EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CREATING SHARED VALUE

How sustainability standards can learn from interoperability in the metals, minerals and mining sectors
Creating shared value

Executive summary

This report offers lessons learned on how interoperability of sustainability standards in the metals, minerals and metals (MMM) sectors can help standards systems in other sectors. In particular, it explores how MMM, forestry and agriculture standards can enhance collaboration and improve sustainability impacts through interoperability.

BACKGROUND ON MMM SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS

The metals, mineral and mining (MMM) sectors are a highly diverse collection of industries with different supply and demand dynamics, operating in a world of finite resources and increasing complexity.

As a response, a comprehensive range of MMM sustainability standards have emerged. Within this, the key concept of ‘interoperability’ is already being widely discussed across MMM standards and their stakeholders as an essential part of driving impact – indeed, many MMM standards organisations are leaders in interoperability, with others moving from opportunistic interoperability to integrating it into their strategic plans and operations.

As standards find themselves overlapping in their operations with regard to geographical areas, sectors and supply chains, the calls from their stakeholders to consider working together, recognising one another, or even harmonising their standards and schemes, have increased.

The report is the result of research carried out by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the ISEAL Alliance, with independent experts Aimee Russillo and Christine Carey authoring the report and conducting the bulk of the research. A literature review, interviews and surveys were conducted with a range of people working with MMM sustainability initiatives, with findings added to the outputs from four face-to-face Theory of Change (ToC) workshops, to form the findings and recommendations. The research also integrates cross-sector learning from more established agricultural and forestry standards.

WHAT IS INTEROPERABILITY?

Interoperability is defined as the degree to which diverse systems, organisations and individuals are able to work together to achieve a common goal. Drivers to increase interoperability include responding to market demand, seeking efficiencies for end users, and cost savings for the scheme. Interoperability presents opportunities to engage with both upstream and downstream actors as well as governments and other interested stakeholders.

In addition, we explore a detailed Theory of Change model to help standards identify opportunities for interoperability. Findings indicate that:

- Developing a ToC is a way for individual organisations to examine their own strategy and determine where interoperability would help achieve their end goals.
- Individual organisational ToCs (or strategic plans) can be shared as an easy way to ‘get to know one another’. The idea of using a ToC as a way of speed dating could be a quick win.
- ToCs can be mapped within a generalised sector framework to help show areas of overlap and complementarity or gaps to be relevant for existing standards.

The research revealed several learnings and recommendations:

- Start with areas that are broadly relevant, but not too contentious across stakeholders.
- Having clear formalised objectives and expectations is important. Clarity and agreement on what can be adapted and changed, acknowledgement and communication is critical.
Timing is everything. The most significant steps and most effective time to embed interoperability is in the initial stages of a standard development or during revisions.

Joint activities or information sharing can be a first step in a recognition process to build trust and understanding of each other’s systems.

Understanding what is happening at the field level is key.

Finding complementary positions in the supply chain offers good opportunities to work together, rather than compete.

Interoperability takes time and resources.

**Recommendations:**

The first step towards interoperability is to have a clear idea of the objectives and strategies of the different standards.

The next step is to get senior-level, organisational and stakeholder buy-in. With a clear value proposition, this will be easier (but perhaps not easy). The overwhelming advice is to start small, build trust and be creative.

Interoperability should be considered strategically in the development of or revision of standards, new tools and approaches.

It is also important to find common ground in a non-competitive space to add value. There is strong interest in having a space for sharing and learning across initiatives. There is also interest from the MMM sector for collaboration with other sectors, such as agriculture and forestry, on topics that are relevant (e.g. free, prior and informed consent).

Finally, interoperability is not just about standards working together, but about leveraging the diversity of stakeholders, expertise, coverage and approaches of the individual standards to create a more responsible sector.

**What will future standards systems look like?**

We are certain interoperability will play a key role.