

# Sustainability standards and the SDGs

Evidence of ISEAL members' contribution

MARCH 2017

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# INTRODUCTION



# THE SDGs AND CASE FOR SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS

In September 2015, the countries of the United Nations set out an ambitious vision for the next 15 years. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* is “a new plan of action for people, planet and prosperity”, based around a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 17 goals and 169 associated targets aim to tackle the biggest social, environmental and economic challenges of our age – from ending poverty and hunger, to providing universal access to water and energy, to action on climate change and stopping biodiversity loss.

The SDGs are quickly becoming a universal language for governments, businesses and NGOs to engage each other around shared sustainability aims, commitments, outcomes and impacts. They provide a holistic framework that allows, and indeed requires, businesses to contribute to their achievement over the next 15 years. More importantly, the SDGs promote partnership and collaboration amongst diverse stakeholders to drive and achieve change.

Credible sustainability standards embody this spirit. A new report published by WWF and ISEAL Alliance builds a strong case for how businesses can use credible voluntary sustainability standards to contribute to the 2030 Agenda<sup>1</sup>. With their focus on measurable economic, social and environmental improvements, standards offer a ready-made tool to contribute to the achievement of many of the overarching goals and specific targets. In particular, as market mechanisms with proven business benefits, voluntary standards can channel the investment and commitment from the private sector that will be critical in achieving the SDGs.

ISEAL Alliance members’ standards are already engaged in many of the areas that are most relevant to the SDGs – from enhancing the livelihoods of people living in poverty, to supporting workers’ rights and gender equality, to addressing water and energy use, to minimising negative impacts on the climate, biodiversity and ecosystems. The sectors they cover – like agriculture, fishing and forestry – are fundamental to the prospects of hundreds of millions of people, including many of the world’s poorest. But these sectors are also putting a huge strain on the natural environment, while poverty, inequality and human rights violations remain all too common. Improving practices in these sectors, as sustainability standards aim to, is essential to achieving many of the goals.

This report demonstrates how sustainability standards that are ISEAL members are already contributing to the SDGs. It pulls together evidence of how certification is driving positive economic, social and environmental impacts in many sectors, resulting in measurable progress toward SDG targets.

As ISEAL member standards continue to align their work with the SDG agenda and measure their impacts accordingly, we hope to bring more evidence of their contribution. We look forward to building on this report and further demonstrating the impact of ISEAL member standards on the SDGs in future.

## About ISEAL Alliance

ISEAL represents the movement of credible and innovative sustainability standards. Our mission is to strengthen sustainability standards for the benefit of people and the environment.

Membership is open to all multi-stakeholder sustainability standards and accreditation bodies that demonstrate their ability to meet the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice and accompanying requirements, and commit to learning and improving. Through membership in ISEAL, standards systems show a commitment to supporting a unified movement of sustainability standards. ISEAL also has a non-member, subscriber category to engage with governments, researchers, consultants, private sector organisations, non-profit organisations and other stakeholders with a demonstrable commitment to the ISEAL objectives.

The goals of the ISEAL Alliance are to:

- Improve the impacts of standards
- Define credibility for sustainability standards
- Increase the uptake of credible sustainability standards
- Improve the effectiveness of standards, including driving innovations in standards

Our vision for 2025 is that credible and innovative sustainability standards, exemplified by ISEAL members, will deliver profound sustainability improvements to the world's most pressing problems.

Current ISEAL members:



# SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THIS REPORT

This report provides evidence of how ISEAL member standards are contributing towards achieving the SDGs drawing primarily from members' evaluation studies and monitoring data and select external sources.

Although ISEAL members cover a wide range of industries and have varying objectives, in this report we focus on four SDGs that are directly relevant to the work of most ISEAL members. These are grouped under three themes:

- Sustainable agriculture (linked to SDG2, with a focus on supporting smallholder production and livelihoods)
- Productive employment and decent work (linked to SDG8, with a focus on entrepreneurship, workers' rights and empowerment)
- Water and energy efficiency (linked to SDG6 and SDG7).

We chose to focus on these goals because we have recent, good quality and publicly available data and evidence across a range of standards demonstrating ISEAL member standards' contribution. The focus on these goals does not mean that there is no evidence of sustainability standards contributing to other SDGs. As ISEAL members and researchers generate more evidence of standards' impacts in sectors such as mining, water stewardship, aquaculture and new thematic areas, it should be possible to synthesise evidence across more goals.

While these themes reflect many of the major contributions made by sustainability standards, this does not mean they are not also having an impact in other areas. Indeed, some individual standards play a strong role in delivering particular SDGs: the Marine

Stewardship Council (MSC), for example, contributes strongly to SDG14 (Life Below Water), while Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification is already recognised as an indicator of progress on forest-related targets under SDG15 (Life On Land). ISEAL member standards are also integral to SDG12, which focuses on Responsible Production and Consumption, and SDG17, which aims to strengthen global partnerships to achieve the goals.

