

ISEAL Credibility Principles revision: V1.2 consultation draft



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Introduction



ISEAL Credibility Principles

Since launching in 2013, ISEAL's Credibility Principles have become an international reference for the foundations of credible practice for sustainability standards.

The Credibility Principles are intended to define and communicate the core values of credible and effective sustainability systems — improving the delivery of sustainability impacts. While they inform the development and revision of ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice and guidance materials, they are not intended to serve as a normative reference.

A review of the principles in 2019 determined that they need to be revised to ensure they remain relevant in our changing sustainability landscape.

The revision process involves two rounds of consultation on the revised principles in 2020 before the final revised version will be published in 2021.

Current stage of the Credibility Principles revision: Second round of consultation

This document presents stakeholders with the second draft of revised Credibility Principles (version 1.2). This draft is open for consultation from 16 November to 18 December 2020.

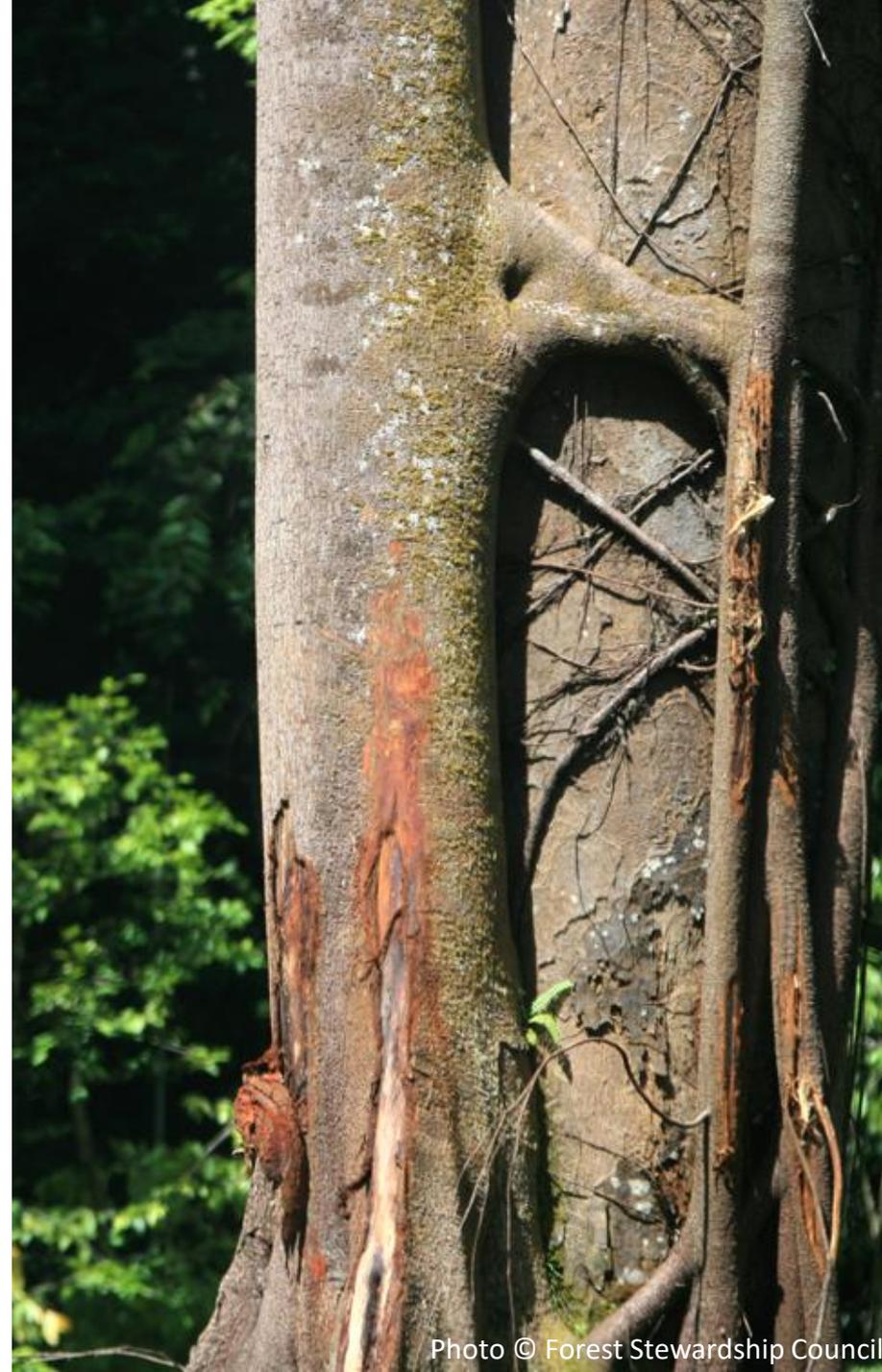
The draft proposed is informed by extensive feedback received during the first round of consultation on version 1.1 that took place in May to July 2020 and the earlier review of the principles.

