Cross-sectoral learning from the M3 Standards Partnership

30th November 2022

“If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together”.

African Proverb

The Mining, Minerals, and Metals Standards Partnership (M3 Partnership) is a collaboration of the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA), Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC), ResponsibleSteel, and Towards Sustainable Mining (TSM). The M3 Partnership was formed to establish and test an operating model for the alignment and collaboration between standards initiatives as they relate to work in the mining, minerals and metals (M3) space. The project which enabled the M3 Partnership to come together was awarded a grant from the ISEAL Innovations Fund in 2019, because of the opportunity to drive alignment and collective action in the M3 sector, knowing that the lessons learned from this work could be transferable to other sectors. Research carried out in 2018 by ISEAL and GIZ identified the opportunities that interoperability can bring for cross-sector learning. Building on the research, this brief summarises key lessons from the multi-year collaboration most relevant for other sustainability systems, based on a desk review of project reports and interviews carried out with representatives of M3 partner organisations between October and November 2022.

This report was authored by Aimee Russillo of LiSeed Consulting.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of ISEAL, ISEAL Community Members, or donor entities to the ISEAL Innovations Fund.

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Swiss Confederation
Background
The only way to solve the global sustainability challenges that we face today, complicated by increasing uncertainty and disruption and often with expedited timelines, is through greater collaboration, collective action, and innovation.

Research conducted by GIZ and ISEAL in 2018 looking at the Mining, Minerals, and Metals (M3) sector highlighted that a multitude of M3 sustainability standards have emerged as a response to the highly diverse collection of industries with different supply and demand dynamics. The research examined the M3 sustainability standards’ potential for collaboration, referred to as interoperability.

Interoperability presents opportunities to engage with both upstream and downstream actors, as well as governments and other interested stakeholders (e.g., civil society, communities, labour unions). It can be linked to productivity factors with the potential to reduce costs, minimise overlaps and reduce bureaucracy and unproductive information flows. This in turn can improve stakeholders’ understanding of the credibility and influence of such initiatives in the marketplace. It can also facilitate exchange of knowledge and practices, broaden the range and type of entities covered, improve performance, and amplify outcomes, all contributing to driving impact.

At the time of the original research, there were already several examples of collaboration in the M3 space. However, these were generally bilateral efforts related to specific topics or project based. The M3 Partnership, supported by grant from the ISEAL Innovations Fund, established a platform for ongoing engagement. This built upon the research and enabled the organisations to move further along the continuum of collaboration to leverage the opportunities and benefits of interoperability.

Most of the M3 Partnership project took place during the COVID pandemic. While this posed several unexpected challenges, it highlighted that collaboration and facing challenges together brought resiliency to the individuals and organisations involved and created a sustainable long-term basis for engagement beyond the partnership.

This cross-sectoral learning brief distils the in-depth reports and tools from the M3 Partnership that can be found on the M3 Partnership website or ISEAL website. This brief also reflects on the recommendations from the earlier 2018 research, testing and expanding on the recommendations made at the start of the M3 Partnership. This brief is meant to leverage the learnings from the multi-year collaboration of the M3 Partnership organisations and inspire sustainability systems working in other sectors.

2 https://www.m3standardspartnership.org/
Key Lessons and Learning for other Sectors
The M3 Partnership tested and validated many of the 2018 research findings. Through the implementation of activities, the M3 Partnership organisations moved from cooperation to deeper collaboration with integrated and shared tools and processes, generating additional learnings for the wider standards community. Below, these learnings are explored and framed around eight key lessons. The first six build on various approaches, challenges, and recommendations identified in the 2018 research, and the final two insights are drawn specifically from activities undertaken as part of the M3 Partnership project.

1. Have a clear value proposition*
2. Develop a shared vision*
3. Start small*
4. It’s less technical, and more institutional and political*
5. The devil is in the detail! *
6. Time and timing*
7. Question your assumptions
8. Collaborative stakeholder engagement

Cross sectoral learning
Building from the original research conducted in 2018, the M3Parternship tested many of the findings, validating several lessons presented here in the following six lessons.

1. Have a clear value proposition for working together
Reflecting on the different drivers and benefits of interoperability, there is a wide breadth and depth of types of interoperability (see Annex 3: Continuum of Interoperability). There is no single path or tool, but it will depend on the strategies, stakeholders and objectives of interoperability of each organization. It is important to understand “What is the added value for each organization and its stakeholders”? Start with areas that are broadly relevant, but not too contentious, first looking for opportunities that are not to contentions across participating organizations and then ground truth those with stakeholders. Ideally this is something tangible which gives value to stakeholders of all organisations. The M3 Partnership focused on the Integrated Assessment Protocol (IAP) Tool for assessing compliance within multiple certification systems through one audit. The organizations involved in the M3 Partnership and companies that would be using the IAP could easily understand how the IAP could bring efficiencies, reduce audit fatigue, etc.