It's also important to understand that the SDGs are strongly interconnected: the UN Resolution calls them "integrated and indivisible". The impacts outlined here are also likely to make a positive contribution in other areas. For example, a standard that contributes to SDG8 (Decent Work) by requiring a safe working environment and providing on-site medical services also has positive impacts on SDG3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and SDG1 (No Poverty), as work-related accidents can push whole families into poverty. Efforts under SDG7 to increase energy efficiency and the uptake of renewable energy will contribute to SDG13 (Climate Action).

ISEAL member standards are increasingly looking at how their principles, criteria and indicators align with the SDGs, and to build this into their impact assessments. This will support governments and the private sector to monitor, measure and communicate their progress against the goals, and drive further improvement.

# SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



# SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

## SDG 2: END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



**Target 2.3:** *By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value additions and non-farm employment*

**Target 2.4:** *By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality*

### Research shows that sustainability standards help build **productive, resilient and sustainable food systems** that directly contribute towards achieving SDG2.

SDG2 aims to end hunger and malnutrition – which still affect more than 790 million people worldwide – by 2030. This can only happen if agricultural practices are sustainable and resilient, able to meet growing demands even as climate change, water scarcity, soil degradation and other risks threaten productivity. With four out of five of the world’s poor living in rural areas and largely dependent on farming to make a living, sustainable agriculture is essential to ending poverty (SDG1) and achieving many of the other SDGs. At the same time, unsustainable agriculture could undermine the achievement of several of the goals: poor farming practices are one of the leading threats to water security (SDG6), the climate (SDG13) and ecosystems and biodiversity (SDG14), among others.

As the FAO report<sup>2</sup> on the role of agriculture in achieving the SDGs states, “Tackling hunger and malnutrition is not only about boosting food production, but also to do with increasing incomes, creating resilient food systems and strengthening markets so that people can access safe and nutritious food even if a crisis prevents them from growing enough themselves”. The SDG framework places specific emphasis on the role of smallholder agriculture in achieving this goal. Smallholder farmers and their families make up a large proportion of the world’s poor and hungry, so improving agricultural productivity and

incomes for smallholders is integral to eradicating poverty and hunger.

Many ISEAL member standards focus on sustainable agriculture, and work to improve productivity, incomes and livelihoods, especially for smallholders. Most standards currently focus on cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, tea, bananas, cotton, sugarcane and palm oil, rather than staple food crops. However, these commodities are essential to the livelihoods of millions of smallholder farmers, and the better management practices that credible standards promote play an important role in improving incomes and making agriculture more productive and sustainable.

This section shows how standards are driving change in three areas, primarily in a smallholder context: agricultural productivity, farmer incomes and ecological conservation. These areas are closely interlinked and often mutually reinforcing: for example, greater productivity generally leads to improved incomes, while conservation measures make production systems more resilient. As well as contributing directly to SDG2, the examples given here will often also have an impact on other goals – from contributing to gender equality by improving incomes for women farmers (SDG5) to conserving biodiversity (SDG15).



## AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY

The adoption of sustainability standards can boost **farm productivity** in many sectors that are **vital to smallholder livelihoods**.













As the world's population continues to grow, improving agricultural productivity is crucial to ensuring food security for all. This is particularly important in the case of smallholders and family farmers, who produce around 70% of total global food supply but often lack access to the knowledge and resources to improve productivity.<sup>3</sup>

Target 2.3 aims to “double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers” by 2030. Sustainability standards are already showing that this ambitious target can be achieved: for example, UTZ certified cocoa farmers in Indonesia more than doubled their yields in just four years.<sup>4</sup> Cost-benefit analyses of small-scale farming have shown that improved yields and revenue that result from

implementing standards outweigh the investment needed in certification and operational costs.

Standards help to improve productivity by providing farmers with access to training and knowledge about better agricultural practices, and a strong incentive to apply them. These include a range of requirements to improve soil quality and fertility, reduce unsustainable pesticide use, improve water management and conserve natural ecosystems – all of which can contribute to increasing yields in the long term while reducing environmental impacts. Many standards also offer access to finance, technical expertise and other inputs that enable increased yields and reduced costs. Initiatives are usually targeted at smaller producers, contributing to SDG2, specifically target 2.3.

### Examples from ISEAL member standards

| Sector                                                                                          | Standard                                                                                      | Country & Region                                                                                                  | Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Coffee<br>   | UTZ<br>    | Caldas and Huida, Colombia<br> | Despite the downward trend in yield over a four year period for both certified and non-certified farmers in Colombia, <b>UTZ</b> certified farmers increased their difference in yield against non-certified farmers, showing that the program has had a positive significant effect. <sup>5</sup> |
| Palm Oil<br> | RSPO<br>   | Thailand<br>                   | 87 out of 100 surveyed <b>RSPO</b> certified palm oil producers reported an increase in oil palm production and quality. Yields of mature trees increased from 18.4 to 20.3 t/ha (for younger trees) and from 21.3 to 23.8 t/ha (for older trees). <sup>6</sup>                                    |
| Coffee<br>   | RA/SAN<br> | Santander, Colombia<br>        | Farm productivity on <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certified farms was 1,375 kg/ha, which was more than double that of non-certified farmers, who produced on average 651 kg/ha. <sup>7</sup>                                                                                                         |
| Cocoa<br>    | UTZ<br>    | Indonesia<br>                  | <b>UTZ</b> certified cocoa farmers studied in Indonesia more than doubled their yields over a 3-4 year period, from 300-400 kg/ha to 800-1,000kg/ha. <sup>8</sup>                                                                                                                                  |

