

From evidence to action: what sustainability initiatives can learn from the experience of standards

18 June 2019, The Hague

Sustainability standards have far-reaching direct impacts, from guiding businesses in implementing sustainable practices, to supporting governments and businesses in meeting their sustainability commitments. Standards also have indirect, systemic impacts, like shaping government and private sector policies, raising consumer awareness and much more.

In recent years, a wealth of evidence has emerged about how sustainability standards are driving positive economic, social and environmental impacts: product quality improvements, better incomes, improved labour conditions, biodiversity conservation and more. Business case studies also show reduced operational costs, and improved reputations and market access.

Yet, not all studies are positive, and it is clear that impacts vary across contexts. This research provides learning opportunities for standard systems, but also has broader relevance for other supply chain sustainability initiatives. What can research and evidence tell us (or not) about the factors that limit the impacts of standards? What do these findings mean for standards, businesses and governments?

We welcome leaders from the worlds of sustainability standards, business, government and civil society to join us for a candid conversation about what we know and don't know about the impacts of sustainability standards. Through presentations about the current state of evidence and recent innovations to deepen impacts, we will explore and debate how to improve the effectiveness of market-driven solutions to problems like deforestation, rural poverty, and water stress.

The day will end with a networking reception to celebrate the launch of Evidensia – an online platform to facilitate access to evidence about the impacts of sustainability standards and other supply chain sustainability systems.

The Global Sustainability Standards Symposium is hosted in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Snapshot of previous symposia

200 delegates in attendance

Senior professionals from certifications and standards, business, NGOs, government and academia representing sectors including agriculture, forestry, seafood, biofuels, mining and cosmetics

Inspiring speakers

ABN AMRO | ArcelorMittal | Bonsucro | Cargill | Colombian Coffee Growers Federation | Finance in Motion | FSC | Fundación Natura | GlobeScan | HSBC | International Finance Corporation | IKEA | Imaflora | Louis Dreyfus Company | MSC | Mars | Natura | Rainforest Alliance | Sodexo | Solidaridad | Tetra Pak | UNIDO | Union for Ethical BioTrade | WWF

Testimonies

"It was an excellent turnout and well-run event."

"Great, passionate, committed & knowledgeable team that's connected with the most insightful speakers network."

08:30	Registration and coffee
09:00	Welcome and introducing who is in the room
	This day brings together leaders from the worlds of sustainability standards, business, government and civil society to highlight what we know about how standards are using evidence to make a difference, and where we need to go from here. ISEAL and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) will open the symposium and highlight the importance of convening all the different actors in the audience to learn from the experience of sustainability standards.
09:20	Opening keynote speech: evidence and action
	Our opening keynote speaker will provide insights and inspiration on our theme of the day: from evidence to action.
9:40	Standards, certification and beyond: how standards work to drive sustainability
	Adoption of good agricultural and business practices, cross-sector collaboration, and informing government policy are just some of the ways that standard setting organisations can deliver impacts. Through a series of short presentations of specific case studies, we will paint a picture of the different pathways through which standards can advance contributions to sustainable development goals.
10:40	The evidence state of play
	We will dig into what stakeholders mean and what researchers mean when we talk about evidence about sustainability impacts. We will provide an overview of the types and coverage of evidence that is available, what topics are addressed in major synthesis research, which geographies they cover and where this information can be found. We will identify where there are gaps in evidence and potential for new research.
11:10	Coffee and networking
11:40	Improving performance: what makes supply chain initiatives most effective?
	Hear from researchers on what insights are emerging about the conditions under which standards can perform better at increasing the uptake of good practices, and about the factors that affect the performance of supply chain initiatives.
13:00	Lunch and topic tables – discover recent research and collaborations trying to address systemic challenges
14:00	BREAKOUT SESSIONS: Different ways of working: how can standards and supply chain initiatives deliver impacts on the issues that matter?
	Landscapes: From deforestation to water quality, a landscapes lens can be critical to ensuring coordinated action to address sustainability issues. We will hear from standards and other actors working on landscape initiatives about what the evidence is telling them about what they can do alone and what their role is in driving wider sector action. We will explore how the evidence is influencing their strategy and innovative approaches to tackling sustainability challenges at a landscapes level. Living income and living wage: From the Global Living Wage Coalition to the Living Income Community of Practice, initiatives are tackling the challenge of enabling a decent standard of living for workers and smallholders. We will hear from standards and other actors working to close the income gaps about what the evidence is telling them about what they can do alone and what their role is in driving wider sector action. We will explore how the evidence is informing their strategy and understanding of the challenges that remain.
15:15	Coffee and networking
15:45	Addressing challenges through data-driven innovation
	As the foundation of good evidence, good data and information are crucial to informing the way standards systems, companies and governments develop new practices, strategies and policies. We will explore how good data is being used to make multi-stakeholder initiatives more effective at improving their systems to drive credible progress and continual improvement.
17:00	Closing keynote: the long game
	Throughout the day, we will have heard about the knowledge that now exists on the impacts of standards and the gaps that remain. We will have gained insight into the strengths and limitations of standard systems for driving particular types of impacts and about the enabling conditions for standards' effectiveness. This closing speech will provide perspective on where we are and where we need to go.
17:15	Closing speech: commitment to evidence, commitment to action
	This closing speech will highlight the importance of sustainability initiatives measuring and monitoring impacts. We will close the conference with the official launch of Evidensia, the exciting new platform where you can find information on the impacts of standards.
17:30	Evidensia launch and networking reception