The product, process, business, or service that is the subject of the standard. (ISEAL Credibility Principles, 2013).

Impacts

Positive and negative long-term effects resulting from the implementation of a standards system, either directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. (Adapted from OECD Glossary).

Impact Evaluation

A systematic, objective and in depth, ex-post assessment of the medium or long-term effects; positive or negative, intended or unintended, of the implementation of a standards system. Impact evaluations employ methodologies that are designed to enable evaluation users to understand the extent to which an observed change can be attributed to the standard system or another intervention. (Adapted from 3ie Impact Evaluation Glossary, 2012 and World Bank).

Indicator

Quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement of outcomes, to reflect the changes connected to a standards system, or to help assess the performance of an organisation. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

Indicator Protocol

An indicator protocol is a detailed description that explains how an indicator is constructed. It includes the metrics needed for an indicator, units of measure,

definitions for key terms, data source(s), data collection frequency and approach, scope and other technical references.

Input

A resource mobilized by a standards system to support activities to further desired long-term impacts. Examples of inputs include physical, human, financial, and capital resources. (Adapted from Rainforest Alliance Glossary, 2013).

Monitoring and Evaluation System

An ongoing process through which an organisation draws conclusions about its contribution to intended outcomes and impacts. A monitoring and evaluation system consists of a set of interconnected functions, processes and activities, including systematic collection of monitoring data on specified indicators and the implementation of outcome and impact evaluations.

Outcome

The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term results from the implementation of a standards system's strategies. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

Outcome Evaluation

Systematic and objective in depth ex-post assessment of the short-term and medium-term results or effects from the implementation of a standards system. These studies seek to shed light on the extent to which standards system's desired changes are occurring as well as why the system is or is not working. Unlike impact evaluations, outcome evaluations are not designed to draw conclusions about the extent to which an intervention can be attributed to the intervention of a standards system.

Output

The products, capital goods, and services that result directly from the activities of a standards system. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

Performance Monitoring

A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide indications of the extent to which outputs and short and medium-term results are being achieved. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

Publicly Available

Obtainable by any person, without unreasonable barriers of access.

NOTE – Information that is published on an organisation's website and can be found through a basic and quick search is considered to be publicly available. 'Available on request' is not the same as publicly available.

Results

The outputs, outcomes and impacts resulting from the implementation of a standards system. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

Scheme owner

The organisation that determines the objectives and scope of the standards system, as well as the rules for how the scheme will operate and the standards against which conformance will be assessed. In most cases this is the standard-setting organisation. However it may also be an assurance provider, a governmental authority, trade association, group of assurance providers or other body. (Adapted from 'Standards system owner' in the ISEAL Assurance Code).

Stakeholder

Individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organisation. (ISO 26000: 2010).

Standards system

The collective of organisations responsible for the activities involved in the implementation of a standard, including standard-setting, capacity building, assurance, labelling, and monitoring. (ISEAL Credibility Principles: 2013).

Strategies

Approaches and activities that standards systems use to effect change, including standards development and implementation, assurance, incentives, outreach, training, and advocacy.

4. Credibility Principles and Monitoring and Evaluation

The ISEAL Credibility Principles underpin effective practices for sustainability standards systems, supporting those systems to achieve more positive social, environmental and economic impacts, while decreasing negative impacts.

The ten ISEAL Credibility Principles were published in 2013 as the result of a year-long global consultation with contributions from more than 400 stakeholders on five continents.

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. Sustainability | 6. Impartiality |
| 2. Improvement | 7. Transparency |
| 3. Relevance | 8. Accessibility |
| 4. Rigour | 9. Truthfulness |
| 5. Engagement | 10. Efficiency |

The ISEAL Credibility Principles provide the foundation for the normative sections of the Impacts Code. Since the Impacts Code does not include detailed requirements for all situations that can occur, the principles should be used as guidance for making decisions in unanticipated situations where there is need to interpret the Code's requirements. The Impacts Code is underpinned by five of the ten Credibility Principles.