It is also important to find common ground in a non-competitive space to add value. Finding complementary positions in the supply chain offers good opportunities to work together, rather than compete. The M3 Partnership worked to improve connections and consistency throughout the supply chain, without gaps or oversight in the chain. The IAP Tool and ResponsibleSteel Recognition Protocol connects up- and down- stream actors while bringing value to a range of stakeholders.
2. Shared vision
Collective action requires a shared vision, with common goals and objectives clearly identified. The ISEAL Innovations Fund provided the mechanism to lay that foundation through the development of the project proposal. Having clear formalised objectives and expectations is important. Rather than an MoU, the M3 Partnership developed a formal document detailing “Principles for Collaboration” which defined the rules for engagement, roles and responsibilities, decision making mechanisms and communication guidelines. This was signed by the President or Executive Director of each M3 Partner. The process of drafting and finalising The Principles for Collaboration helped build trust and confidence between M3 Partnership organisations. The establishment of that trust provided the foundation that allowed the M3 Partnership to pivot when it became clear that many of the initially scoped actions were no longer feasible in the wake of the COVID pandemic to a modified work plan and set of objectives.

3. Start small
The success of the M3 Partnership validated several of the research recommendations, beginning with the advice to start small, build trust and be creative. Joint activities or information sharing is a good first step to build trust and understanding of each other’s systems. The project focused on 2 key objectives for the partnership. The process of developing and piloting the Integrated Assessment Protocol Tool helped build understanding of the different standards and approaches of partners. Through the process, key terms were unpacked such as “stakeholder” versus “community of interest (COI)” and “operation” versus “site”. These were discussed together to understand the differences to maintain the integrity and requirements of each respective standard while finding common ground. This experience serves as an avenue for future coordination and collaboration. It enabled the M3 Partnership to accomplish much more than originally envisioned, successfully pivoting during COVID lockdowns to develop several additional outputs covering Due Diligence, Measuring GHG emissions, Chain of Custody, Guidance and Training Materials on the Integrated Audit Protocol, and ResponsibleSteel’s Recognition Process.

4. It’s less technical, but institutional and political...
A critical success factor for interoperability is personal relationships and trust. Communication, dialogue, and information exchange are pre-cursors to interoperability, and serve as a basis for building trust and understanding of how other standards work. There were already several bi-lateral and multi-lateral activities taking place across the M3 Partnership organisations. Several joint Theory of Change workshops deepened the understanding of each organisations’ visions, long term goals and strategies to achieve those. The M3 Partnership provided a platform for sharing technical documents and deep-dive technical discussions, as well as a space for addressing challenges. Organisation partners met regularly, at least once a month, for accountability and ongoing learning.

Another critical success factor is to get senior-level, organisational and stakeholder buy-in. This builds upon the clear value proposition and shared vision. The M3 Partnership included regular communications and updates to leadership and other stakeholders, often developed jointly.

5. The devil is in the detail!
With the political and institutional buy-in, organisations can begin working towards deeper collaboration with shared tools and processes implementation. However, there are challenges around technical aspects. With the foundation of shared trust and deeper understanding of partners, the M3 Partnership highlighted several learnings.
Finding common ground by understanding the differences

Time needs to be built into the project plans as different organisations may have very distinct interpretations of key terms. There will also be different levels of details in technical tools and documents. Several factors play a role, including their distinct organisational remit, business models and strategies.

Each system may have different implementation and assurance systems. There are differences in approaches and defining what is a credible system. These can range from different governance models, auditor approval mechanisms and audit frequencies, different thresholds of conformance, risk profiles, reporting requirements and claims as well as different core audiences. It is essential to hold focused meetings for review of key terms and definitions as well as review of conformity requirements to ensure that the integrity and requirements of each respective standard are maintained.

Utilize third-party support to review where standards align and where there are unique requirements; this delegation is useful to protect in-house staff time and also to enhance objectivity. The M3 Partnership used third party *ERM* sustainability consultancy with strong expertise in the M3 sector to further develop the IAP and conduct the detailed mapping of the individual standards. This was essential to the M3 Partnership to allow each organisation the time and energy to focus on important definitions and negotiate different interpretations or corrections. It was efficient and effective to send comments to a third party and work through bigger picture issues together.

