State of gender integration among ISEAL Community Members in the agri-food sector
INTRODUCTION

to scoping study

Voluntary Sustainability Systems (VSS) can play an important role in reducing persistent gender inequalities and supporting women’s empowerment to achieve more just and resilient agri-food systems. However, research indicates that gender equality impacts have been minimal given few VSS have taken a strategic approach to addressing gender equality and there has been a failure to address the structural causes of gender equality in global supply chains.

In order to support sustainability standards in their efforts to advance gender equality, a scoping study was recently conducted to understand the state of gender integration among VSS that are members of ISEAL (a global membership organization for credible sustainability standards). The study aimed to:

- Explore how ISEAL Community Members seek to enhance gender equality and women’s empowerment, with a focus on schemes in the agri-food sector
- Identify enabling factors and challenges for enhancing gender equality and promoting women’s rights and empowerment through ISEAL Community Members’ systems
- Consider opportunities for learning and collaboration to advance gender equality through ‘sustainability standards and similar systems

The scoping study builds on an evaluation of gender mainstreaming in sustainability standards conducted with ISEAL Community Members in 2020. That evaluation found that gender was not a focus for most voluntary sustainability standards reviewed, though most members had increased their efforts on gender equality in recent years. The 2022 scoping study aimed to provide an update on ISEAL Community Members’ efforts on gender equality.

The following results of the scoping study were derived from:

- Conducting semi-structured interviews with 14 ISEAL Community Members in agri-food sectors
- Implementing a quick scan of members’ standards and strategies based on these discussions
- Supporting feedback and iteration with members, including and beyond those interviewed

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS INTERVIEWED

Aquaculture Stewardship Council; Bonsucro; Fairtrade International; Fair Trade USA; Gold Standard; Linking Environment and Farming; Marine Stewardship Council; ProTerra Foundation; Rainforest Alliance; Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil; Roundtable on Sustainable Soy; Sustainable Agriculture Network; Trustea; Union for Ethical BioTrade
APPROACHES
to gender equality and women’s rights

‘DO NO HARM’
Most standards have basic requirements to protect women from harm, including:
- **Non-discrimination / equality of treatment** in the workplace (hiring, wages, promotion, access to training) and for small producers (prices, membership, access to producer organization services)
- **Fair working conditions** while pregnant or with small children (maternity leave and protections, breastfeeding breaks, separate accommodation and sanitation facilities)
- **No harassment or violence** against women and girls
- **Trusted and accessible grievance systems**
- **General promotion of social dialogue**

What is missing is the proactive side of encouraging women’s participation and transforming the enabling environment for gender equality.

**PROACTIVELY SUPPORTING GENDER EQUALITY (IN STANDARDS)**
Going beyond ‘Do No Harm’ in standards entails:
- Implementing a **gender policy**
- Creating a **gender committee**
- Ensuring committees include **representation** of diverse groups
- Implementing a **‘gender sensitive’ grievance committee**
- **Gender risk mitigation measures** as part of management plan
- **Operator conducts community-based women’s empowerment training**
- Recruitment that **increases women’s presence in management and skilled positions** (not less than 15%)
- **Consultation processes that are representative and inclusive** of the needs and interests of ‘vulnerable groups’ (in the workplace, in communities)

**ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY**
**Rainforest Alliance (2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard: Farm Requirements)**
To receive Rainforest Alliance certification, farms must comply with certain core requirements on gender equality. This includes having a gender sensitive grievance committee, a written statement promoting gender equality and a committee that is responsible for implementing, monitoring and evaluating measures that promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. The committee is expected to implement measures based on a basic risk assessment, to raise awareness and to be involved in remediation cases concerning gender-based violence and gender-based discrimination.

The Farm Standard also supports additional improvement requirements that farms are expected to comply with over time. For this, gender committees are expected to implement a gender in-depth Risk Assessment tool, from which they prioritize mitigation measures to implement and report on progress to management annually.
Examples of programmes / initiatives that promote gender equality and women’s rights beyond the standards include:

- **Gender strategies** that include strategic aims, activities and extensive monitoring and evaluation for GE

- **Research projects and pilots** focused on deepening understanding of gender and social inclusion issues in the sector

- **Advocacy campaigns / systems change** supporting GE

- **Development of internal gender policies** to increase diversity and inclusion and awareness building ‘in here’

- **Support, training, guidance, tools** to complement / support compliance with GE expectations in standards.