|                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Coffee</p>    | <p>Global Coffee Platform (4C)</p>  | <p>Colombia</p>                | <p>4C certification showed a significant positive effect during a period of low yields and productivity in Colombia. While overall output fell, farmers within the programme performed significantly better: their yields dropped just 8% in Caldas and 7% in Santander, compared to 59.4% and 49% in their respective control groups.</p> |
| <p>Palm Oil</p>  | <p>RSPO</p>                         | <p>Indonesia</p>               | <p>For independent smallholders in Indonesia, meeting the best practices required by the <b>RSPO</b> standard led to yields increasing by 10%, from 17.9 t/ha to 19.7t/ha. Even larger productivity gains have been achieved: one firm in Indonesia reported a 186% increase in t/ha from its smallholder producers.<sup>9</sup></p>       |
| <p>Coffee</p>    | <p>RA/SAN</p>                       | <p>Nicaragua</p>               | <p>11 <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certified farms were compared to nine comparable non-certified farms. It was found that annual productivity was higher on certified farms (1,430 kg/ha versus 872 kg/ha).<sup>10</sup></p>                                                                                                                |
| <p>Cocoa</p>    | <p>UTZ</p>                         | <p>Ghana and Ivory Coast</p>  | <p>Cost-benefit analyses of small-scale farming show that the improved production practices required by UTZ certification bring enhanced yields. Higher cacao revenue was found to outweigh the extra investment in certification and operational costs.<sup>11</sup></p>                                                                  |

### Bonsucro Standard and higher yields in the sugarcane sector



Sugarcane mills certified to the **Bonsucro** Production Standard around the world register consistently higher yields than the global average. The world average orbited around 70 tonnes per hectare, reaching the highest level in 2013 at 70.7 t/ha. Certified mills have improved their yields consistently, reaching an average of 73t/ha in 2014. This is reassuring, as yields might have been expected to fall at this time: most certified mills are in Brazil, which faced difficult climatic conditions, with strong droughts reinforced by one of the hardest El Nino events on record.<sup>12</sup>

Better Cotton Initiative and productivity improvements in the cotton sector:  
Difference in yield between BCI and non-BCI farmers in 2014 <sup>13</sup>



Pakistan  
+9%

India  
+11%

Mozambique  
+57%



Tajikistan  
+53%

China  
+11%

Turkey  
+7%



Mali  
+15%

## FARMER INCOMES AND PROFITABILITY


Certified farmers who adopt sustainability standards can receive **higher incomes and profits than non-certified** farmers in the same region and sector.

While some standards, such as Fairtrade, guarantee minimum prices, certified producers don't depend on price premiums to improve their incomes and profitability. As discussed, certification can lead to higher farm productivity and better quality yields. Often, this is achieved with lower production costs: techniques such as using organic matter in place of

chemical fertiliser, biological controls instead of chemical pesticides, and more precise irrigation are good for farmers' wallets as well as the local environment. Growing international demand for certified products also enables small producers to access high-value markets and benefit from stable, long-term relationships with buyers.


### Examples from ISEAL member standards

**UTZ coffee in Caldas and Huila, Colombia**



In Colombia, between 2008 and 2011, there were challenging conditions for the coffee sector in the country with low prices and disease. Yields of conventional farmers fell by 52%, but only by 1% for **UTZ certified** farmers, showing good resilience.<sup>14</sup>

**Fairtrade bananas in Colombia**



In Colombia, 96% of smallholders growing bananas said their economic situation and household income had improved since joining **Fairtrade**. Increases ranged from 7% to 64%, averaging out at 34%.<sup>15</sup>



Certification in cocoa can lead to improved farm productivity and profitability<sup>36</sup>



In Ghana, UTZ certified cocoa farmers' **profit per kilo increased by 24%** over three years, compared to 18% for non-certified farmers.


Wageningen report on UTZ in cocoa in Ghana, 2016.

In Indonesia, average **yield** for UTZ certified farmers **was double that of non-certified farmers** (687 vs 322 kg/ha) after 2 years.

Aidenvironment report on UTZ in Indonesian cocoa, 2016

In Cote d'Ivoire, half of UTZ certified cocoa farmers said that their **income had increased since certification**. Net household income for **certified farmers was 15% higher than for non-certified farmers** (€2,343 vs. €2,013) from 2012-16.

Wageningen report on UTZ in Cote d'Ivoire, 2014

A person is riding a motorcycle through a lush palm oil plantation. The motorcycle has two large, woven wicker baskets attached to the front and back, filled with palm oil fruit. The rider is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark shoes. The ground is a dirt path, and there are some sandals on the ground in the foreground. The background is filled with tall palm trees and dense foliage.