Bringing data together (Dances with Data)

One Integrated Assessment Protocol (IAP) Pilot brought data from two separate assessments (one under TSM and one under IRMA) into the IAP Tool. Unless it is a truly integrated audit, this can be an interesting option to consider as different standard systems typically do not operate on aligned assessment schedules. Combining data from different audits and standard systems can provide value for those being assessed and theoretically use less resources. However, there are many challenges associated with this approach, including data access, formats, definitions, and language; scope changes (e.g., one or both standards may have changed over time); and different consulting or in-house teams collecting and assessing data. ISEAL has done extensive work around combining, sharing and leveraging data across systems as captured in their report "Aligning and Combining: What we’ve learned about metrics and data sharing." Combining data sets or using existing data may seem like an easy “win”, but understanding the underlying protocols, definitions, language and changes in the standard since the last audit is essential for findings to be of value.

For the M3 Partners, a key lesson learned for importing data into the IAP Tool in an efficient manner was to establish strategies for coordinating data collection across tools and teams and bringing that data together.

Additionally, data protection requirements must be met, including EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance. One objective for the M3 Partnership had been to bring together M3 Partners’ contact lists for joint outreach, however data protection requirements prevented this and required M3 Partners to manage separate (but in some cases overlapping) contact lists for outreach related to the M3 Partnership.

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6. Time and timing

There is never enough time, and the *timing* can be critical to success. Collaboration requires ongoing and consistent communications, including regular meetings that need to be put into workplans. There is the need to plan substantial time for review by each organisation of joint tools and communications, internal coordination and integrating feedback.

Creating shared documents and tools requires extra time for review and approval at each organisation. There may be different levels of the organization that need to review joint outputs. This could even include legal review.

The M3 Partnership IAP Tool required substantial time from each organisation to review technical content, comment on the alignment results and for comments to be integrated.

On the “Principles for Collaboration” more time was needed for internal socialization and approval across all organisations.

During the piloting of the IAP Tool, key learnings included considerations related to time. Time was needed to train the mine site and audit team on a new standard. The M3 Partners learned, when onboarding a new standard in an integrated audit, to consider the following variables:

a. **availability of time** to train company teams and third-party assessors regarding the new standard and use of the IAP tool well before commencing an integrated audit

b. **ability to lengthen the timeline** for the assessment and reporting to allow teams to navigate new standards and requirements. Recognize the human nature of reverting to familiar tools, especially when under deadlines.

Timing is also critical. The most significant steps and most effective time to embed interoperability is in the initial stages of a standard development or during revisions. Interoperability should be considered strategically in the development of or revision of standards, new tools and approaches. One approach common in many sectors, including M3, is “Plug and Play”. This means using discrete pieces of a system, generally with no changes, such as the adoption of another standard’s policy or procedure. This can even include adopting policies or procedures from well-established standards in other sectors. Many of the M3 standards reference other schemes, standards, initiatives or guidelines. This approach does not require any action or acknowledgement by the referenced standard, so may not be inter-organizational. All of the M3 partners took into consideration alignment and also “plug and play” elements when revising or developing new tools and processes. A few examples include MAC- TSM made changes to its assurance processes for alignment with RS; RJC/IRMA/RS alignment of Chain of Custody requirements during revisions and/or development. These all helped strengthen systems and adopt good practice.

Timing was also important with different meeting cycles for governance bodies and getting buy-in, approval or other decision making.
Specific Insights from M3 Partnership Project Activities

7. Question your assumptions

Some of the biggest opportunities for innovation and ultimately driving impact can come from non-traditional, unlikely allies. A key business strategy is to be open to collaboration with other organisations that you may not have considered working with in the past. Getting outside of comfort zones to work with organisations adopting different approaches and models provides unique opportunities. This will also be important for the M3 Partnership as it considers bringing additional organisations into the Partnership and its IAP Tool and becomes an open platform in which other initiatives participate.

“Value comes from collaboration with non-traditional, unlikely allies”

One project strategy was to address stakeholder fatigue based on the assumption that each organisation was doing outreach with many of the same stakeholders. This strategy was based on a theory that stakeholders were being asked by multiple organisations to support/provide input/participate, creating fatigue and inefficiencies. This could place an undue burden particularly on under-resourced organisations such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and civil society actors, requiring them to “choose” among competing standards. This is also true of affected communities who are having to deal with increased burden as they are asked to engage in reporting and assurance activities related to all of the standards, often at different times and in different ways. After conducting an extensive mapping, the M3 Partners found that there was actually minimal overlap of stakeholders across the partners due to the unique structure, history and remit of each organisation. If the mapping had been done earlier, it would have been clearer that the problem they were trying to address didn’t actually exist. Using common messaging and signalling collaboration, the M3 Partnership changed its focus to coordinated communications within each M3 Partner’s network and outreach to stakeholders. See next.

8. Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement

Convening common stakeholders was a key objective of the project. While the assumption that there was a lot of overlap of stakeholders proved to be false, the goal of reducing stakeholder confusion and addressing concerns of duplication or overlap were addressed by engaging stakeholders collectively through communications around ongoing collaborative activities. This included joint workshops and panel presentations at key events, as well as individual organisations presenting the M3 Partnership work and outputs within their own networks and events. Through this strategy, the M3 Partnership was able to demonstrate to stakeholders working together on important issues of common interest where an aligned and interoperable approach is fundamental to success.

Lessons learned included that collaborative stakeholder engagement is most effective when there are ongoing collaborative activities across project partners. The focus of collaborative engagement should be on projects that are accessible and directly relevant to those engaged. Collaborators must be flexible and creative in their engagement approach when changing circumstances arise, such as limitations on travel and in-person gatherings in a global pandemic.
Conclusion
The M3 Partnership contributed to increasing awareness among a wide range of stakeholders that the initiatives are collaborating and coordinating efforts to enhance alignment and efficiency as well as to integrate best practices and improve environmental and social performance.

Overall, the M3 Partnership provided value to the individual organisations and their stakeholders. It established a firm foundation to further explore common issues across the organisations, many of which are relevant to sustainability schemes in other sectors. Details on the project and more rich learnings can be found on the M3 Partnership website.

Some key remaining questions that the M3 Partnership can best address together include:

- Building on lessons learned from the IAP Tool Pilots, what does a truly integrated audit look like in terms of implementation systems, including:
  - Auditor requirements, training and accreditation?
  - Recognition protocols?
  - Credible stakeholder engagement in the assurance process?
  - Reporting requirements?
- What does credible stakeholder engagement look like in the assurance process?
- In terms of GHG and opportunities for interoperability:
  - Can we set requirements for common units of GHG disclosure? The formatting, disclosure, and reporting of emissions data is central to the transfer of emissions data between points in the supply chain.
  - Can we harmonize measure of Scope 3 emissions, extending requirements on Scope 3 emissions target setting to both the mine site and corporate levels, and harmonize frameworks and terminology?
- How can we use standards to complement other mechanisms (Smart Mix) and improve due diligence processes?

There is strong interest in having a space for sharing and learning across initiatives. Interoperability is not just about standards working together, but is also about leveraging the diversity of stakeholders, expertise, coverage and approaches of the individual standards to create a more responsible sector.

The organisations in the M3 Partnership see value in continuing, deepening the work done so far, as well as broadening it to encourage other standards in the M3 sector to engage. The four organisations are already doing more than other sustainability standards in terms of actively collaborating to learn from one another, strength systems and adopt good practice. This ultimately will drive performance improvements and amplify outcomes. The M3 Partnership offers an opportunity to raise all boats.

*The M3 Partnership is actively demonstrating the African proverb by going further...together.*
Annex 1: ISEAL Innovations Fund M3 Project Summary

ISEAL Innovations Fund Project Summary: “Mining, minerals and metals partnership: Alignment and collective action to drive improvement”

Between May 2019 and June 2022, a grant from the ISEAL Innovations Fund enabled the M3 Standards Partnership to identify and work in different aspects that can increase interoperability in the sector, including:

- Create an Integrated Assessment Protocol (M3 IAP): This tool was designed to allow mine sites to be assessed against multiple site-level standards in a single audit, supporting identification of alignment across standards, and promoting demonstration of conformity with multiple standards with greater efficiency and reduced cost. The tool was piloted in South Africa and Canada.

- Develop ResponsibleSteel’s recognition methodology: The most effective and efficient way for ResponsibleSteel to address responsible sourcing is to recognise input material programmes that credibly verify the ESG performance of suppliers and to build its responsible sourcing requirements for ‘Certified Steel’ on these programmes. The methodology directs how input material programmes are assessed for the purpose of recognition and was piloted with IRMA and TSM.

- Review the greenhouse gas (GHG) aspects of the standards in the M3 Standards Partnership and survey leading mining companies in their memberships: The review highlighted areas for potential alignment and where further research is needed for the sector as a whole to improve harmonisation of GHG emissions requirements and data.

- Explore the use of Voluntary Sustainability Initiatives to demonstrate due diligence: Desk research shed light on the inconsistencies in approaches to due diligence for the mining sector and discussed advantages and challenges related to alignment with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas (CAHRAs).