- **Networks and partnerships** to build on existing efforts on GE and support additional expertise or representation

- **Engaging men and reflecting on masculinities**

- **Innovative ways to fund GE initiatives**

- **Benefit sharing (from profits)** that target women’s needs, interests, businesses, etc.

- **Programming that supports building women’s leadership and entrepreneurial skills**

**Trustea’s approach to supporting women’s safety**

Safety is one of the key pillars of the Trustea program. They use a **three-pronged, holistic approach to support women’s safety in the workplace:**

- Mandating legal compliance mechanisms
- Seeking inputs from subject matter experts
- Collaboration with civil society organisations.

This has involved having a representative from UNWomen serve in an advisory capacity to the Trustea governing council, providing expertise on their approaches to ensuring women’s safety.

It has also led to a partnership with the Women’s Safety Accelerator Fund (WSAF) to **build awareness and understanding of gender-based violence in the tea industry.**

At the grassroots level, they realized that mechanisms for redress only work through focused efforts to train on all facets of prevention of sexual harassment, including the rights and duties of all stakeholders. WSAF has been supporting the tea industry to put measures in place to prevent and respond to GBV, including strengthening the capacity of local NGOs in this aspect.
**Fairtrade Women’s Schools of Leadership**

Fairtrade has been strengthening the capacity of women and men members of producer organizations to better address gender issues in their organizations and communities through Women’s Schools of Leadership. The goal is to increase the representation of skilled women in leadership roles in order to influence decision-making and support more equitable participation. One study found that Leadership Schools have been instrumental in strengthening the participation of some women within their producer organizations, though broader participation of women in local governance beyond that is still low.

The Schools’ curricula and modules have been adopted and adapted to the needs of different regions. In Côte d’Ivoire, for example, the Women’s Schools of Leadership consists of a 9-month training, mentoring and coaching programme aimed at improving participants’ basic leadership skills and application of human rights to their contexts. Since 2017, the programme has helped to build the capacity of women and men in a number of areas, covering topics like personal development, gender awareness (including masculinities), leadership skills, strategic negotiation, project and financial management, entrepreneurship, and so on. Thanks to external funding, a total of 144 women and men from 14 Fairtrade certified cocoa cooperatives will complete training by 2025.

Each graduate is responsible for relaying the knowledge and practices they gain from the training to the thousands of women in their respective communities. Previous graduates have found success and lessons learned through income generation projects. For example, two school canteens (feeding more than 100 children) have been set up using the food crops grown by a women’s association. Furthermore, cooperatives have invested in 14 women’s groups who support the livelihoods of women farmers.

**Bonsucro Impact Fund**

The Bonsucro Impact Fund (BIF) was launched in early 2022. This grant-making fund leverages the income made from sales of Bonsucro Credits through the Bonsucro Credit Trading Platform, to coinvest in impact projects.

The fund recognises that while certification can make a positive contribution to improving human rights in the cane sector, it will not deliver the necessary systemic changes needed. Systemic change requires collective action and the engagement of multiple stakeholders who have a shared interest in finding long-term solutions to these difficult problems.

The fund can form a way to support more gender equality projects and comply with gender strategies.

Two grant awards valued at up to £150,000 each are available to Bonsucro members and their project partners with the following criteria:

- Projects need to take a systemic approach that connects to the root causes of the problem
- Projects need to be collaborative and involve local stakeholders
- Projects need to include a convening element to inspire and coordinate collective action
- Projects need to be able to measure/demonstrate their impact
- Projects need to be co-funded

The BIF was launched in early 2022. This grant-making fund leverages the income made from sales of Bonsucro Credits through the Bonsucro Credit Trading Platform, to coinvest in impact projects.

The fund recognises that while certification can make a positive contribution to improving human rights in the cane sector, it will not deliver the necessary systemic changes needed. Systemic change requires collective action and the engagement of multiple stakeholders who have a shared interest in finding long-term solutions to these difficult problems.