Average annual household income for RSPO certified palm oil smallholders in Keresas, Malaysia is almost 25% higher than that of non-certified smallholders – with bigger yields and farm size also being relevant factors.

RSPO Impacts Report, 2016.



















## ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION













The adoption of standards can reduce the ecological footprint of farming by preserving **soil quality, water and conservation** areas around certified farms.

Farming systems depend on the services provided by natural ecosystems – from freshwater resources, to the microorganisms that make the soil fertile, to the trees that prevent flooding and erosion, to pollinators and other beneficial insects. However, unsustainable farming practices have a huge impact on the natural world: agriculture is the leading cause of biodiversity loss globally and is responsible for around 80% of water use and around a fifth of greenhouse-gas

emissions. Sustainability standards directly address these issues through criteria that promote better soil and water management, reduce or prohibit the use of harmful chemicals, and protect natural habitats. Many standards require farmers to preserve local habitats, including identifying and protecting areas of high conservation value (HCV), conserving vegetation around water courses and maintaining habitat connectivity, and to take steps to conserve species.

### Examples from ISEAL member standards

| Sector                                                                                             | Standard                                                                                           | Scope                                                                                                  | Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agriculture<br>  | LEAF Marque<br>  | Global<br>           | Farms with the <b>LEAF Marque</b> takes steps to protect wildlife and soils. In 2015, 686 LEAF Marque certified businesses set at least 5% of land aside for habitat management; 116,092 hectares of crops had a Landscape and Nature Conservation and Enhancement Plan; and 190,516 hectares had a Soil Management Plan. <sup>17</sup>                                                                                                                                            |
| Coffee<br>      | RA/SAN<br>      | Central America<br> | In El Salvador, shade-grown coffee plantations and conservation areas on <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certified farms provide a refuge for migratory birds in a largely deforested landscape. <sup>18</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Cocoa<br>       | UTZ<br>         | Cote D'Ivoire<br>   | <b>UTZ</b> certified farmers in Cote d'Ivoire performed better than non-certified farmers with regards to knowledge and implementation of water and soil conservation measures, and the protection or restoration of natural habitats. The longer farmers are in the programme, the better they implement biodiversity conservation practices. <sup>19</sup>                                                                                                                       |
| Agriculture<br> | LEAF Marque<br> | Ghana<br>           | In Ghana, Blue Skies was the first company to achieve <b>LEAF Marque</b> certification for a group of farmers. Its Landscape and Nature Conservation and Enhancement Plan includes a tree-planting programme, and a policy of purchasing areas at risk from land degradation or deforestation in order to preserve them. Blue Skies is also campaigning to stop illegal quarrying and 'sand winning', which is causing widespread environmental damage around Accra. <sup>20</sup> |
| Cocoa<br>       | RA/SAN<br>      | West Africa<br>     | <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certified cocoa operations in West Africa were mainly found to maintain riparian buffers and other forms of habitat connectivity, which help protect conservation values in cocoa-producing landscapes. <sup>21</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Coffee<br>      | UTZ<br>         | Colombia<br>        | A study of <b>UTZ</b> coffee farmers in Colombia cites progress in care for the environment as “the most outstanding achievement”, pointing to significant improvements from soil conservation practices, recycling, better agrochemical handling and water saving. <sup>22</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

|                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Palm oil</p>  | <p>RSPO</p>                         | <p>Indonesia &amp; Malaysia</p>  | <p>Some 3.5 million hectares of land has been certified by the <b>RSPO</b>, of which around 5% is set aside to conserve HCV areas. Protecting HCV areas is particularly critical when it comes to new plantings: by 2014, the RSPO had received 100 notifications of new planting covering 1,140,683 hectares in 10 countries, with 159,656 hectares or 14% set aside for conservation.<sup>23</sup></p> |
| <p>Tea</p>       | <p>UTZ</p>                          | <p>India</p>                     | <p>In India, 95% of <b>UTZ</b> certified tea farmers used organic fertilisers, compared to 51% on non-certified farms. The large majority of certified estates (84%) say their soil quality has improved.<sup>24</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <p>Coffee</p>    | <p>Global Coffee Platform (4C)</p>  | <p>Colombia</p>                  | <p>In the Caldas region of Colombia, 43% of <b>4C</b> farms had access to water treatment systems or used methods like mixing wastewater with coffee pulp, compared to 12% of the control group. In the Santander region, 40% of 4C farms treated the water, compared to only 3% of control farms.<sup>25</sup></p>                                                                                      |
| <p>Coffee</p>    | <p>RA/SAN</p>                       | <p>Ethiopia</p>                  | <p>In Ethiopia, <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certification had a beneficial effect on forest protection, decreasing the probability that natural forests producing shade-grown coffee would be deforested, relative to nearby non-certified and non-coffee producing forests.<sup>26</sup></p>                                                                                                             |



A man wearing a colorful striped hoodie is working in a coffee field. He is looking down at a yellow bucket he is holding. The background is filled with green coffee plants and leaves.

