



## ISEAL Credibility Principles: Summary of changes from version 1 to version 2

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### Introduction

The ISEAL Credibility Principles define the core values of credible and effective sustainability systems and provide the foundations for systems to deliver greater impact. Since their first publication in 2013, the principles have become an international reference for good practice.

In June 2021, ISEAL published version 2 of the principles following extensive global consultation, guided by an international multi-stakeholder Steering Group with oversight from ISEAL's Technical Committee. This document presents a summary of the changes made from version 1 to version 2 of the ISEAL Credibility Principles.

The revision improved the Credibility Principles as a communications tool, while clarifying the role of the principles as desired outcomes of the Codes of Good Practice. The revision also updated the principles so that:

- › they apply to both standards and a wider range of sustainability systems
- › they reflect changes and anticipated future developments in the sustainability landscape

### General changes

A number of overall changes were made (as compared to version 1) to broaden the scope of the principles and improve their communications value:

- To introduce a more dynamic approach to guidance, the consultation addressed the core definitions for each principle from version 1 (i.e., reflecting the "Credibility Principles - At a Glance" text and excluding the further guidance that was provided in version 1). This will allow for separate guidance that can be easily updated, including to reflect revised Code content.
- The principles have been reordered to better tell a logical narrative.
- The principles are presented in plain English, reducing the use of technical terms as much as possible. Definitions have been provided when necessary, but the aim has been to avoid an over-reliance on these.
- Language that limited the scope to standards and certification schemes was updated.
- The principles are presented in positive language (i.e., what you can do instead of what you can't do) as much as possible (the few exceptions relate to framing that carries particular meaning for stakeholders).
- The principles are presented in descriptive rather than prescriptive language and excludes details that are more appropriate to Code requirements or further guidance.

## Main substantive changes

The main substantive changes to the principles made through the process (as compared to version 1).

- There is a greater focus on impacts, where this includes driving positive impacts, remediating negative impacts, and contributing to systemic impacts. This is reflected in the renaming of “Sustainability” to “Sustainability impacts” and the incorporation of “Relevance” from version 1 within this revised principle.
- Collaboration has been elevated to the level of a principle (whereas in version 1 it was embedded as a concept within “Efficiency”).
- Value creation has been added as a new principle. This makes a more direct link to uptake and the business case for participating in a system while also incorporating content from the previous principle “Accessibility” and elements from “Efficiency” that are not captured in “Collaboration.”
- Measurable progress has been added as a new principle. This incorporates concepts from “Rigour” in version 1 and builds on this to talk about the importance of collecting and analysing quality data.
- “Stakeholder engagement” now includes references to inclusion and non-discrimination and speaks to the need to include previously under-represented and under-engaged stakeholders.
- “Transparency” now acknowledges the need to balance transparency with privacy considerations.
- Content from “Rigour” in version 1 is reframed as “Reliability” and emphasises the importance of consistency, competence, and accuracy.
- “Truthfulness” is updated to clarify that scope includes the system’s claims and the claims it allows users to make while also more directly addressing what “not misleading” means.
- “Improvement” is reframed as “Continual improvement” and is clearer that the scope includes both the system and its tools.

## Side-by-side comparison of versions 1 and 2 with a summary of the main changes

V2 (final draft)	Main changes from V1 to V2	V1
<p><b>Sustainability impacts</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system makes a difference where it matters.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system has a clear purpose to drive positive social, environmental, and economic impacts and to eliminate or remediate negative impacts. It defines and clearly communicates its scope, its specific sustainability objectives, and its strategies for achieving these objectives (its theory of change). The system focuses on the significant sustainability impacts in its scope. It seeks to address the root causes of sustainability issues and deliver wider or systemic impacts. It reflects current</p>	<p>“Relevance” is aggregated within “Sustainability” and this is reframed as “Sustainability impacts”.</p> <p>There is specific reference to positive impacts, the remediation of negative impacts, and contributions to systemic impacts.</p> <p>The three dimensions of sustainability are specified.</p>	<p><b>Sustainability:</b> 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><b>Relevance:</b> 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>