The table opposite presents these five principles and articulates how they relate to monitoring and evaluation.¹



Credibility Principle	Relation to Impacts
<p>1. Sustainability</p> <p>Standards scheme owners clearly define and communicate their sustainability objectives and approach to achieving them. They make decisions that best advance these objectives.</p>	<p>Standards systems articulate their sustainability objectives (the intended outcomes and impacts of their system). There is a monitoring and evaluation system in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the standards system in achieving its stated sustainability objectives.</p>
<p>2. Improvement</p> <p>Standards scheme owners seek to understand their impacts, and measure and demonstrate progress towards their intended outcomes. They regularly integrate learning and encourage innovation to increase benefits to people and the environment.</p>	<p>Results and learning from the monitoring and evaluation system are integrated to improve the structure and functioning of the standards system, the content of the standards and other strategies, and the monitoring and evaluation system itself, so as to achieve the desired sustainability objectives.</p>
<p>4. Rigour</p> <p>All components of a standards system are structured to deliver quality outcomes. In particular, standards are set at a performance level that results in measurable progress towards the scheme’s sustainability objectives, while assessments of compliance provide an accurate picture of whether an entity meets the standard’s requirements.</p>	<p>The monitoring and evaluation system delivers clear and verifiable information about the effectiveness of the standard and other strategies in achieving sustainability objectives. The standards system employs mechanisms to ensure the quality of performance monitoring data and of outcome and impact evaluations.</p>
<p>7. Transparency</p> <p>Standards systems make relevant information freely available about the development and content of the standard, how the system is governed, who is evaluated and under what process, impact information and the various ways in which stakeholders can engage.</p>	<p>Standards systems make information about the monitoring and evaluation system and about the results of outcome and impact evaluations publicly available. Stakeholders are aware of the standards system’s intended outcomes and impacts, and how the monitoring and evaluation system will assess progress towards those objectives. Evaluation results are also open to the scrutiny of all stakeholders.</p>
<p>9. Truthfulness</p> <p>Claims and communications made by actors within standards systems and by certified entities about the benefits or impacts that derive from the system or from the purchase or use of a certified product or service are verifiable, not misleading, and enable an informed choice.</p>	<p>Claims made about outcomes and impacts are based on knowledge generated through performance monitoring and/or outcome and impact evaluations. Claims are revised over time in response to learning from the monitoring and evaluation system.</p>

¹ The text in the right hand column is an adaptation and expansion of the Credibility Principles document (2013), which described how each principle relates to “impacts.” In case of any contradiction between this table and the original Credibility Principles document, the text in this table should be used to aid interpretation of the Impacts Code.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation System Requirements

Clause 5.1 Monitoring and Evaluation System

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner has a functioning and effective M&E system in place.	1. The scheme owner shall develop, document and implement a monitoring and evaluation system that is compliant with this Impacts Code.	

Clause 5.2 Scope and Boundaries of the M&E System

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner ensures that the M&E system monitors and evaluates the standards system's ability to achieve its intended social, environmental, and economic effects.	1. The scheme owner shall define and regularly update documentation of the scope and boundaries of its monitoring and evaluation system.	<p>'Regularly updating' requires the scheme owner to assess the scope and boundaries on at least an annual basis and update them if required.</p> <p>Defining the scope and boundaries of the M&E system entails identifying the standards system's intended and unintended effects (outcomes and impacts) and the strategies, standards and/or programmes that will be monitored and evaluated through the M&E system. It may also include defining geographic and time boundaries for the activities of the M&E system. Minimum documentation of the scope and boundaries includes stating and justifying what is and is not included within the scope of the M&E system.</p>
	2. At a minimum, the M&E system shall enable the scheme owner to monitor and evaluate its most significant intended social, economic and environmental effects (see 7.1), through a combination of performance monitoring and outcome and impact evaluations (see section 8).	<p>Most significant intended effects may be those most central to the stated mission and sustainability objectives of the standard system and/or those considered most critical to monitor by stakeholders. Stakeholders' views on this may be captured during stakeholder consultation processes (see section 6).</p> <p>Minimum documentation of compliance with this requirement will identify how each of the most significant effects is covered in the M&E system - by performance monitoring or through outcome and impact evaluations (see 8.1).</p>