Following review of this draft, you can [provide comments here](#).

You can find more information about consultation feedback and review findings on the [consultation webpage](#) or email consultation@isealalliance.org.

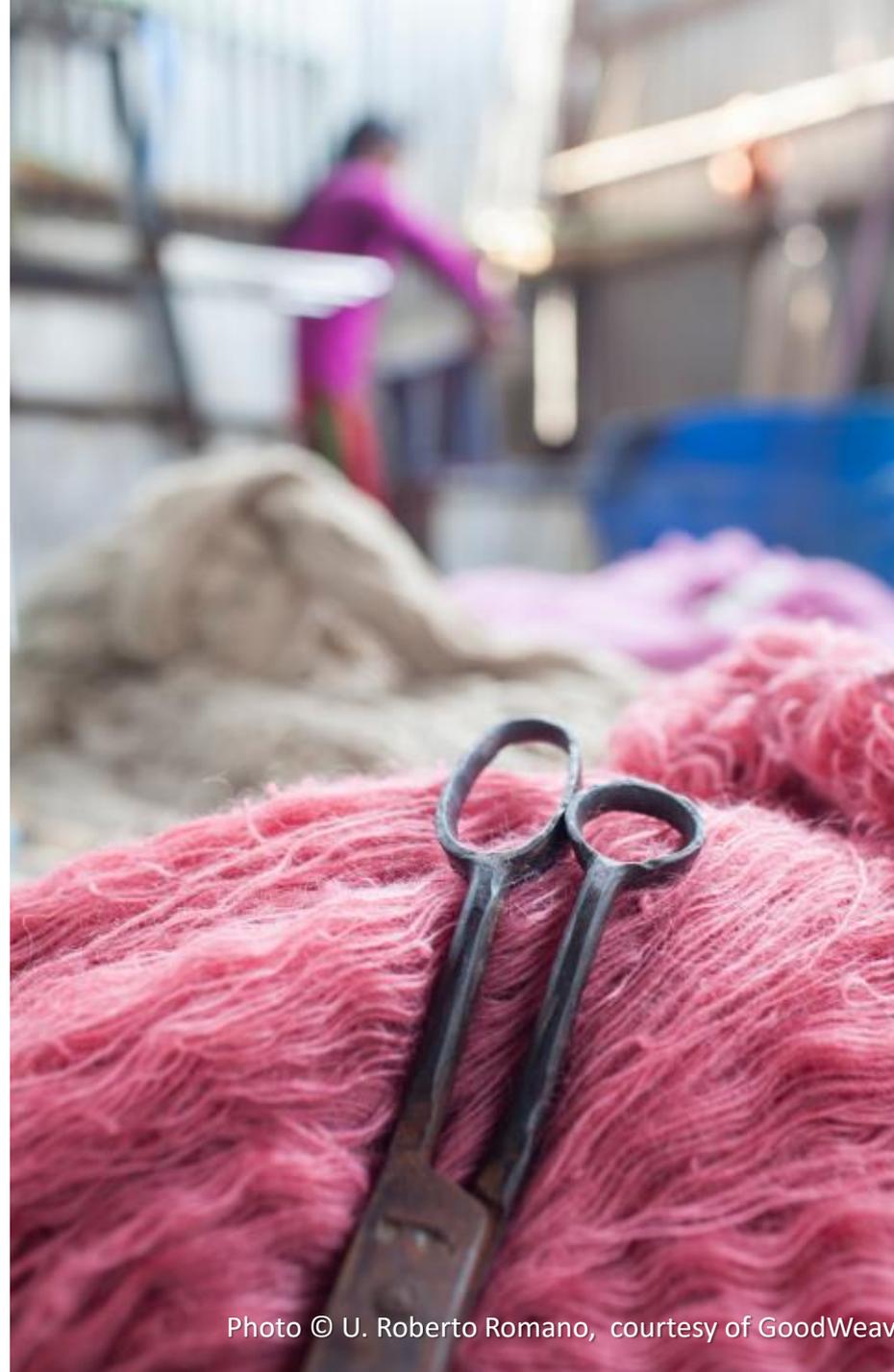
Aims of the revision

- › Update the Credibility Principles:
 - to extend the scope of the principles to a wider range of sustainability systems and tools, and
 - to reflect changes and anticipated future developments in the sustainability landscape
- › Improve the Credibility Principles as a communications tool
- › Clarify the role of the Credibility Principles as desired outcomes of the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice



