Driving sustainability at scale

Strategy 2020

Who we are

ISEAL Alliance[1] represents the global movement of credible and innovative sustainability standards. We are committed to addressing the most pressing problems facing people and our planet. While our standards and systems take different forms, we share a commitment to credibility such as basing our work on inclusive consensus-based definitions of what sustainability looks like. As leaders in the sustainability movement, we know that the scale of global challenges requires an ambitious, collaborative response so we innovate and work with governments, businesses and NGOs to deliver innovative and effective solutions. Above all, we strive to achieve measured, proven impact on people and the environment.

Vision and mission

ISEAL's vision is a world in which social, environmental and economic sustainability is the normal condition of business.

The ISEAL Secretariat's mission is to strengthen sustainability standards for the benefit of people and the environment.

The challenge

The great challenge for sustainable standards today is to scale quickly, responding to concerns about our approach while maintaining credibility.

Sustainability standards are widely and increasingly used. They are recognised globally for catalysing improvements and operationalising sustainability. Yet despite impressive progress in several sectors, we have only moved part of the market. Looking ahead, we must adapt and collaborate to deliver greater value in emerging markets, in new sectors, and for millions of small enterprises.

At the same time, our systems are under scrutiny. Under increasing pressure to rapidly improve sustainability performance, companies are questioning the efficiency of our assurance and traceability systems and are exploring alternatives. Critics suggest that the costs of our multi-

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[1] Throughout this strategy the use of "ISEAL", "our" and "we" refers to all ISEAL members as well as the ISEAL Secretariat that serves those members. Where specific activities refer to the Secretariat's work, this has been noted as such.

stakeholder standard-setting model outweighs its value and some organisations are presenting less inclusive approaches as equivalent.

We must respond to these doubts or risk losing our leadership position. This will require innovative solutions that integrate new technologies and leverage collaboration.

The urgency with which companies are seeking solutions also opens opportunities for scaling up our approach. Businesses need credible approaches for delivering on their time-bound and issues-based commitments. We bring expertise in stakeholder engagement and in guiding and verifying change through our independent and transparent systems.

Similarly, governments and the finance sector are looking for new ways to drive enterprises to improve sustainability performance. Our systems can be used as proof of compliance with laws, in public procurement, or as frameworks for continuous improvement. Our convening power and stakeholder experience can catalyse collaborative, large-scale transformations around a sector, region or issue.

Sustainability standards have a critical role to play. We must step up and respond to the challenge of going to scale and the opportunities it brings.

Looking ahead – a vision for 2025

In 2025, credible and innovative sustainability standards, exemplified by ISEAL members, will deliver profound sustainability improvements to the world's most pressing problems. They will form the foundation for the global transition to a world in which social, environmental and economic sustainability is the normal condition of business.

Sustainability standards will be efficient, data-driven, and results-focused, providing a near real-time understanding of performance and risk*,* and will create measurable value for the full range of affected stakeholders, including the world's poor. They will meet producers and enterprises at their existing levels of performance and provide the incentives and support needed to drive improvement over time and at scale.

They will collaborate deeply with each other, and with governments, businesses and communities, to transform critical sectors and regions. They will be universally used, and globally recognised by businesses, governments, the finance sector and NGOs as innovative, relevant and impactful. Those same actors will create the conditions that enable standards to be used most effectively.

Our commitment as ISEAL

We aspire to be relevant, inclusive, collaborative and effective sustainability platforms that positively impact the world's most urgent problems. We understand that to achieve this we must significantly increase the effectiveness of our systems through innovation and collaboration, and harness our unique, core assets to drive sustainability at all levels, and at scale.

This means that we must:

- Define and embrace the evolving concept of credibility for standards and other sustainability tools, and more effectively communicate what credibility delivers.

- Measure our impact, our value throughout the supply chain, and the effectiveness of our systems, and use this information to drive continual improvement.

- Deepen collaboration among members, with our verified entities, and with other partners to find, test and offer solutions to both technical and sustainability challenges.

- Dramatically improve the standards model by innovating and evolving across all parts of our systems, from assurance to traceability to data quality to our own business models.

- Act as leaders and strong partners in transforming sectors, regions and supply chains.

ISEAL Secretariat's priorities to 2020

Between now and 2020, the ISEAL Secretariat will provide value to ISEAL members by supporting them in meeting the above commitment and working to advance our shared 2025 vision for the standards movement.

