



Call for proposals

Improving performance measurements of key sustainability issues

Deadline for submission of proposals: 20 January 2020

Extended deadline for submission of proposals: 24 January 2020

Contract duration: 3 February 2020 to 31 March 2020 (TBC with consultant)

Contract value: ~15,000 GBP (including VAT and expenses)

1. Research Framing

ISEAL is the global membership association for credible sustainability standards. Our members are sustainability standards and systems that meet our Codes of Good Practice and promote measurable change through open, rigorous and accessible verification, certification and assurance models.

Following significant growth and influence over the last 20 years, standards, certification, and their associated best practices are now seen by many as the norm and a pre-requisite to market access. However, the reporting outputs and metrics generated by standards systems have traditionally been designed to demonstrate compliance, and have mainly been focused at the level of certified site. Increasingly, the demands on sustainability standards to demonstrate good performance through data and reporting have increased in scope, frequency and contextual specificity. For sustainability standards, this means taking into account the following trends:

- A shift from certification as a bar (you're either in or you're out) to measuring and incentivizing improvement over time. This is manifesting within sustainability standards as a shift to more outcomes-focused standards;
- Embedded in the shift to continual improvement is the call for better information about performance. Companies want to have access to regular data and insights about performance against key metrics on a limited subset of issues;
- For some sustainability issues, meaningful performance and impact needs to be measured and reported on at a scale larger than individual certified sites like farms.

The shift towards more outcome-focused standards and measurements will support standards to credibly communicate how the results of their interventions and activities impact on the issues people care about. However, questions remain before standards can fully leverage this opportunity, including:

- Considerations around defining the sustainability issue and the associated performance measurement, i.e. what is the change you want to deliver and how will you measure this progress?
- Considerations around which metrics and indicators are needed and choosing the most appropriate scale for data collection and performance reporting.

- Considerations around the data needed to measure this performance, including availability, feasibility of data collection and data quality, knowing that standards are all working across unique operational contexts.

This consultancy focuses on answering these questions for a limited set of critical sustainability issues and is part of a wider ISEAL-led project that seeks to improve the ability of ISEAL members to incentivize and measure improvement of sustainability performance. This work is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through GIZ.

2. Research scope and questions

ISEAL is seeking a consultant to carry out research on a limited subset of critical sustainability issues including deforestation, biodiversity, water use, forced labour, poverty, and GHG emissions. The aim of the research is to document for each issue a range of leading metrics and indicators and commensurate data sources that can be used to credibly measure and report on performance over time and across multiple spatial scales. The intent of the research is not to build a definitive list of the best metrics and data sources but rather to focus on the applicability of various metrics and data sources, and best practices, limitations and trade-offs associated with their use. The research is intended to further contribute to ISEAL's conceptual thinking and member support around the implementation of indicators and metrics for improved performance measurement at appropriate spatial scales.

We expect that the research will be mainly desk-based, drawing on publically available information from organizations considered global leaders on evaluating impacts and performance trends across both social and environmental sustainability issues. The outputs of this desk-based work should be supplemented by interviews with sustainability issue and sector experts to further explore approaches, methods, other considerations and case studies across each issue. We expect that the research should broadly address the following considerations for each sustainability issue, though these can be refined in consultation with the selected consultant:

Considerations around defining the sustainability issue

Knowing that global consensus on how to define some issues is lacking, how can a measurement and reporting framework account for this? Outline implications for measurement and indicator development and adapting definitions to your operational contexts. Are new partnerships or initiatives forming that are set to deliver consensus around definitions and indicator development?

Considerations around metrics and indicators needed for sustainability performance monitoring

What are the trade-offs to reconcile in terms of data quality and accuracy vs what is feasible to collect and analyze at larger scales and across multiple actors? What is an appropriate spatial scale at which to measure each sustainability issue? What are the pros and cons of measurement at various spatial scales?

Considerations around data use, collection, sources and quality

Are there global/country/landscape baseline data available to help put performance measurement in context (e.g. reference point for watersheds, jurisdictions, or agro-ecological zones, etc). Are there examples of good strategies for extrapolating data from individual sites up to landscapes? What is on the

horizon for improving performance measurement for each issue in the future? Are new tools/software, data sources becoming available?

Ultimately, this work will support standard systems and other sustainability initiatives to move towards more data-driven outcome claims, whilst providing insight into the process of considering and understanding the suitability of certain metrics and the interrelatedness of different outcomes that those metrics are intended to measure. As this work will draw on experiences across sectors and a range of sustainability issues, we also hope to highlight common challenges and emerging solutions across this global reporting spectrum.

3. Expected Deliverables

The consultant will be expected to deliver:

- A metrics/indicator table, populated with key considerations as outlined above, for each sustainability issue;
- Notes from each interview;
- Synthesis report (30 pages max.) that includes recommendations for how to determine which metrics and data sources to use in different contexts and highlights the limitations, challenges faced and emerging trends in good performance measurement across each of the prioritized sustainability issues. The outputs of the desk-research, supplemented by expert interviews and case studies, should inform the conclusions and recommendations on how to approach performance measurement at scale for these issues;
- A presentation (slide deck) summarizing the research and its findings - to be presented to ISEAL at the end of the project.

The exact format, length and tone of these deliverables will be agreed upon in close consultation with the ISEAL project team.

4. Application timeframe

The contract duration will be two months, from 3 February 2020 to 31 March 2020 (to be confirmed with successful consultant).

The expected tentative timeline for the application process and implementation deadlines is:

- 24 January: extended deadline for proposal submission
- 30 January: notification of contract award
- 3 February: start of contract and kick-off meeting
- 10 March: intermediate outputs provided and discussed
- 31 March: final report submitted and close of contract (TBC with consultant)

5. Application process

Interested parties should submit a full proposal of max. 10 pages, covering or considering the following elements:

- A summary of experience and knowledge related to the specific deliverables, including references from related work experience and publications;
- A proposed research methodology covering data collection methods and data sources and prospective number of institutions /organizations that would need to be used in order to populate a metrics/indicator table.
- A prospective list of institutions /organizations to contact for interviews across sustainability challenges.
- A budget including a high-level work-plan, day rates, and incidentals such as communications expenses and any applicable taxes.

Please note that interested parties are expected to have the network and contacts already in place to independently organise and schedule interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Contractors should declare all potential conflicts of interest.

The ISEAL project team will provide the consultant with existing background research, where relevant.

Tenders can be submitted by email to innovations@isealalliance.org on or prior to 24 January 2020.

ISEAL reserves the right not to accept any tender submitted.