Opportunities for stakeholder involvement

- › Complete our [online survey](#)
 - 2nd round: 16 November to 18 December 2020
- › Participate in our [consultation webinars](#)
- › Sign up to our [mailing list](#) to be kept informed about the revision process
- › Promote the consultation amongst your networks



Proposal



Definitions (1/2)

Sustainability: Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability has three interdependent dimensions: social, environmental and economic.

Tool: Standards and similar initiatives that define sustainability performance levels or improvement pathways.

System: The collective set of decisions and activities carried out by an organisation to establish a standard or a similar tool; to measure, monitor or verify performance or progress against this tool; and to allow for claims.

Organisation (also known as scheme owner): The organisation responsible for the credibility, effectiveness, impacts and uptake of the system.

Strategies: The approaches and activities that the organisation applies to create change.

Impacts: Long-term direct or indirect effects, which can be positive or negative, intended or unintended.

Outcomes: Short-term and medium-term results.

Sustainability objectives: Intended outcomes and impacts.

Definitions (2/2)

Remediation: Effectively redressing negative impacts (including cumulative or historic negative impacts).

Data quality: The degree to which data is valid (i.e., the data measures what is intended to be measured) and is fit for its intended use. Note: data can be qualitative or quantitative.

Users: Businesses and other entities (including producers and groups of producers) who implement or adopt standards or tools.

Stakeholders (also known as interested parties): Individuals or groups who are interested in or who will be affected by the decisions or activities of the organisation. Stakeholders also include parties with protected interests such as rightsholders.

Disadvantaged stakeholders: Individuals or groups who will be disproportionately affected when compared to their capability to participate in an organisation's activities or decision-making.

Competence: The quality of having sufficient knowledge, judgment, or skill for a particular duty.

Claims: Promotional communications made by the organisation or by users; this includes business-to-business or business-to-consumer communications.

Credibility Principles V1.2 (1/7)

Sustainability impacts

The organisation has a clear sustainability purpose that is focused on driving positive sustainability impacts and eliminating or remediating negative impacts.

The organisation defines and clearly communicates its scope of responsibility, its specific sustainability objectives, and its strategies for achieving these objectives (its theory of change).

The organisation's system focuses on the most significant or material sustainability impacts and outcomes in its scope; it reflects current scientific evidence and relevant international norms; and is adapted to local or sectoral conditions where this can improve its impact.

Why is it important? The organisation intends to make a difference where it matters.

Credibility Principles V1.2 (2/7)

Accuracy

The organisation's tools can be consistently implemented and assessed.

The organisation ensures competent and accurate assessments of users' performance as it relates to its tools, and it ensures that these assessments support the claims it allows users to make.

Why is it important? Assessments of users' performance can be trusted.

Measurable progress

The organisation's tools define performance levels or improvement pathways that result in users' measurable progress towards the organisation's sustainability objectives.

The organisation collects reliable and verifiable data and evidence to accurately measure and demonstrate the progress its users make towards the organisation's sustainability objectives.

Why is it important? The organisation and its stakeholders know if and how the organisation is making a difference.

Credibility Principles V1.2 (3/7)

Collaboration

The organisation understands the context in which it operates and recognises that systemic change is complex and requires collaboration, which it pursues with openness and respect.

The organisation actively reduces duplication of efforts. When it has common sustainability objectives, it seeks collaboration with public, private and civil society actors as well as other sustainability systems. It establishes partnerships and shares learnings to create efficiencies and/or improve its outcomes and impacts.

Why is it important? It is a prerequisite for lasting, systemic change.

Credibility Principles V1.2 (4/7)

Added value

The organisation recognises that all users share responsibility for achieving sustainability objectives and that implementing sustainability tools comes at a cost. It strives to create benefits that fairly reward users' efforts.

The organisation is accessible and does not unfairly burden producers. It operates efficiently, reducing barriers to implementation.

The organisation supports users to access reliable markets and resources (such as capacity-building or financial resources), to manage risks and build resilience, and to monitor and improve sustainability performance.

Why is it important? It supports uptake of the organisation's tools.