Clause 5.3 Plan for Expansion

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner takes a realistic approach to monitoring and evaluation, linked to capacity.	1. A scheme owner that is not able to include all of its intended social, economic and environmental effects (see 7.1) and its most significant unintended effects (see 7.3) within its M&E system due to a lack of capacity (human or financial) shall document how its system is expected to evolve over time, in order to permit the scheme owner to monitor and evaluate its intended and unintended effects.	

Clause 5.4 Resources

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner adequately resources the M&E system over time.	1. The scheme owner shall ensure that it plans for and provides sufficient, skilled staff members or consultants, and commensurate budget for the development and implementation of the M&E system.	A sufficient financial and staffing budget is one that will allow the organisation to conform with this Impacts Code within a reasonable period of time (e.g. 3 years for ISEAL members). Conformance with this clause is illustrated in part by undertaking an assessment of the financial and human resources required to implement the M&E system over time. Skilled staff members or consultants are those who have the skills and training necessary to take on the M&E responsibilities assigned to them.

Clause 5.5 Roles and Responsibilities

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
There is competent staff with clear responsibilities and capacity for implementing the M&E system.	1. The scheme owner shall designate at least one person to be responsible for implementation of the M&E system.	This may include staff outside the M&E department – see also 5.8.
	2. In organisations that have more staff working in monitoring and evaluation, the scheme owner shall specify the M&E roles and responsibilities of those staff members.	



Clause 5.6 Data Management

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Information technology systems support the M&E system by ensuring that monitoring data is safely stored and easily accessible for analysis and use.	1. The scheme owner shall have in place a data management system for storing, organising and facilitating analysis and use of performance monitoring data.	

Clause 5.7 Data Confidentiality and Use

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Confidential information is respected and protected.	1. The scheme owner shall have procedures in place to protect confidential and proprietary data.	
The scheme owner has addressed any legal requirements around data confidentiality and use that would prevent it from analysing relevant data for monitoring and evaluation purposes.	2. The scheme owner shall have procedures in place to address any legal barriers to the use of relevant data for the implementation of the organisation's monitoring and evaluation system	

Clause 5.8 Integrating M&E in the Organisation

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
The M&E system is integrated throughout the organisation and has the support of senior executives.	1. The scheme owner shall seek to integrate the M&E system throughout the organisation by defining responsibilities for, and seeking involvement of and input from, senior staff and staff in departments or programmes that contribute to or can benefit from the M&E system.	



Clause 5.9 Cooperation and Coordination

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
Standards systems achieve efficiency and quality in their M&E systems and facilitate cross-organisational learning and increased understanding of sustainability impacts.	1. The scheme owner shall: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> assess the potential for co-operation, co-ordination and partnerships with other organisations (e.g. standards systems, research institutes, companies) in the implementation of the scheme's M&E system; and engage with these organisations whenever practicable. 	
	2. The scheme owner shall use and report on common or standardized indicators recommended by the ISEAL Alliance and/or other sector-specific reporting initiatives, whenever practicable.	

