

# Call for Proposals

## Research consultancy to review evidence on ethical and social auditing and recommendations to improve practice

ISEAL is looking for an experienced researcher or consultancy team to conduct background research and deliver a concise report that summarises the available evidence on social and ethical auditing, drawing out key critiques and synthesising recommendations for voluntary sustainability schemes. This consultancy is part of ISEAL's efforts to improve the credibility and reliability of audit and assurance functions of sustainability standards, especially to deliver against human rights and decent work goals. ISEAL will use the insights from this research to drive learning and improvements in practice with its Community Members.

*Call for proposals: 27th February 2023*

*Deadline for submission of proposals: 10 March 2023*

*Notification to successful candidate: 15 March 2023*

*Contract duration: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023*

*Contract value: up to a max of 9000 GBP (including VAT)*



## About ISEAL

ISEAL supports ambitious sustainability systems and their partners to tackle the world's most pressing challenges. With [our growing global network](#) and our focus on credible practices, we drive impact and make markets a force for good. From the climate emergency to human rights and persistent poverty, the world needs scalable and effective solutions. Our convening power and thought leadership accelerate positive change on these critical challenges, so companies and governments can meet their sustainability commitments and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Our membership works across more than a hundred countries, in sectors from agri-food, forestry and seafood to biomaterials and extractives.

## Background

Sustainability standards have existed for two decades and are one of the most widely used voluntary tools for driving sustainable and responsible business behaviour. As market-based tools, many systems have specific criteria and requirements in their standards relating to workers' rights. We believe that voluntary instruments will continue to play an important role in the next decade of action on business and human rights, especially on advancing decent work goals. But to do so, there is an urgent need for voluntary sustainability schemes to address current limitations, strengthen systems and governance and drive innovation at scale to become fit for purpose as instruments to advance the decent work agenda.

In recent years, several studies have been published with strong critiques of 'social audits' and/or the use of certification and auditing in the context of human and labour rights. These include reports by the Clean Clothes Campaign, Human Rights Watch, Re:Structure Lab, Seafood Alliance, SOMO and MSI Integrity. Understanding the arguments being made and what remedies and improvements are suggested is critical input for various aspects of ISEAL's work – the revision of ISEAL's Code of Good Practice, the development of new tools and guidance to assist in improving system integrity, and a new workstream focused on improving the effectiveness of sustainability standards in global collective solutions to address human and labour rights abuses.

## The Assignment

We are looking for an experienced researcher or consultant team with strong subject matter knowledge of voluntary sustainability standards (especially in relation to the audit, verification and assurance function of voluntary schemes) and human rights and decent work context to help us summarize the key findings and recommendations of reports and studies about social auditing.



The consultant will be expected to:

1. Identify at least 15 credible reports or studies to review (focusing on the most recent and most widely read and referenced reports, preferably drawing from literature on two – three sectors)
2. Produce a concise report that captures:
  - the arguments made about the weakness and problems with auditing and certification in the human and labour rights context,
  - an assessment of the strength of the evidence and methodology used in these reports, what arguments or issues the reports may have overlooked,
  - analysis and insight into whether the weaknesses and problems noted are cross-cutting (across sectors) and to what extent they are sector specific,
  - recommendations, solutions or remedies suggested to address these specific concerns, and
  - what questions/issues deserve further research and analysis.
3. Present and discuss the report in a virtual member meeting organized by ISEAL after completion of the research.

## Timing

This assignment has a tight timeline and we encourage consultants who can meet our timelines to apply. Interested consultants should be prepared to start work on this assignment no later than April 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 and to carry out the work over a one month period.

## To Apply

Interested candidates should contact Vidya Rangan ([vidya@isealalliance.org](mailto:vidya@isealalliance.org)) Senior Manager, Impacts and Innovations as soon as possible with an expression of interest.

To be considered for this work, the consultant will need to submit by 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023:

- A statement of interest, explaining their interest in this work and how it builds on past work they've done:
- A CV or short summary of their experience and knowledge of sustainability standards



- Publication record or list of previous research assignments taken and writing samples of reports written
- Names of references from related work experience
- A budget for the work (including no of days and total cost for the piece of work)
- Contractors should declare all potential conflicts of interest.

The total budget should include consultant time and incidentals such as telephone expenses and any taxes (including VAT).

The budget should not include travel costs. Any travel needed for this project must be approved in advance by ISEAL and will be reimbursed based on agreed guidelines.

All information exchanged during the contract will be confidential, unless otherwise indicated, and the consultant will be expected to sign a confidentiality agreement with ISEAL at the outset. The research will be property of ISEAL. If the consultant wishes to publish the results elsewhere, advance approval by ISEAL and by the standard systems included as cases will be needed.

Submissions will be reviewed on a rolling basis starting on March 1, 2023. Submissions should be sent to [vidya@isealalliance.org](mailto:vidya@isealalliance.org)). ISEAL reserves the right not to accept any tender submitted.