In Santander region,  
Colombia, 40% of **Global  
Coffee Platform** certified  
farms treated the water  
used during coffee  
processing compared to  
only 3% of control farms.

CRECE 4C Colombia Evaluation Report, 2016

## PARTNERING TO ADDRESS KEY CHALLENGES

Some key challenges remain in the field of sustainable agriculture:

- Yield and quality improvements are not always translating into income improvements for farmers. This is key to addressing food security and nutrition concerns in rural areas as food prices rise.
- Some commodity prices remain low, which can be a disincentive for farmers to invest in more sustainable practices.
- Improved measurement and evidence is needed to demonstrate and strengthen the conservation impacts of standards.
- More sales of certified agricultural products are needed to scale up revenues and profits for farmers.
- Specific efforts are needed to address issues facing women farmers and agricultural labourers.

Standards are working with governments, businesses and NGOs to address these challenges and drive improvements. For example, ISEAL members and many businesses that rely on their standards are seeking to understand whether smallholder farmers are actually earning a 'living income' and, if not, what it would take to get them there. ISEAL is working with the Sustainable Food Lab and GIZ to develop living income benchmarks and explore what a decent standard of living could be for farming households.

[www.isealalliance.org/livingIncome](http://www.isealalliance.org/livingIncome)

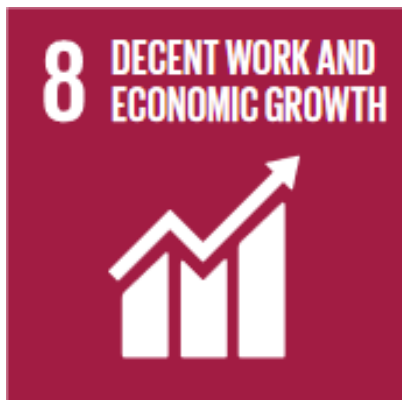


# DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



# DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

## SDG 8: PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL



**Target 8.3:** *Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services*

**Target 8.5:** *By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value*

**Target 8.7:** *Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms*

**Target 8.8:** *Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment*

Research shows that sustainability standards promote inclusive **economic growth** that **supports core labour rights, improves sustainability awareness and fuels local entrepreneurship**, directly contributing towards achieving SDG8.

Economic growth is the engine of sustainable development, and is especially vital for the world's poorest countries. But growth needs to be inclusive, providing income and opportunities for all. And it needs to be sustainable, so that economic prosperity doesn't come at the expense of a healthy environment. The right to work, and to decent working conditions, is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Globally, unemployment stands at around 6% – although women and young people are significantly more likely to be unemployed. Many of those who are in work suffer dangerous and unreasonable working conditions, and their wages often fail to cover even basic living expenses. Meanwhile, there are 168 million child labourers, 59% of them working in agriculture; more than half do hazardous work.

SDG8 promotes sustainable economic growth and decent work for all – and credible standards address many of its key themes and targets. Standards can help

provide productive employment and a better living for some of the world's poorest people, including smallholder farmers, agricultural workers, fishers and factory workers. They also play a key role in improving working conditions and respect for workers' rights throughout supply chains.

This section provides evidence of the impact ISEAL member standards are having in three key areas: in supporting economic productivity and entrepreneurship, particularly among smallholder producers; in promoting workers' safety, rights and wellbeing; and in tackling child labour in the sectors where it is most widespread. These examples contribute directly to achieving several targets under SDG8, while also advancing progress towards other goals, such as ending poverty (SDG1) and hunger (SDG2), education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG6) and reduced inequality (SDG10).









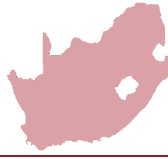



## ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP













Sustainability standards support **sustainable production**, can boost **productivity and profits of SMEs**, build vocational skills and spur **entrepreneurship**.


A key aim of sustainability standards is to enable farmers and workers to gain more from trade – including through premiums (which are guaranteed by standards such as Fairtrade and UTZ), by strengthening supply chain relationships and market access, and by improving productivity and profitability, as discussed above. Sustainability standards contribute to sustainable economic growth (8.1) and greater productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation (8.2) by providing training

and sharing knowledge. Many standards work with local partners to support livelihood opportunities and decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation (8.3). Standards help to improve business performance and access to credit lines and higher-value markets, particularly for SMEs (8.3). They can also improve resource efficiency and help to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation (8.4).