Credibility Principles V1.2 (5/7)

Stakeholder Engagement

The organisation identifies its stakeholders and operates in a way that is accountable to them. It involves a balanced and representative group of stakeholders in decisions that will affect them.

The organisation is non-discriminatory and inclusive. It makes particular efforts to understand the context and perspectives of disadvantaged stakeholders and ensure their participation in decision-making.

It provides clear and transparent feedback on stakeholder input or concerns and has fair, impartial and accessible mechanisms for resolving complaints and conflicts.

Why is it important? When stakeholders are empowered to participate, their input ensures that the organisation's sustainability objectives reflect the issues that matter most.

Credibility Principles V1.2 (6/7)

Continual improvement

The organisation regularly reviews the performance of its system, its objectives and strategies, evaluating the impacts and outcomes of its activities, and applying the lessons learned to improve its system and its tools.

The organisation responds to new evidence, to stakeholder input and to changes in its operating environment, adapting its strategies to improve its impacts.

Why is it important? It ensures the system remains fit-for-purpose over time.

Impartiality

The organisation is committed to impartiality. It identifies, avoids and mitigates conflicts of interest throughout its governance and operations, particularly as concerns its oversight of users' performance. Transparency, accessibility and balanced representation contribute to impartiality.

Why is it important? The organisation's integrity can be trusted.

Credibility Principles V1.2 (7/7)

Truthfulness

If the organisation makes claims, or allows users to make claims, these are clear, relevant and verifiable — enabling an informed choice.

Claims are proportional to the nature of the system, reflecting the scope and design of the system. Claims about sustainability impacts are substantiated with data and evidence.

Why is it important? The organisation's claims and communications can be trusted.

Transparency

While protecting confidential and private information, the organisation makes important information publicly available.

The organisation makes this information easily accessible, so that stakeholders can understand and evaluate the system and its impacts. They have the information they need to actively participate in decisions or raise concerns.

Why is it important? By enabling stakeholders to understand how decisions are made or results achieved, the organisation's decisions and processes can be trusted.

Annexes



Annex A: Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Sustainability impacts

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Sustainability impacts</p> <p>The organisation has a clear sustainability purpose that is focused on driving positive sustainability impacts and eliminating or remediating negative impacts.</p> <p>The organisation defines and clearly communicates its scope of responsibility, its specific sustainability objectives, and its strategies for achieving these objectives (its theory of change).</p> <p>The organisation’s system focuses on the most significant or material sustainability impacts and outcomes in its scope; it reflects current scientific evidence and relevant international norms; and is adapted to local or sectoral conditions where this can improve its impact.</p> <p>Why is it important? The organisation intends to make a difference where it matters.</p>	<p>Negative impacts and remediation are referenced in Sustainability impacts rather than in Measurable progress</p>	<p>Sustainability impacts</p> <p>The organisation is focused on driving positive sustainability impacts.</p> <p>The organisation defines and clearly communicates its sustainability objectives and its strategies for achieving these objectives.</p> <p>The organisation’s system focuses on the most significant sustainability impacts and outcomes; reflects current scientific evidence and relevant international norms; and is adapted to local or sectoral conditions where this is necessary to improve its potential impact.</p>	<p>Sustainability and Relevance are aggregated.</p> <p>The proposal has a greater focus on positive impact. Otherwise, no significant change</p>	<p>Sustainability: 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>Relevance: Standards are fit for purpose. They address the most significant sustainability impacts of a product, process, business or service; only include requirements that contribute to their objectives; reflect best scientific understanding and relevant international norms; and are adapted where necessary to local conditions.</p>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Accuracy

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Accuracy</p> <p>The organisation's tools can be consistently implemented and assessed.</p> <p>The organisation ensures competent and accurate assessments of users' performance as it relates to its tools, and it ensures that these assessments support the claims it allows users to make.</p> <p>Why is it important? Assessments of users' performance can be trusted.</p>	<p>Clarified, and link to claims specified</p> <p>Placement of the principle adjusted for improved logical flow</p>	<p>Accuracy</p> <p>The organisation's system produces accurate assessments of users' performance.</p> <p>The implementation of the organisation's tools, and the assessments carried out against these, are consistent and competent.</p>	<p>Disaggregated from "Rigour"; reframed to focus on consistency and competency.</p>	<p>Rigour (partial): ...assessments of compliance provide an accurate picture of whether an entity meets the standard's requirements.</p>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Measurable progress