6. Stakeholder Engagement in M&E System Design

Clause 6.1 Stakeholder Identification

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner is better able to consult with stakeholders during the design and implementation of the M&E system.	1. The scheme owner shall: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> identify categories of stakeholders who have an interest in different aspects of the M&E system; and document this exercise either using existing protocols or by developing new ones. 	In identifying stakeholders with an interest in the monitoring and evaluation system, the scheme owner should, at a minimum, consider users of the standards system, stakeholders that are affected by the activities of the standards systems, and organisations (such as ISEAL, other standards systems, and research or reporting initiatives) with which alignment, coordination and cooperation in the implementation of the M&E system could be valuable. The scheme owner may also consider stakeholders within their own organisation (see 5.8) See 'Stakeholder Mapping' in the ISEAL Standard Setting Code



Clause 6.2 Stakeholder Consultation

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Stakeholders have opportunities to provide input at different stages in the design and periodic revision of the M&E system.	<p>1. The scheme owner shall provide and publicize (10.1) opportunities for the identified stakeholders to comment on at least the following aspects of the M&E system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the intended impacts and outcomes of the standards system (7.1); b. the unintended effects of the system (7.3), including identifying the most significant and potentially damaging unintended negative effects; and c. the scope and boundaries of the M&E system (5.2). 	These opportunities for comment should be available both when the M&E system is first being designed and also for periodic revisions of the system (see 9.2).

7. Defining the Intended Change

Clause 7.1 Intended Impact and Outcomes

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner has determined the sustainability impacts and outcomes they are striving to achieve.	1. The scheme owner shall define and document the intended long-term social, environmental or economic impacts of the standards system.	Scheme owners should make use of activities required by the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code to articulate the sustainability objectives for the standard. The intended impacts (goals) of a standards system are aligned with, but generally broader than the objectives of a specific standard. Standard systems may implement various activities and strategies (see 7.2.1) to achieve their goals, one of which is the standard itself.
	2. The scheme owner shall define and document the short and medium-term social, environmental or economic outcomes they expect to see as a result of compliance with their standard and through other strategies that the standards system employs (see 7.2.1).	



Clause 7.2 Causal Pathways

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner has an understanding of how the strategies they employ are expected to contribute to their intended impacts and outcome.	1. The scheme owner shall identify the strategies that the standards system employs to contribute to its intended outcomes and impacts.	See 'Strategies' definition. If these strategies are not already explicitly documented, scheme owners should consider the various activities (or intended activities) of the standards system and describe the strategies it will use to contribute to desired outcomes.
	2. The scheme owner shall illustrate or describe the causal pathways that explain how identified strategies are expected to contribute to the intended outcomes and impacts.	

Clause 7.3 Unintended Effects

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner is aware of possible unintended consequences of its activities.	1. The scheme owner shall: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. consult with stakeholders to identify the possible unintended effects (both positive and negative), including the most significant and potentially damaging negative unintended effects of the standards system's activities; and b. document the results of this consultation. 	

Clause 7.4 Influencing Factors

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
	1. The scheme owner shall define and regularly review the external factors most likely to influence (both positively and negatively) the achievement of intended impacts and outcomes, to assess whether the organisation can take action to avoid or mitigate risks and/or take advantage of favourable factors and conditions.	These may include factors such as weather, complementary or detrimental interventions by other actors, political or social unrest, financial crisis, market structure, availability and quality of infrastructure, etc.



8. Monitoring and Evaluation

Clause 8.1 Performance Monitoring and Outcome and Impact Evaluation

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The M&E system both regularly tracks progress towards intended outcomes and provides in-depth insight into how the standards system is functioning and why it is or is not achieving its desired impacts.	1. The scheme owner shall implement an M&E system that includes both performance monitoring, and outcome and impact evaluations.	See definitions of ‘performance monitoring’, ‘outcome evaluation’, and ‘impact evaluation’.

Clause 8.2 Indicators

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner has defined indicators for performance monitoring and for outcome and impact evaluations that will provide the data necessary to measure progress and monitor unintended effects in a standardized way over time and across studies.	1. The scheme owner shall: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> define and document the indicators to be employed in the M&E system; and show to which sustainability outcomes, impacts and unintended effects each indicator contributes. 	The scheme owner may use common or standardized indicators recommended by the ISEAL Alliance and/or other sector-specific reporting initiatives (see 5.9 and 8.8).
	2. The scheme owner shall identify which indicators are to be included in performance monitoring activities, which in outcome and impact evaluations, and which in both.	