The fund can form a way to support more gender equality projects and comply with gender strategies.

Two grant awards valued at up to £150,000 each are available to Bonsucro members and their project partners with the following criteria:

- Projects need to take a systemic approach that connects to the root causes of the problem
- Projects need to be collaborative and involve local stakeholders
- Projects need to include a convening element to inspire and coordinate collective action
- Projects need to be able to measure/demonstrate their impact
- Projects need to be co-funded
Signs of change identified by ISEAL Community Members

- At least 5 ISEAL Community Members have signed the UNECE ‘Gender Responsive Standards Declaration’

- Diversity and inclusion considerations in standards organisations (privilege workshops)

- More dedicated gender strategies and activities targeting gender equality

- More women as representatives on standards’ Boards and in decision-making roles, including as representatives of producers

- More women in senior management roles in companies, including on the production side

- Men learning about equality – and changing their behaviours (providing land to female family members, inviting them to assemblies, representing their views/interests)

- Women influencing spending of the Fair Trade premium / Community Development Fund in ways that benefit women and communities (i.e. daycares, subsidized grocery stores, cooking stoves, water pumps, washing machines, access to healthcare, etc)

- Women with leadership positions in producer organisations going on to elected positions in communities (village councils)
### Driving Factors (Enablers)

- **Leadership buy-in**, including higher representation of women in senior leadership and decision-making roles.
- **More efforts to increase diversity and inclusion** (or ‘in here’) policies in standards organizations, with activities such as awareness building, privilege workshops, changing representation of boards.
- **Higher expectations/rewards** for more integrated standards that ‘do it all’ (environmental and social).
- **Opportunities to earn a higher premium** for addressing gender gaps (Gold Standard).
- **International initiatives** that provide clarity on gender-related targets, policies or minimum standards (SDGs, The Women’s Empowerment Principles, UNECE Gender Responsive Standards Declaration).
- **Women sharing experiences** and supporting each other (e.g. committees supporting more conversations between women farmers).
- **Relationships, trust-building and dialogue** with local teams, communities and companies, and working with partners and gender experts.

### Challenges/Barriers

- **Lacking leadership buy-in**
- **Not a priority** relative to other higher risk/more pressing and less contested issues; limited understanding on how gender is an integral part of interventions.
- **Resource constraints** (technical skills / expertise, money, time) of staff, auditors, etc. to ‘do it all’.
- **Difficult to operationalize** even when the commitment is there.
- **Difficult to generalize across commodities and contexts**: requires context-specific evidence and responses to increase gender equality.
- **Lack of data on**:
  - current state of gender equality, as well as changes in gender equality over time
  - women’s roles in value chains (member data makes women’s labour largely invisible) and how to measure impacts
- **Gender equality approaches** are seen as alienating (‘too feminist’, involve ‘reverse discrimination’ of men being excluded).
- **Concerns about already significant amounts of data collected and expectations for information management** (especially for smallholders).
- **Lack of robust evidence to quantify** and bring visibility, BUT quantitative metrics cannot capture deeper root causes of inequalities.
LEARNING PRIORITIES for ISEAL Community Members

- Deeper gender analysis: women’s lived realities, gender norms, root causes of gender equality
- Monitoring gender equality: meaningful indicators, useful metrics
- Evaluating impact on gender equality
- ‘What works’ in standards / ESG to enhance gender equality (i.e. training for women, economic independence, land ownership, increasing safety)
- More effective grievance mechanisms that are trusted and used by women, innovative remediation practices, working with local duty bearers
- Recognizing and addressing unpaid care work in standards
- Good practice on developing gender policies and strategies / key entry points for getting started
- Gender vis-à-vis other components of standards (environmental sustainability, living income)
- Encouraging women into non-traditional occupations / positions


Acknowledgements: This work is part of the CGIAR Research Initiative on Gender Equality, Work Package 4 (VOICE: Inclusive Governance and Policies). We would like to thank all funders who supported this research through their contributions to the CGIAR Trust Fund: https://www.cgiar.org/funders/

Produced by KANDS Collective | hello@kandscollective.com