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Measurable progress</p> <p>The organisation's tools define performance levels or improvement pathways that result in users' measurable progress towards the organisation's sustainability objectives.</p> <p>The organisation collects reliable and verifiable data and evidence to accurately measure and demonstrate the progress its users make towards expected sustainability objectives.</p> <p>Why is it important? The organisation and its stakeholders know if and how the organisation is making a difference.</p>	<p>Reference to remediation now included in Sustainability impacts</p> <p>The reference to data is clarified</p>	<p>Measurable progress</p> <p>Users' application of the standard or tool results in remediation of harm and measurable progress towards the organisation's sustainability objectives.</p> <p>The organisation collects high quality data and evidence that allows it to accurately measure and demonstrate the progress its users make towards expected sustainability outcomes and impacts.</p>	<p>Disaggregated from Rigour</p> <p>Updated to reflect the importance of both remediation and high quality data</p>	<p>Rigour (partial): ...standards are set at a performance level that results in measurable progress towards the scheme's sustainability objectives...</p>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Collaboration

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Collaboration</p> <p>The organisation understands the context in which it operates and recognises that systemic change is complex and requires collaboration, which it pursues with openness and respect.</p> <p>The organisation actively reduces duplication of efforts. When it has common sustainability objectives, it seeks collaboration with public, private and civil society actors as well as other sustainability systems. It establishes partnerships and shares learnings to create efficiencies and/or improve its outcomes and impacts.</p> <p>Why is it important? It is a prerequisite for lasting, systemic change.</p>	<p>The intent of the principle is clarified and strengthened</p>	<p>Collaboration</p> <p>The organisation recognises that system-wide change requires collaboration and partnership.</p> <p>It understands the broader context in which it operates and collaborates with other actors where this creates efficiency or improves results against its sustainability objectives.</p>	<p>Disaggregated from “Efficiency”</p> <p>Updated to reflect collaboration and systemic change.</p>	<p>Efficiency (partial): Standards systems refer to or collaborate with other credible schemes to improve consistency and efficiency in standards content and operating practices...</p>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Added value

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Added value</p> <p>The organisation recognises that sustainability comes at a cost and that all users share responsibility for achieving sustainability objectives. It strives to create benefits that fairly reward users' efforts.</p> <p>The organisation is accessible and does not unfairly burden producers. It operates efficiently, reducing barriers to implementation.</p> <p>The organisation supports users to access reliable markets and resources (such as capacity-building or financial resources), to manage risks and build resilience, and to monitor and improve sustainability performance.</p> <p>Why is it important? It supports uptake of the organisation's tools.</p>	<p>The intent of the principle is clarified and strengthened</p> <p>The continued importance of accessibility as a necessary condition of added value is made clearer</p>	<p>Added value</p> <p>The organisation strives to create value for all users of its tools.</p> <p>It operates efficiently and reduces barriers to implementation, supporting users to access resources, manage risks, and monitor performance.</p>	<p>Updated to focus on added value rather than reduction of barriers</p>	<p>Accessibility: To reduce barriers to implementation, standards systems minimise costs and overly burdensome requirements. They facilitate access to information about meeting the standard, training, and financial resources to build capacity throughout supply chains and for actors within the standards system.</p> <p>Efficiency (partial): ...They improve their viability through the application of sound revenue models and organisational management strategies.</p>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Stakeholder engagement

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Stakeholder Engagement</p> <p>The organisation identifies its stakeholders and operates in a way that is accountable to them. It involves a balanced and representative group of stakeholders in decisions that will affect them.</p> <p>The organisation is non-discriminatory and inclusive. It makes particular efforts to understand the context and perspectives of disadvantaged stakeholders and ensure their participation in decision-making.</p> <p>It provides clear and transparent feedback on stakeholder input or concerns and has fair, impartial and accessible mechanisms for resolving complaints and conflicts.</p> <p>Why is it important? When stakeholders are empowered to participate, their input ensures that the organisation's sustainability objectives reflect the issues that matter most.</p>	<p>The intent of the principle is clarified and strengthened</p> <p>Specific references to non-discrimination and inclusion added</p>	<p>Stakeholder Engagement</p> <p>The organisation is accountable to its stakeholders and meaningfully involves them in decisions that will affect them. It makes particular efforts to engage disadvantaged stakeholders and has fair mechanisms for resolving conflicts.</p>	<p>No significant change</p>	<p>Engagement: Standards-setters engage a balanced and representative group of stakeholders in standards development. Standards systems provide meaningful and accessible opportunities to participate in governance, assurance and monitoring and evaluation. They empower stakeholders with fair mechanisms to resolve complaints.</p>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Continual improvement