Clause 8.3 Performance Monitoring

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner has sufficient information to determine the extent to which outputs and short and medium-term results are being achieved.	1. The scheme owner shall ensure that data is collected on an ongoing basis to track and report progress on their current performance monitoring indicators.	Data is collected on an on-going basis when data collection is recurrent and on a regular schedule (e.g. once a year, during each audit, each time a new certificate is issued, etc.).
	2. The scheme owner shall compile, analyse and produce reports on the results observed through performance monitoring at least once per year for internal purposes.	For ‘internal purposes’ means that these reports should be used and circulated internally. They are not required to be made publically available, but publishing monitoring reports is aspirational best practice (see 10.4)

Clause 8.4 Quality Assurance for Performance Monitoring

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Monitoring data is collected accurately and consistently.	1. The scheme owner shall implement data quality assurance measures to help ensure the quality, reliability and accuracy of data used for performance monitoring. At a minimum, these measures shall include creating and following specific indicator protocols for each monitoring indicator currently in use.	Data quality assurance measures can also include building cross-checks into data entry systems; defining procedures for identifying and handling outliers and missing values; and following recognized data quality assurance guidelines.

Clause 8.5 Outcome and Impact Evaluations

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Periodic in-depth evaluations provide the scheme owner with the information necessary to understand the extent to which its desired changes are occurring as well as why the system is or is not producing intended results.	1. If the scheme owner has had an operational standards system for at least two years, it shall conduct, commission or otherwise undergo at least one in-depth outcome or impact evaluation per year.	A standards system becomes operational when it certifies or verifies the first entity to its standard. Outcome or impact evaluations that are consistent with the spirit of the definitions in the glossary and meet the requirements of 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, and 10.2 are eligible to count towards compliance with this requirement.
	2. The scheme owner shall ensure that at least some of these in-depth evaluations are independent impact evaluations, designed to determine whether it is possible to attribute observed changes to the standards system.	The number, regularity and extent of impact evaluations should be commensurate with the maturity, scale and intensity of the activities of the standards system. Impact evaluations generally take a number of years to complete as a goal is to see change over time. Thus, standards systems are unlikely to have any fully completed independent impact evaluations until they have been operational for three to five years.
	3. The scheme owner shall ensure that each outcome and impact evaluation addresses at least the following questions: a. Is the standards system intervention producing desired and intended sustainability outcomes or impacts? b. What unintended effects (positive or negative) resulted from the activities or intervention assessed?	Outcome and impact evaluations can also include investigation of how standards content or other supporting strategies should be refined to strengthen the likelihood of achieving the desired outcomes and impacts and/or to avoid negative unintended effects.

	<p>c. To what extent is it possible to attribute the observed effects to the activity or intervention of the standards system using the methodology applied in this evaluation?</p> <p>d. What factors could have influenced the results (factors within the control of the standards system and other external factors)?</p>	
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Clause 8.6 Quality Assurance for Outcome and Impact Evaluations

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Outcome and impact evaluations produce accurate, reliable, and relevant results and analysis.	<p>1. The scheme owner shall:</p> <p>a. take measures to help ensure that each outcome and impact evaluation it commissions or undertakes produces accurate, reliable, and relevant findings; and</p> <p>b. document these measures.</p>	<p>Quality assurance measures can be documented through policies and procedures, in the evaluation reports themselves or through other means. Such quality assurance measures may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following recognized guidelines for evaluation quality; • ensuring that personnel undertaking impact evaluations are independent of the entity or system being evaluated; • publicly committing to publish full evaluation reports; • peer review or scientific review of terms of reference, methodology, and/or of evaluation reports and articles; • use (in impact evaluations) of counterfactuals or control groups following widely-recognized methodologies; • obtaining pre-intervention baseline measures; • ensuring that evaluators understand the context in which the evaluation takes place as well as the standards system’s intended change and strategies; • checking interpretations by presenting evaluation results to those who participated in the evaluation and to local stakeholders prior to finalizing the study; and • making evaluation data available to other researchers to replicate findings.

