

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

CONTRIBUTING TO MORE SUSTAINABLE
VALUE CHAINS



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The joint ITC-EUI report aims at uncovering factors making environmental and social standards producer-friendly. It shows how the institutional design of standards and their governance structure can make standards more accessible to producers through cost sharing, assistance and transparency, and how country-level characteristics affect the number of standards available. The report concludes with recommendations on how standard-setting organizations and value chain players can foster inclusiveness and sustainable development, and provides guidance for policymakers on supporting the integration of their SMEs and small farmers into sustainable value chains.

Descriptors: **Certification, Global Value Chains, Standards, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Supply Chains, Sustainable Value Chains, Voluntary Standards.**

For further information on this report, contact Olga Solleder (solleder@intracen.org).

English

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ITC, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland (www.intracen.org)

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Foreword

The increase in consumer demand for sustainable trade has given rise to a growing array of social and environmental standards. These standards play a valuable role in supporting greener supply chains, as evidenced by their dramatic expansion. Between 2008 and 2014, areas certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil increased almost thirtyfold; the Rainforest Alliance/Sustainable Agriculture Network's areas of coverage expanded more than ninefold. The UTZ certified area grew by 6.5 times between 2010 and 2014 (ITC, 2016).

Standards related to working conditions and the protection of basic human rights play an important role in supporting corporate social responsibility. The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) Base Code, Social Accountability 8000 (SA 8000) Standard and Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) Code of Conduct are among the major social responsibility schemes currently applied worldwide.

Another driver of voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) is global supply chains. The rise of global supply chains has facilitated efficiency gains and given consumers access to a greater variety of and lower-priced products. However, this trend has also made production more complex. Lead firms need to be able to ensure that suppliers conform to quality and safety standards. They need to establish systems to monitor the production process, including the traceability of the origin and flow of inputs and processed products. Product and production process standards developed by the private sector as opposed to governments are among several tools used to ensure that suppliers satisfy minimum quality, safety, social and environmental norms.

As a result, a plethora of voluntary standards have emerged. Some of these standards have been adopted by companies and others by consumer groups. Several initiatives overlap with each other and compete in the market. Producers may confront significant complexity and uncertainty over which standards to adopt. The same is true for consumers seeking to buy products that conform to environmental, social and quality standards.

To help overcome these challenges, ITC launched the Trade for Sustainable Development Programme (T4SD) eight years ago, with strong support from the German Government, the Swiss Government and the European Commission. The programme's goal is to promote sustainable supply chains as a means to help developing countries and their small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) add value to their products and services. One of the main outputs of T4SD is the Standards Map website and database, which contain information on more than 200 standards systems, codes of conduct and audit protocols addressing sustainability hotspots in global supply chains.

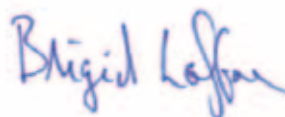
Understanding the requirements of different sustainability standards is only a first step. That is why ITC partnered with the European University Institute (EUI) to produce this groundbreaking report. It marks the first time that the richness and depth of information in the T4SD database has been analysed from an econometric perspective. This enables a better understanding of the landscape of voluntary standards and provides insights into the geographic patterns of their operations and accessibility to producers. The Global Governance Programme of the EUI's Robert Schuman Centre is an ideal partner in this effort. The Robert Schuman Centre has an active research programme on multilevel governance and international regulatory cooperation. Voluntary sustainability standards are relevant to both of these dimensions.

Several important messages can be taken away from the ITC-EUI analysis. Key among them is that voluntary standards are more producer-friendly and more transparent if both buyers and producers are involved in standards management or governance. In addition, the size of the economy and the quality of government institutions are important determinants of the number of standards operating in countries, and hence of their availability to producers.

We are very pleased with this first outcome of ITC-EUI collaboration and trust that the findings of this policy report will be a useful resource to standard-setting organizations, policymakers, suppliers and lead firms as they work to better integrate developing-world SMEs into sustainable and responsible supply chains.



Arancha González
Executive Director
International Trade Centre



Brigid Laffan
Director
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
European University Institute

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