To this end, ISEAL has set four strategic priorities for the Secretariat in the coming period:

1. **Deliver credibility expertise**
2. **Measure and share impacts**
3. **Catalyse improvements and scalable solutions**
4. **Build support for credible standards**

Strategic Priorities

1. Deliver credibility expertise

Outcomes for ISEAL

By 2020, the ISEAL Secretariat will be globally recognised and respected within sustainability circles as experts on credible and effective sustainability standards. This recognition and expertise also extends to ISEAL members who embody ISEAL's Credibility Principles and Codes. The Credibility Principles will be seen as the foundation that informs the design of and choice between sustainability tools and initiatives. Standards systems around the world will use ISEAL's Codes to develop and improve their systems, and will look to ISEAL membership for a community of practice.

Major activity streams for the Secretariat

- Develop and deliver easily accessible information about Credibility Principles and credible practices for standards and other sustainability tools.

- Revise Credibility Principles, Codes, and guidance to capture evolving global understanding of what credibility looks like in practice while supporting improved effectiveness and innovation.

- Provide expertise and develop guidance to strengthen the credibility of innovative, collaborative initiatives that sustainability standards contribute to.

- Deliver generic and bespoke training on credible standards at a global scale to sustainability standards and tools and their users.

- Deliver a membership and compliance process that differentiates credible practices and standards, and delivers value to users.

- Review the structure of membership and the community to ensure that it continues to support strategic priorities and reflect the evolution in standards' models.

2. Measure and share impacts

Outcomes for ISEAL

By 2020, ISEAL will be the go-to source for trustworthy, compelling information about standards' impacts and business value. All members will confidently and publicly communicate high-quality evidence of our coverage and reach, business value, and our contribution to sustainability issues of concern in the sectors in which we operate.

Major activity streams for the Secretariat

- Strengthen the capacity of ISEAL members to measure their geographic coverage, reach, impacts and value to users, and to effectively, accurately and transparently communicate the evidence they produce.

- Foster strong relationships with the research community to assist in building a body of independent, high quality research to fill evidence gaps.

- Develop and maintain an authoritative web site to provide easy access to evidence about standards impacts and the business case for standards.

- Synthesize evidence and produce messaging and communications products targeted to key audiences who use or are contemplating using or supporting standards.

- Periodically refresh understanding of the information needs and preferences of supply chain businesses and other audiences critical to delivery of this strategy and use this understanding to inform implementation.

3. Catalyse improvements and scalable solutions

Outcomes for ISEAL

By 2020, the ISEAL Secretariat will have a proven track record of catalysing innovations and improvements. ISEAL members will have created new value through increased accessibility, better use of data and technology, and a real-time understanding of risk and performance. We will demonstrate our value as partners through a few high impact collaborations to address critical issues or work towards transforming sectors, regions and supply chains.

Major activity streams for the Secretariat

- Provide analysis on changes in the sustainability landscape and emerging scalable solutions and tools, to inform members' strategies and influence critical conversations about the role of sustainability standards in that landscape.

- Stimulate innovative thinking and collaboration through dialogue and exchange between standards and outside experts and organisations, and through the adoption of a systems learning approach.

- Provide incentives and funding to catalyse collaboration and change by ISEAL members; enabling them to develop, test and share innovations.

- Deepen understanding of what verified entities expect from standards by engaging them in how standards need to adapt to deliver improved value.

- Facilitate a limited number of high-profile member-driven collaborations aimed at developing or supporting scalable solutions on a topic, or in a sector or region.

4. Build support for credible standards

Outcomes for ISEAL

By 2020, ISEAL will have built strong and broad support for standards with governments, the finance sector, influential NGOs, companies and intergovernmental agencies, with a focus on developing at least one country in each region to serve as inspiration and influence hubs. The sustainability dialogue in these regions will highlight the positive aspects and impacts of credible standards and their role as valued partners in sustainability solutions at scale.

Major activity streams for the Secretariat

- Harness opportunities for both Secretariat and member experts to engage important audiences in targeted geographies on topics of relevance to them through hosting conferences, training workshops, symposia, webinars and other speaking engagements.

- Develop communications content and equip Secretariat staff, ISEAL members and trusted ambassadors to deliver compelling information and key messages to target audiences.

- Support businesses to deepen commitments to standards through providing tailored training, joint projects, issue engagement or opportunities to publicly demonstrate their support.

- Develop and disseminate information and guidance to targeted government agencies that highlights the synergies between policy objectives and credible standards.

- Collaborate with UN bodies, and the finance sector to support their understanding and use of credible standards in policies, programmes and products.

- Build partnerships with leading NGOs to identify and act on shared sustainability objectives, and engage their support for credible standards.