

# Learning workshop 1 – remote auditing

## Summary

The first learning workshop of the ISEAL remote auditing project, supported by IDH took place on 17 September 2020. We had some very interesting discussions throughout and we wanted to provide a summary of the thoughts and reflections that came out of our discussions.

In the break-out sessions, we tried to discuss some very tricky topic areas that have arisen as challenging since remote auditing became the new normal.

- How to determine the eligibility of remote audits?
- How to audit social responsibility requirements?
- How to ensure the quality and credibility of remote audits?

We are under no illusions that any of these areas can be considered solved at this point, and all require further thought, more collaborations and experimentation as we continue to adapt to the situation that COVID has forced upon us.

But in our discussions, some themes for potential collaborative solutions were highlighted.

- For instance, on the topic of determining eligibility for remote audits, data sharing across organizations and relevant sectors on such areas like risk ratings. This could lead to the development of common risk criteria on health issues and maybe on compliance risks (blended with internal and external data).
- Or at a simpler level, that agreements are reached on which external indices of risk and other relevant analyses should be used to inform decision making across organizations, and forming a common baseline for decision making.
- Developing shared decision making trees to determine when and where and under what circumstances remote audits, vs on-site vs partially remote audits are most applicable was also discussed. Where consistent and pragmatic decisions balancing the risk of health vs the risk of non-compliance are both taken into account.
- Moving to consistent data feeds to inform decision making was also brought up but recognized to be somewhat difficult to implement in the short-term. But it was recognized that on-site audits conducted once every year, can come with drawbacks as well. The level of detail you can acquire may not be enough or at the right frequency for the sustainability and compliance issue, you are wanting to mitigate. If there is a way to get data at a more consistent basis, leading to a more comprehensive picture of risk and performance, this could allow for a whole new model of oversight. Not to mention other positive impacts that could occur from this, such as vastly reduced environmental footprints from not travelling.

That said, the persistence of the very unfortunate situation that we have found ourselves in has additionally meant;

- Many standards initially made 6-month derogations to some or all of their compliance requirements, now decisions on further extensions or even suspensions are needing to be made.
- Audit back-logs and a reduced auditor capacity
- The continued uncertainty and the ever-changing landscape of national advice means that standard setters and certified clients can have different opinions on whether audits should take place
- The use of technological solutions across organizations are increasing and the ease of some interactive tools like Zoom, have been much appreciated by both standard setters, auditors and clients. But for some areas, like social auditing, there is still uncertainty on whether technology and data can fill the gaps left by physical audits and the effectiveness of some existing tools, such as Worker Voice applications, remains in question.

With the growing recognition that we are all in this for a longer haul than initially expected, our second Workshop will build on everything we have learned so far and as a theme, will focus on how we can move our solutions from the short to the long-term. In other words, how can we capitalize on the innovations we have seen so far, and if remote or partially remote audits are to become the new normal, how do we make those solutions as good as possible.