<p>scientific evidence and international norms when relevant. It is adapted to local or sector-specific conditions where this helps improve impact.</p>		
<p><b>Collaboration</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system works with others to create change.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system identifies governments, businesses, and civil society organisations, including other sustainability systems, that are working towards shared sustainability objectives. It actively seeks alignment and respectfully pursues collaboration with others. It establishes partnerships and shares learnings to improve its efficiency and its direct or systemic impacts.</p>	<p>“Collaboration” is disaggregated from “Efficiency”.</p> <p>Updated to focus on improving both impacts and efficiencies.</p> <p>The qualities that make a system collaborative are also addressed.</p>	<p><b>Efficiency (part 1):</b> Standards systems refer to or collaborate with other credible schemes to improve consistency and efficiency in standards content and operating practices...</p>
<p><b>Value creation</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system adds value.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system strives to create value that fairly rewards the effort and resources that it takes for users to participate in the system. It has a viable business model, and it operates efficiently, minimising costs for users and reaching more users by reducing other barriers to access. It supports users to implement its tools, and it empowers users by demonstrating a clear business case for participating in its system.</p>	<p>“Accessibility” is now a necessary condition for value creation. “Value creation” also draws some content from “Efficiency”.</p> <p>There is a link made between the business case and incentives for participation and the uptake of the tool.</p> <p>Specific examples of support are deleted.</p>	<p><b>Accessibility:</b> 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><b>Efficiency (part 2):</b> ...They improve their viability through the application of sound revenue models and organisational management strategies.</p>
<p><b>Measurable progress</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system can demonstrate the difference it is making.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system has tools that are relevant to achieving its sustainability objectives, and these tools allow progress towards objectives to be measured over time. It collects and analyses the data it needs to measure, understand, and demonstrate the progress its users are making towards these objectives.</p>	<p>“Measurable progress” is disaggregated from “Rigour”.</p> <p>Updated to reflect the importance of collecting quality data and using this effectively.</p>	<p><b>Rigour (part 1):</b> All components of a standards system are structured to deliver outcomes. In particular, standards are set at a performance level that results in measurable progress towards the scheme’s sustainability objectives...</p>
<p><b>Stakeholder engagement</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system listens and learns.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system is inclusive and non-discriminatory. It empowers stakeholders to participate in</p>	<p>The intent of the principle is clarified and strengthened.</p> <p>References to non-discrimination and inclusion are added, and the inclusion of under-</p>	<p><b>Engagement:</b> 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</p>

<p>decisions and hold the system to account. It involves a balanced and diverse group of stakeholders in decisions that will affect them. It strives to understand the context and perspectives of stakeholders who have been under-engaged or under-represented, and it creates opportunities to ensure their participation in decision-making. It provides clear and transparent feedback on stakeholder input and concerns. It has fair, impartial and accessible mechanisms for resolving complaints and conflicts.</p>	<p>engaged and under-represented stakeholders is also addressed.</p> <p>The need to provide feedback to stakeholders responding to their input or concerns is addressed.</p> <p>Examples are deleted.</p>	<p>stakeholders with fair mechanisms to resolve complaints.</p>
<p><b>Transparency</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system earns trust by being open and honest.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system makes important information publicly available and easily accessible, while protecting confidential and private information. It enables stakeholders to understand and evaluate the system’s processes, decision-making, results, and impacts. Stakeholders have the information they need to actively participate in decisions or raise concerns.</p>	<p>Reference to the balance between data privacy and transparency added</p> <p>The reason for ensuring stakeholders understand the information that is made publicly available is made clearer</p>	<p><b>Transparency:</b> 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><b>Impartiality</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system is impartial.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system identifies and avoids or mitigates conflicts of interest throughout its governance and operations, particularly when it comes to assessing its users’ performance. Transparency and stakeholder engagement help ensure the system’s integrity can be trusted.</p>	<p>No significant change</p>	<p><b>Impartiality:</b> 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>
<p><b>Reliability</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system provides trustworthy assessments of users’ performance.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system designs its tools so that these can be consistently implemented and assessed. It ensures assessments of users’ sustainability performance are competent and accurate, and that these assessments support any claims it allows users to make.</p>	<p>Disaggregated from “Rigour” and renamed and reframed to focus on consistency, competency and accuracy.</p> <p>Link to claims made clear.</p>	<p><b>Rigour (part 2):</b> ...assessments of compliance provide an accurate picture of whether an entity meets the standard's requirements.</p>
<p><b>Truthfulness</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system’s claims and communications can be trusted.</b></p>	<p>Updated to ensure that the scope includes claims made by the</p>	<p><b>Truthfulness:</b> Claims and communications made by actors within standards systems and by certified entities about the benefits or</p>

<p>A credible sustainability system substantiates its claims. Any claims the system or its users make are clear, relevant, and can be checked. They enable customers and other stakeholders to make informed choices. The scope and design of the system is accurately reflected in any claims, ensuring these are not misleading. Claims about sustainability impacts are backed up with data and evidence that is publicly available.</p>	<p>system and claims allowed by the system.</p> <p>More emphasis is placed on substantiating claims and the idea of claims being proportional to the scope and design of the system to address what “not misleading” means.</p>	<p>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>
<p><b>Continual improvement</b></p> <p><b>A credible sustainability system keeps improving.</b></p> <p>A credible sustainability system regularly reviews its objectives, its strategies, and the performance of its tools and system. It evaluates the impacts and outcomes of its activities. It applies the lessons learned to improve. It responds to new evidence, stakeholder input, and external changes, adapting its strategies to improve its impacts and remain fit for purpose.</p>	<p>Renamed from “Improvement” to “Continual improvement”.</p> <p>Updated to make clear that improvement relates to both the system itself and the standards or tools.</p> <p>The purpose of innovating and adapting is clarified.</p>	<p><b>Improvement:</b> 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>