



Fair Trade, Organic & co.

SECO encourages transparent and innovative sustainability standards through the «Transparency and Innovation of Sustainability Standards» (TISS) programme.

SECO has been committed to sustainability standards for many years; one example being the initial funding it provided to the Swiss Max Havelaar Foundation in 1992. Today, many standards are widely accepted in the market; however, significant global and technological changes lead to new challenges. SECO encourages transparency and innovation and supports the cooperation of standards organisations through the TISS Programme. For this reason, it is collaborating with the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance (ISEAL Alliance).

Rationale

For the past thirty years, voluntary private sustainability standards or labels such as Fairtrade, Organic Farming or FSC have become an important economic factor. A SECO-funded study, which looked at 14 standards in several raw material sectors, showed that their market share is rapidly expanding.¹ Labels can guide consumers, but for businesses they are much more than simply communication or marketing instruments. Implementing sustainability standards helps them improve how they manage their supply chains and their operational processes.

Standards organisations are confronted with new challenges due to increased globalisation, the increased use of natural resources, and digitisation. Also, the number of sustainability standards has risen dramatically – and sometimes uncontrollably. It is against this backdrop that the London-based ISEAL Alliance provides useful guidance. The Alliance was founded in 2002 by seven standards organisations that included the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and Fairtrade. The objective in setting up ISEAL was to build closer cooperation across standards organisations working in diverse sectors such as wood, fishing, organic and fair farming, in order to learn and evolve together.

SECO country/region
Global

Project partner
International Trade
Centre ITC,
ISEAL Alliance

Duration
2016-2022

Total budget
USD 30 million

SECO contribution
USD 12.5 million



¹ Julia Lernoud et al. (2017), The State of Sustainable Markets – Statistics and Emerging Trends 2017, ITC, Geneva

Objectives and Activities

The TISS programme features two components:

● Networking and innovation

The Codes of Good Practice proposed by ISEAL, especially the required multi-stakeholder approach, are considered the global reference for developing and applying credible standards. The organisation encourages knowledge sharing across the different standards systems, promotes their collaboration, and has launched an innovation programme to increase the positive social, environmental and economic impact of credible standards.

SECO supports various ISEAL projects, including its new Innovations Fund. Through this Fund, ISEAL provides co-finance to standards organisations to help them develop and pilot test innovative solutions to many of the key challenges they face. Improving assurance and monitoring efficiencies through digitizing audit information, traceability innovations like blockchain, monitoring and verification at the level of landscapes or jurisdictions, are examples of some of the innovations being tested. For more information, go to www.isealalliance.org/get-involved/our-work/innovations-fund.

● A database for more transparency and credibility

In light of the proliferation of sustainability standards, it is important for all actors involved to promote transparency. Since 2009, the Trade for Sustainable Development Programme (T4SD) of the International Trade Centre (ITC), the joint agency of WTO and the UN with headquarters in Geneva, has developed a comprehensive database of over 270 voluntary sustainability standards, hosted and developed by the programme. In autumn 2017, ITC launched the new information platform www.sustainabilitymap.org, which combines the data of two existing online tools with two new platforms, creating the world's leading data pool for sustainability standards.

Under the scope of the TISS programme, the database will be expanded and supplemented with information about other standards. ITC is also in direct contact with the Swiss information sites like www.kompass-nachhaltigkeit.ch and www.labelinfo.ch, which help guide consumers, SME purchasing departments and the authorities.

Governance Structure

The TISS programme features two independent governance structures for the transparency and the innovation component. Both are subordinated to an overarching annual Steering Mechanism Meeting in order to ensure a regular exchange on the progress and perspectives between the two components of the programme.

Results so far

Sustainability Map gathers more than 270 standards in a platform where users can easily access and compare the content and geographical representation of individual labels. The database has become an important tool for various actors looking for sustainable solutions to increase their value added in supply chains.

Further information and contact details

Website for ISEAL: www.isealalliance.org

Website for ITC: www.sustainabilitymap.org

TISS at SECO: info.wehu.cooperation@seco.admin.ch