### Examples from ISEAL member standards

| Sector                                                                                          | Standard                                                                                                          | Country                                                                                             | Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Textiles<br> | GoodWeave<br>                  | Nepal<br>        | <b>GoodWeave's</b> Weaving Opportunities programme in Nepal provides training for women whose families are living in poverty. During the pilot year, 124 newly trained weavers were placed in fair, safe and stable employment at GoodWeave monitored carpet factories. Before entering the programme, more than half of the 87 surveyed women said they had no income source, while the median income of those who were employed doubled. <sup>27</sup>                                                                    |
| Forestry<br> | RA/SAN<br>                     | Peru<br>         | A <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> -supported community forestry programme in Peru has helped more than 250 independent brazil nut harvesters to become entrepreneurs while sustainably managing 89,501 hectares of tropical rainforest. Over four years (2010-14), the programme created 60 new jobs, boosted the assets of three cooperatives by 160% and their cash reserves by 23%, and increased farmer incomes by 17%. <sup>28</sup>                                                                                        |
| Marine<br>   | Marine Stewardship Council<br> | South Africa<br> | <b>Marine Stewardship Council</b> certification is worth 4.1 billion rand (US\$300 million) to South Africa's hake fishery, according to a recent study. Certification has enabled the fishery to access to new markets; losing its MSC certificate would represent a 38% loss in net present value. <sup>29</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Bio-fuel<br> | UEET<br>                       | Tanzania<br>     | With the support of International Finance Corporation, <b>UEET</b> has been working to facilitate low-income women farmers' access to international biotrade markets, as well as to develop a sustainable <i>Allanblackia</i> plant supply chain in Tanzania. UEET worked with partners and local communities to outline sustainable practices and train the community on sustainable collection. By sourcing UEET certified products, companies can support local development and biodiversity conservation. <sup>30</sup> |

|                                                                                                      |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Agriculture</p>  | <p>LEAF Marque</p>  | <p>Global</p>                                | <p>The <b>LEAF</b> members' sustainability questionnaire in early 2014 found that 43.4% of respondents said their businesses were more economically sustainable than five years ago. In the survey, respondents focused on financial measurements, such as: net worth; profitability and return on capital, as key financial sustainability measurements, although a few mentioned indicators, such as staff retention and profit per hectare.<sup>31</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p>Palm oil</p>     | <p>RSPO</p>         | <p>Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand</p>         | <p><b>RSPO</b> certification of independent smallholders can enhance access to agricultural inputs, finance and markets. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, certification has been shown to strengthen links between growers' associations and cooperatives and certified mills, with mills providing support such as fertiliser and training during the certification process. Independent smallholders in Indonesia also experienced better market access after certification, as mills had a preference for certified products.<sup>32</sup></p>                                                             |
| <p>Coffee</p>       | <p>Fairtrade</p>    | <p>Peru, Indonesia, Mexico and Tanzania</p>  | <p><b>Fairtrade</b> coffee producers are more resilient to economic shocks, according to a multi-country study. Certified producer organisations in Peru, Indonesia, Mexico and Tanzania used the Fairtrade Premium as a source of funds to meet a range of challenges, including providing price subsidies to farmers to remain competitive during high international prices, investing in quality management to meet buyers' demands and providing training and inputs to combat coffee rust. The Fairtrade Premium and guaranteed minimum price also helps absorb the shock of price crashes.<sup>33</sup></p> |
| <p>Coffee</p>     | <p>UTZ</p>        | <p>Colombia</p>                            | <p><b>UTZ</b> certified coffee growers in Colombia have more positive and optimistic perceptions of their living conditions than non-certified growers. In a survey, they gave significantly higher ratings in questions relating to level of income, household quality of life, family health, economic situation of the household, farm management, coffee-selling opportunities, village environment and community relationships.<sup>34</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                             |



In Peru, a **Rainforest Alliance**-supported community forestry scheme supported **250 independent brazil nut become entrepreneurs**, while sustainably managing **89,501 hectares** of tropical rainforest.

Community forest case studies,  
Rainforest Alliance, 2015.

A WWF study of **FSC certification** found companies earned an **average extra US\$ 1.80** for every cubic metre of certified round wood – the business case is strongest for **tropical forest operations** and **small-medium producers**.

WWF report on cost-benefits of FSC certification, 2015.










## WORKERS' SAFETY, RIGHTS AND WELL BEING

Sustainability standards uphold **core labour rights**, help to improve **workers' safety and wellbeing** and promote **industrial dialogue**.



















Sustainability standards uphold labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments (8.8). ISEAL members work with businesses, national governments and NGOs to improve working conditions in many sectors. Many ISEAL members' standards are based on – and go beyond – core International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions. Labour rights such as fair wages, collective bargaining, the freedom to join a union, no discrimination and protection from harassment and abuse are written into the principles and criteria of most standard systems. Criteria also cover areas such as health and safety procedures and training, and providing protective equipment.


Standards have independent assurance mechanisms, including regular audits, to ensure enterprises comply with national labour and wage regulations, especially in countries where government capacity to enforce compliance is weak. Standard systems also provide workers in certified units with access to training and capacity-building. As multi-stakeholder initiatives, ISEAL member standards bring together stakeholders to facilitate industry-wide dialogue and action on key issues. For example, the RSPO has organized workshops and discussions between plantation companies and labour unions to understand and create a common approach to fair labour relations.