Clause 8.7 Monitoring and Evaluation Reports

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
<p>Reports contain enough information for the scheme owner and other stakeholders to understand how conclusions were reached and to judge the quality of the underlying analysis.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The scheme owner shall include at least the following information in performance monitoring reports (8.3) and reports of outcome and impact evaluations (8.5): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The purpose of the evaluation or analysis and the guiding evaluation questions; b. (For outcome and impact evaluations) Names of people involved in conducting the evaluation, their qualifications, and their connection to the entity or system being evaluated; c. Methodology (e.g. what data was collected; specific methods used to gather data; thresholds employed; sampling; data manipulation; how data was analysed and conclusions drawn); d. Findings and conclusions, including both positive and negative effects; e. Any limitations of the evaluation or analysis (including limitations or uncertainties in the data, and assumptions); f. (For outcome and impact evaluations) How the context (e.g. internal and external factors) might have affected the results of the intervention; and g. Recommendations, where appropriate. 	

Clause 8.8 Indicator Alignment

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
<p>Monitoring data is comparable across different standards systems and allows for standardized reporting and reporting of collective results.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Whenever practicable, the scheme owner shall use the same indicators and unites of measure as those of other standards systems. 	<p>For instance ISEAL Common Core indicators and other industry specific reporting initiatives.</p>



Clause 8.9 Communication of Evaluation Results

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
Study participants and other stakeholders are empowered through a better understanding of the results achieved by the standards system.	1. The scheme owner shall provide results of evaluations to study participants and shall seek effective and innovative ways of sharing and accurately communicating evaluation results to different stakeholder groups.	This includes sharing and communicating with the subjects of an evaluation.

Clause 8.10 Benefits of M&E for Entities Involved in the Standards System

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
The M&E system provides direct and tangible benefits, and minimal extra burden, to entities that are involved in the standards system.	1. The scheme owner shall implement activities and adopt practices to ensure that the entities covered by the standard derive benefits from the M&E system.	<p>“Entities covered by the standard” may include, for example, certified enterprises, producer organisations, producers, worker organisations, etc.</p> <p>This could include practices such as providing support and capacity building for data collection and management; opportunities to be part of learning events or exchange on good practices and research findings; access to data; or analysis of how they compare to other entities in the standards system.</p>

Clause 8.11 Ethical Guidelines

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
Evaluators respect and do not harm the subjects of the evaluation.	1. Scheme owners that commission evaluations shall develop or adopt ethics guidelines for evaluation work, or shall review and approve the researcher’s own ethics guidelines.	Ethics guidelines could require consideration of risk for subjects involved in evaluations, evaluation burden and fatigue for entities involved in the evaluation, guidelines on reporting of legal or standards breaches, and other related factors.



9. Learning and Improving

Clause 9.1 Internalising Learning and Improving

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Information from the monitoring and evaluation system is used within the organisation to improve the effectiveness of the standards system.	1. The scheme owner shall ensure that the standards system's definition of intended change (section 7), reports from performance monitoring and outcome and impact evaluations (section 8), and the learning from these activities, are distributed and discussed throughout the organisation, including at least to the organisation's senior management, governance structures, and standards' committee.	Inclusion in meeting agendas and the minutes summarizing the discussion of these points during relevant meetings, or similar documentation, would constitute evidence of distribution and discussion.

