

Linking Voluntary Standards to Sustainable Development Goals



In collaboration with



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STUDIES

Linking Voluntary Standards to Sustainable Development Goals

About the report

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations has called on the private sector to contribute more to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This report helps decision makers in the public and private sectors to understand where voluntary sustainability standards are best placed to contribute. It maps the linkages between these standards and each SDG goal, including its specific targets.

Publisher: International Trade Centre, in collaboration with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the European University Institute, the University of Amsterdam and the German Development Institute

Title: Linking Voluntary Standards with Sustainable Development Goals

Publication date and place: Geneva, October 2020

Page count: 73

Language: English

ITC Document Number: SIVC-20-53.E

Citation Citation Bissinger, K., Brandi, C., Cabrera de Leicht, S., Fiorini, M., Schleifer, P., Fernandez de Cordova, S., Ahmed, N. (2020). Linking Voluntary Standards to Sustainable Development Goals. International Trade Centre, Geneva, Switzerland.

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For more information on Voluntary Sustainability Standards and the SDGs, see: www.standardsmap.org

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Foreword

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide our pathway to progress towards 2030 and will be critical in allowing us to ‘build back better’ after the global pandemic. This will require smart partnerships between the public and private sector where the focus must be on supporting responsible social, environmental and economic practices in the pursuit of sustainable and inclusive growth.

Voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) are currently at the centre of the approach of businesses to sustainability. Going beyond minimum legal standards established by governments, VSS focus on reducing adverse environmental and social effects and responding to the demands of various stakeholders, including consumers.

Using original data, the present report tracks the extent to which sustainable practices promoted by voluntary standards align with the SDGs. This innovative research provides a clear picture of how the private sector can work towards the SDG targets by adopting voluntary sustainability standards. It documents the overlap between existing VSS standards and the SDG targets and identifies further potential to better align VSS with additional sustainable development goals. The report demonstrates that policymakers can select from a large number of relevant voluntary sustainability standards – at country and sectoral levels – to contribute to the SDGs.

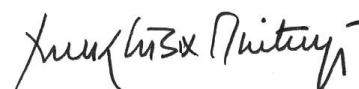
These insights are especially valuable for developing countries in their drive to for a future growth trajectory that is more sustainable and inclusive. Understanding the links between voluntary standards and the SDGs contributes to efforts to build a more resilient business ecosystem, create greener jobs, and build the business case for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to adopt greener technologies.

At the United Nations, we have emphasized the alignment between competitiveness, sustainability and inclusiveness as a means to maximize economic and development impact. This report supports and builds on that approach. Increased understanding of how voluntary sustainability standards can connect with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda makes it possible to widen and advance the effort to meet the SDGs, especially given that we have just under ten years to reach our goal.

This project was the result of successful collaboration between ITC, UNCTAD, the European University Institute, the German Development Institute and the University of Amsterdam. We trust that the findings in the report will be a useful resource for standard-setting organizations, policymakers, suppliers and lead firms as they strive to bring together the public and private sectors and promote sustainable and responsible supply chains in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals.



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Acknowledgements

This is a publication of the International Trade Centre (ITC), prepared jointly with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the European University Institute (EUI), the University of Amsterdam (UvA), and the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE).

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Joseph Wozniak (ITC), Mathieu Lamolle (ITC), Anders Aeroe (ITC), Siti Ruby Lambert (UNCTAD) and Aimee Russillo (LiSeed) provided valuable comments and feedback.

Data were provided by the Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) team of ITC. Publication of the report was made possible by the support of the Swiss and German Governments. Natalie Domeisen led the editorial and design production. Julie Wolf edited the report. Production contributors included, Anne Griffin, Sandra Cabrera de Leicht, Vicheth Christophe Khou, Duc Dang, Gregory Sampson, Matteo Fiorini and Andrew Silva. Franco Iacovino provided layout services and Serge Adeagbo the digital printing services.

This report builds on two previous reports, the ITC Report 'Social and Environmental Standards: Contributing to More Sustainable Value Chains' (ITC 2016) and the third UNFSS Flagship Report: 'Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS), Trade and Sustainable Development' (UNFSS 2018).

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