### Examples from ISEAL members

| Sector                                                                                          | Standard                                                                                                          | Scope                                                                                              | Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Coffee<br>   | UTZ<br>                        | Colombia<br>    | After four years in the programme, coffee workers on <b>UTZ</b> certified farms were more than twice as likely to be provided with protective gear (81% vs 35%) and over three times more likely to have access to first aid kits (60% vs 17%) than those on non-certified farms. <sup>35</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Tea<br>      | UTZ, RA/SAN and Fairtrade<br>  | India<br>       | Studies have confirmed the benefits for workers on certified tea estates ( <b>UTZ, Rainforest Alliance and Fairtrade</b> ) in India. Certified workers enjoy better on-site health and safety training and first aid, healthier work environments, reduced sickness and absence, and increased awareness of sexual harassment issues and policies. Workers on certified farms had significantly higher annual incomes and overtime pay, as well as contracts and entitlements like annual paid leave, sick leave and maternity leave. <sup>36</sup>                              |
| Forestry<br> | Forest Stewardship Council<br> | Congo Basin<br> | A study assessing the social impacts of <b>FSC</b> certification found significant differences in working conditions in certified and non-certified forest management units in Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of Congo. Safety procedures existed in 90% of certified units, compared to just 25% of those not certified. All certified companies provided showers and WCs in workers' living quarters, compared to 46% of non-certified companies, as well as health and life insurance for all staff – which only one in four non-certified companies offered. <sup>37</sup> |



|                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Tea</p>                    | <p>UTZ</p>                              | <p>Sri Lanka</p>                               | <p>In Sri Lanka, tea workers and estate managers consistently reported that their relations improved as a result of the <b>UTZ</b> programme, with estate managers coming to recognise the essential contribution of workers to better estate performance. Managers reported reduced absenteeism and improved work discipline. Workers increased their sense of ownership and responsibility for the performance of the estate, and appreciated the opportunities to acquire greater technical skills.<sup>38</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <p>Bananas</p>                | <p>Fairtrade</p>                        | <p>Ghana, Colombia and Dominican Republic</p>  | <p>Levels of trust between workers' organisations and management were stronger on <b>Fairtrade</b>-certified banana plantations than on non-Fairtrade plantations in Colombia and the Dominican Republic. Workers on Fairtrade plantations generally had a higher level of job satisfaction and a stronger sense of ownership. They are also more familiar with sexual harassment and grievance policies, and said there had been improvements in health and safety. In the Dominican Republic, workers are more often members of plantation workers' committees; they report higher levels of trust in these committees and feel more listened to by their supervisors. In Colombia, workers on Fairtrade certified plantations had higher levels of trust in the workers' union, fellow workers and the community.<sup>39</sup></p> |
| <p>Palm Oil</p>              | <p>RSPO</p>                            | <p>Global</p>                                 | <p>In 2015, a workshop was held in Indonesia by RSPO to initiate dialogue between plantation companies and labour unions and discuss the challenges associated with plantation practices and how these affect labourers, employers and the government. 73 representatives from labour unions, growers, government agencies, non-profit organisations, academia and the media attended the workshop, to try to understand and create a common approach to fair labour relations in oil palm plantations.<sup>40</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>Coffee</p>               | <p>RA/ SAN</p>                        | <p>Colombia</p>                              | <p>Researchers found that <b>SAN/Rainforest Alliance</b> coffee certification was associated with a significantly higher proportion of farm workers storing agrochemicals safely, using protective equipment while working with chemicals and receiving training in first aid and the correct use of pesticides, compared to workers on comparable non-certified farms.<sup>41</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>Mining and Minerals</p>  | <p>Responsible Jewellery Council</p>  | <p>Peru</p>                                  | <p>In order to achieve RJC certification, Peruvian gold company Minera Yanaquihua is engaging with three communities of artisanal and small scale miners working on its concession to support their formalisation and to help them operate legally and with improved safety and environmental practices. Prior to the engagement, mercury use among artisanal miners was very high. One of the three communities, consisting of 105 miners, has achieved five of the six main steps to formalisation and has phased out the use of mercury within two years.<sup>42</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>Agriculture</p>          | <p>Fairtrade</p>                      | <p>Global</p>                                | <p>61% of <b>Fairtrade</b> hired labour organisations have signed a collective bargaining agreement with workers' representatives.<sup>43</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |



To achieve Responsible Jewellery Council certification, Peruvian gold mining company Minera Yanacocha worked with one community of artisanal and small scale miners to help them improve their safety and environmental practices and phase out the use of mercury within two years.

RJC Impacts Report, 2015

## SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS WORKING TOWARDS HIGHER WAGES FOR WORKERS










### Towards a living wage

#### GLOBAL LIVING WAGE COALITION

Earning a living wage allows a worker to meet their family’s basic needs – and to have a little to spare. Legal minimum wages, where they exist, often don’t come close to this.

Many sustainability standards require employees to be paid a living wage, and research consistently shows workers’ wages in certified operations are higher than the norm. The average **Bonsucro** mill’s lowest wage is 29% higher than the local legal minimum wage, while a study of tea farms in Kenya found that hired workers on **Fairtrade** and **Rainforest Alliance** certified farmers were paid 50% more than those on non-certified farms. A study of coffee farms in Uganda and Vietnam found that workers’ hourly wages showed a significant increase on **4C** verified farmers.