Clause 9.2 Improving M&E System Effectiveness

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
The scheme owner regularly updates and improves its monitoring and evaluation system.	1. The scheme owner shall ensure that the results from performance monitoring, outcome and impact evaluations and the learning from these activities are used to inform a periodic review and refinement of the intended change and of the M&E strategy.	Documentation of conformance with this requirement will explain the approach to and chosen frequency of this 'periodic review.' The scheme owner may review and refine some aspects of an M&E system on an on-going or annual basis. Other elements of the system are more difficult to change (e.g. indicators embedded in audits) and thus may be reviewed and refined less frequently.

Clause 9.3 Responding to and Using M&E Results

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
The scheme owner documents and shows how the standards system is responding to and using M&E results.	1. The scheme owner shall issue external and/or internal management responses to performance monitoring and outcome and impact evaluation reports.	
	2. The scheme owner shall document the uses of M&E results for management and learning purposes and to build internal support for the value of the M&E system.	



10. Transparency and Public Information

Clause 10.1 Publicly Available Information About the M&E System

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Stakeholders have the information they need to understand and contribute to the standards system's M&E programme.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The scheme owner shall ensure the following information is made publicly available: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A contact point for submission of any comments, questions or complaints about the M&E system; b. A description of the current scope and boundaries of the monitoring and evaluation system (5.2), and if appropriate, the plan for expansion (5.3); c. Procedures and opportunities for stakeholder engagement in the design and revision of the M&E system and the results of these consultations (6.2); d. An explanation of the scheme's strategies, intended outcomes and impacts, and the most significant unintended effects (7.1, 7.2, 7.3); e. A list of all indicators being used in the monitoring and evaluation system (8.1); and f. A list of completed, ongoing and planned outcome and impact evaluations (8.6). 	Having publicly available information about the M&E system is a baseline requirement. Of the list of required public information, those that relate to improvement criteria in the Code need not be made publicly available as a baseline requirement.

Clause 10.2 Transparency of Evaluations

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Stakeholders have access to the conclusions of outcome and impact evaluations and are able to judge the quality of these studies.	1. The scheme owner shall make the results of outcome and impact evaluations publicly available, either by providing access to the full final reports of these studies or by providing public summaries.	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The scheme owner shall ensure that <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. public summaries of outcome and impact evaluations are accurate summaries of the original reports; and b. they include at least the evaluation questions, a description of the methodology employed, the positive and negative conclusions, and the recommendations contained in those reports. 	

Clause 10.3 Substantiating Claims

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Claims made about the results achieved by the standards system are accurate and are not overstated.	1. The scheme owner shall ensure that claims made in any reports or statements that it issues about the outcomes and impacts of the standards system are accurate and linked to actual findings and conclusions from performance monitoring or outcome and impact evaluations.	Describing the contribution the standards system makes towards impact, rather than attributing impact directly to the standards system is one way to ensure claims about attribution are not overstated. Documentation of conformance with this requirement could include a description of procedures in place and/or assignment of responsibility to check claims or statements made by the scheme itself (e.g. in publications or on website) about its outcomes and impacts.

Clause 10.4 Increased Transparency, Public Access, and Engagement

Desired Outcome	Requirement	Guidance
Aspirational Good Practice		
Stakeholders have more complete information about the impact and effectiveness of standards systems. They are better able to scrutinise the M&E system and provide feedback	1. The scheme owner shall plan to increase levels of transparency over time and to make additional outputs of the M&E system publicly available, for example by publicly tracking performance monitoring indicators and making annual performance monitoring reports publicly available.	
	2. The scheme owner shall put mechanisms in place to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. encourage stakeholders, peers and the scientific community to scrutinise results and findings; and b. make comments received about results or reports publicly available. 	
	3. When commissioning an outcome or impact evaluation, the scheme owner shall publicly commit upfront to publish the full evaluation report.	



Appendix A: Compliance Criteria

Each of ISEAL’s Codes of Good Practice consists of a combination of baseline, improvement and aspirational criteria.