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Continual improvement</p> <p>The organisation regularly reviews the performance of its system, its objectives and strategies, evaluating the impacts and outcomes of its activities, and applying the lessons learned to improve its system and its tools.</p> <p>The organisation responds to new evidence, to stakeholder input and to changes in its operating environment, adapting its strategies to improve its impacts.</p> <p>Why is it important? It ensures the system remains fit-for-purpose over time.</p>	<p>Renamed from Improvement to Continual improvement</p> <p>The purpose of innovating and adapting is clarified</p> <p>Placement of the principle adjusted for improved logical flow</p>	<p>Improvement</p> <p>The organisation is committed to continual improvement.</p> <p>It regularly reviews the performance of its system and evaluates the impacts of its tools, applying the learnings to improve both its system and its tools.</p> <p>The organisation also tests, evaluates and integrates new ideas and approaches to improve its impacts.</p>	<p>Updated to make clear that improvement relates to both the system itself and the standards or tools.</p>	<p>Improvement: 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>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Impartiality

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Impartiality</p> <p>The organisation is committed to impartiality. It identifies, avoids and mitigates conflicts of interest throughout its governance and operations, particularly as concerns its oversight of users' performance. Transparency, accessibility and balanced representation contribute to impartiality.</p> <p>Why is it important? The organisation's integrity can be trusted.</p>	<p>The earlier specificity of v1 is reintroduced</p>	<p>Impartiality</p> <p>The organisation is committed to impartiality and mitigates conflicts of interest throughout its operations.</p>	<p>No significant change.</p>	<p>Impartiality: Standards systems identify and mitigate conflicts of interest throughout their operations, particularly in the assurance process and in governance. Transparency, accessibility and balanced representation contribute to impartiality.</p>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Truthfulness

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Truthfulness</p> <p>If the organisation makes claims, or allows users to make claims, these are clear, relevant and verifiable – enabling an informed choice.</p> <p>Claims are proportional to the nature of the system, reflecting the scope and design of the system. Claims about sustainability impacts are substantiated with data and evidence.</p> <p>Why is it important? The organisation's claims and communications can be trusted.</p>	<p>Some earlier specificity of v1 is reintroduced and the meaning of proportional claims is clarified</p>	<p>Truthfulness</p> <p>If the organisation makes claims, or allows users to make claims, these are clear and truthful.</p> <p>Claims are proportional to the nature of the system. Claims about sustainability impacts are substantiated.</p>	<p>Minor update to capture the idea of proportionality.</p> <p>Minor update to ensure that the scope includes claims made by the system and claims allowed by the system.</p>	<p>Truthfulness: 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 certified product or service are verifiable, not misleading, and enable an informed choice.</p>

Principles of V1.2 presented with change log

Transparency

V1.2	Main changes from V1.1 to V1.2	V1.1	Main changes from V1 to V1.1	V1
<p>Transparency</p> <p>While protecting confidential and private information, the organisation makes important information publicly available.</p> <p>The organisation makes this information easily accessible, and stakeholders can understand and evaluate the system and its impacts. They have the information they need to actively participate in decisions or raise concerns.</p> <p>Why is it important? By enabling stakeholders to understand how decisions are made or results achieved, the organisation's decisions and processes can be trusted.</p>	<p>Reference to the balance between data privacy and transparency added</p> <p>The purpose of ensuring stakeholders understand the information available is made clearer</p>	<p>Transparency</p> <p>The organisation makes important information publicly available and easily accessible to its stakeholders.</p> <p>The organisation supports users and stakeholders to understand and evaluate the system and its impacts, providing them the information they need to engage.</p>	<p>No significant change.</p>	<p>Transparency: 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>

Annex B: Credibility Principles Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Credibility Principles were updated following the review and approved by the ISEAL Board in December 2019.

Scope

- › The Credibility Principles apply to the full scope of operations and governance of sustainability standards and related systems.**
- › They are also relevant to a wide range of actors in their engagement with and evaluation of sustainability systems.

Objectives

- › The Credibility Principles define and communicate the core values of credible and effective sustainability systems, improving the delivery of sustainability impacts.
- › They inform the development and revision of ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice and guidance materials.
- › They are not intended to serve as a normative reference.

**Related systems includes standards-like initiatives that define sustainability performance levels or improvement pathways; that measure, monitor or verify performance or progress; and that allow for claims.