- Discuss different approaches to Chain of Custody: RJC was in the processes of revising its Chain of Custody standard, IRMA was finalising its first Chain of Custody standard, and Responsible Steel was developing responsible sourcing requirements, which contain Chain of Custody obligations. Collaboration during review/development processes helps ensure the systems support each other.

- Coordinate around stakeholder engagement: A mapping exercise helped the partnership identify shared key stakeholders and discuss the potential for streamlining some of the engagement with them. Key industry engagements were used to promote the partnership.

The Grant Decision Making Committee of the ISEAL Innovations Fund awarded the grant in recognition of the need to drive alignment and collective action in the M3 sector, knowing that the lessons learned from this work could be transferable to other sectors. In fact, research carried out by ISEAL in 2018 had already identified the opportunities that interoperability can bring for cross-sector learning.
Annex 2. References and Resources

References


2. M3 Standards Partnership website: https://www.m3standardspartnership.org/


Resources consulted

- Integrated Assessment Protocol (IAP) Description (M3 Partnership, June 2022)
- Integrated Assessment Protocol (IAP) Guidance (M3 Partnership, June 2022)
- Integrated Assessment Protocol (IAP) Tool (M3 Partnership, June 2022)
- Integrated Assessment Protocol (IAP) Pilot Report (M3 Partnership, June 2022)
- GHG Project Report (M3 Partnership, June 2022)
- Use of Voluntary Sustainability Initiatives in the Mining Sector to Demonstrate Due Diligence (M3 Partnership, June 2022)
- Summary of Projects and Lessons Learned (M3 Partnership, June 2022)
- Recognition Methodology (ResponsibleSteel, 13 June 2022)
- Overview of Recognition Assessments: Bettercoal, IRMA, TSM (ResponsibleSteel, 13 June 2022)
- Recognition Decisions: Bettercoal, IRMA, TSM (ResponsibleSteel, June 2022)
- Key Learnings from Recognition Process (ResponsibleSteel, June 2022)

Representatives interviewed from M3 partner organisations

- Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA). Kristi Disney Bruckner, Senior Policy Advisor
- Responsible Jewellery Council. Andreea Cojanu Davidoiu, General Manager Standards, Assurance and Certification
- Responsible Steel (RS). Thuong Bui, Standard and Assurance Director
  - Matthew Wenban-Smith. Former M3 Project lead, GHG Lead, and RS Director
- Toward Sustainable Mining (TSM). Ben Chalmers, Senior Vice President
### Annex 3: Continuum of Interoperability

*Figure 1: Framework of Interoperability from ISEAL Creating Shared Value.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compete</th>
<th>Co-exist</th>
<th>Communicate</th>
<th>Cooperate</th>
<th>Coordinate/ Harmonization</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Integrate Merge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competition for resources: clients, funding, support, etc</td>
<td>No systematic connection among organizations. Independent</td>
<td>Dialogue and information exchange. Build understanding and trust. Identify opportunities</td>
<td>Ad-hoc, informal interaction and/or discrete activities or projects</td>
<td>Organizations systematically adjust and align work for greater outcomes</td>
<td>Longer term interaction based on shared missions, goals, shared decision making and resources</td>
<td>Fully integrated programs</td>
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- **RJC-MAC**
- **IRMA-RS**
- **RS-MAC**

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Figure 2: Framework of Interoperability updated with examples from the M3 Partnership (November 2022)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuum of Collaboration</th>
<th>Compete</th>
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**Interoperability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Issues Based Working Groups</th>
<th>Joint Projects</th>
<th>“Plug and Play”</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Shared Processes</th>
<th>Harmonisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Address common challenges including defined terms, methodologies and assurance</td>
<td>Pooling resources Investing together e.g. for capacity building</td>
<td>Use of only specific tools and processes often for efficiencies but may also lead to harmonisation</td>
<td>Refer to or accept another’s systems provisions including Full, partial, unilateral, stepwise</td>
<td>mechanisms which sustainability standards are able to operate jointly, for example, by joint auditing and other assurance processes</td>
<td>alignment of texts to adopt similar language eliminating major differences and creating common minimum requirements</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Any M3 Working groups?</th>
<th>GHG Data and Methodologies Due Diligence research</th>
<th>Reference to other standards or guidelines MAC-TSM Supplemental Chain of Custody</th>
<th>M3 Recognition Protocol Responsible Steel recognition of XXX</th>
<th>Integrated Assessment Tool Stakeholder Engagement*</th>
<th>Chain of Custody Due Diligence Tool kits</th>
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**Aspects of Interoperability**

**Turf**

Loose Interoperability Tight

**Trust**