This distinction is relevant for ISEAL members showing compliance with the respective ISEAL Code:

- **Baseline criteria** are the minimum compliance requirements that standards systems need to meet to become an ISEAL Associate Member.
- **Improvement criteria** provide a learning framework that supports standards systems to improve over time and with which ISEAL members make a commitment to comply within one to three years, depending on the Code (three years for the Impacts Code).

- **Aspirational criteria** (optional good practice) are either new and innovative practices that can be implemented and tested by standards systems but for which compliance is not assessed, or are practices that new organisations might not be able to implement within the timeline for compliance.

All requirements from the Impacts Code are presented in the table below with an indication of the level of compliance required. Where all requirements under a given clause have the same level of compliance, only the clause is indicated:

Clause	Compliance Criteria
5. M&E System Requirements	
5.1 Monitoring and Evaluation System	Improvement
5.2.1 Scope and Boundaries of the M&E System	Baseline
5.2.2 Scope and Boundaries of the M&E System	Improvement
5.3 Plan for Expansion	Improvement
5.4 Resources	Baseline
5.5. Roles and Responsibilities	Baseline
5.6 Data Management	Improvement
5.7.1 Data Confidentiality and Use	Baseline
5.7.2 Data Confidentiality and Use	Baseline
5.8 Integrating M&E in the Organisation	Aspirational
5.9.1 Cooperation and Coordination	Aspirational
5.9.2 Cooperation and Coordination	Aspirational

Clause	Compliance Criteria
6. Stakeholder Engagement	
6.1 Stakeholder Identification	Baseline
6.2 Stakeholder Consultation	Improvement

Clause	Compliance Criteria
7. Defining the Intended Change	
7.1.1 Intended Impact and Outcomes	Baseline
7.1.2 Intended Impact and Outcomes	Baseline
7.2.1 Causal Pathways	Improvement
7.2.2 Causal Pathways	Improvement
7.3 Unintended Effects	Improvement
7.4 Influencing Factors	Aspirational

Clause	Compliance Criteria
8. Monitoring and Evaluation	
8.1 Performance Monitoring and Outcome and Impact Evaluation	Improvement
8.2.1 Indicators	Improvement
8.2.2 Indicators	Improvement
8.3.1 Performance Monitoring	Improvement
8.3.2 Performance Monitoring	Improvement
8.4 Quality Assurance for Performance Monitoring	Improvement
8.5.1 Outcome and Impact Evaluations	Improvement
8.5.2 Outcome and Impact Evaluations	Improvement
8.5.3 Outcome and Impact Evaluations	Improvement
8.6 Quality Assurance for Outcome and Impact Evaluations	Improvement
8.7 Monitoring and Evaluation Reports	Improvement
8.8 Indicator Alignment	Aspirational
8.9 Communication of Evaluation Results	Aspirational
8.10 Benefits of M&E for Entities Involved in the Standard System	Aspirational
8.11 Ethical Guidelines	Aspirational

Clause	Compliance Criteria
9. Learning and Improving	
9.1 Internalising Learning and Improving	Improvement
9.2 Improving M&E System Effectiveness	Improvement
9.3.1 Responding to and Using M&E Results	Aspirational
9.3.2 Responding to and Using M&E Results	Aspirational

Clause	Compliance Criteria
10. Transparency and Public Information	
10.1 Publicly Available Information	Baseline
10.2.1 Transparency of Evaluations	Baseline
10.2.2 Transparency of Evaluations	Baseline
10.3 Substantiating Claims	Improvement
10.4.1 Increased Transparency, Public Access, and Engagement	Aspirational
10.4.2 Increased Transparency, Public Access, and Engagement	Aspirational
10.4.3 Increased Transparency, Public Access, and Engagement	Aspirational





Our Cover

These colourful yarns are used in handmade rugs and carpets in South Asia. ISEAL member GoodWeave works to stop child labour in the carpet industry and to replicate its market-based approach in other sectors. © GoodWeave USA

Photography

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