ISEAL members **Fairtrade International**, **FSC**, **GoodWeave**, **Sustainable Agriculture Network/Rainforest Alliance** and **UTZ**, along with **Social Accountability International**, have come together to form the Global Living Wage Coalition. They aim to promote the living wage concept and develop methodologies to define living wages for specific regions.<sup>44</sup>

| Sector                                                                                            | Standard                                                                                                           | Scope                                                                                                  | Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sugar cane<br> | Bonsucro<br>                    | Global<br>          | The average lowest wage on a <b>Bonsucro</b> certified farm and mill, including benefits, is 24% and 29% higher respectively than the local minimum legal wage. <sup>45</sup>                                                                                                     |
| Tea<br>        | RA/SAN and Fairtrade<br>        | Kenya and India<br> | In Kenya, managers on certified farms paid hired workers 9.93 KES/kg, versus 6.65 KES/kg paid by non-certified farms. In India, significantly more workers on certified farms had contracts and were entitled to annual paid leave, sick leave and maternity leave. <sup>46</sup> |
| Coffee<br>     | Global Coffee Platform (4C)<br> | Vietnam<br>         | <b>4C</b> verified farmers in Vietnam show a significantly greater increase over time in hourly wages paid to workers, compared to control farmers. <sup>47</sup>                                                                                                                 |
















## TACKLING CHILD LABOUR

Sustainability standards work to **reduce child labour**, including **rescuing children from hazardous work** and helping put them back into school.
















SDG8.7 aims to end child labour by 2025. Sustainability standards in sectors such as agriculture, textiles and mining, which account for the highest rates of child labour globally, have strict criteria on child labour. For example, all Bonsucro certified mills must demonstrate to third-party assessors that they and their supply chains are free of child and forced labour. They also build community awareness of the issue and support access to education so children don't work during

school hours. Some standards go even further – for example, RSPO in Malaysia makes ensuring children's education an obligation for certified palm oil growers. As well as acting at a local level, ISEAL member standards have highlighted and lobbied for child rights within their sectors: the 4C Association, for example, has been pushing for youth and gender issues to be much more prominent within the coffee sector's sustainability approaches.

### Examples from ISEAL member standards

| Sector                                                                                            | Standard                                                                                         | Scope                                                                                                               | Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tea<br>        | RA/SAN<br>    | India<br>                        | In India, a higher proportion of workers' children on <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certified tea estates attended school – with workers being more satisfied with the schooling their children received than those on non-certified estates. <sup>48</sup>                                                                                                                                                      |
| Cocoa<br>      | UTZ<br>       | Ghana<br>                        | In Ghana, <b>UTZ</b> certified cocoa farmers are more aware of the tasks that children are not allowed to do on the farm, and of the benefits of going to school. Almost all children (98%) of certified farmers go to school. <sup>49</sup>                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Textiles<br>   | GoodWeave<br> | Nepal, Afghanistan and India<br> | <b>GoodWeave</b> has rescued 3,554 children from working in carpet factories in Nepal, Afghanistan and India, and has supported 12,282 children from weaving communities to enrol in school. <sup>50</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Sugar cane<br> | Bonsucro<br>  | Global<br>                       | Each of the 52 <b>Bonsucro</b> certified mill has demonstrated to third party independent assessors the absence of child and forced labour within their premises. This equates to 828,306 hectares free of child or forced labour. <sup>51</sup>                                                                                                                                                              |
| Cocoa<br>      | RA/SAN<br>    | Global<br>                       | Audit results indicate that <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certification effectively curtails the employment of minors on cocoa farms, including by limiting work to tasks that are not hazardous and by limiting work hours to levels that do not interfere with schooling. Additionally, audit results indicate that school-aged children of farmers in certified groups had access to education. <sup>52</sup> |

Sustainability standards and the SDGs

|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Cotton</p>        | <p>Better Cotton Initiative</p>  | <p>India</p>          | <p>In India, 27 out of 93 Better Cotton producer groups reported engaging in partnerships to promote access to school for children in cotton-growing areas. Activities included running awareness raising events around child labour issues and children’s rights and working with schools to monitor student attendance.<sup>53</sup></p>                                                                                              |
| <p>Coffee</p>        | <p>RA/SAN</p>                    | <p>Colombia</p>       | <p>Research on coffee farms in Colombia found that the children of <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certified farmers had significantly higher levels of education than those of non-certified farmers, with a median educational achievement two years higher.<sup>54</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>Cotton</p>        | <p>Better Cotton Initiative</p>  | <p>Global</p>         | <p><b>Better Cotton Initiative (BCI)</b> licensed farmers are trained in what constitutes unacceptable and acceptable forms of child work, and in the importance of children attending school. In most countries the majority of BCI farmers show an advanced awareness of child labour issues – reaching 87% in Tajikistan and 71% in Pakistan.<sup>55</sup></p>                                                                       |
| <p>Cocoa</p>         | <p>RA/SAN</p>                    | <p>Côte d’Ivoire</p>  | <p>In Côte d’Ivoire, significantly more children from <b>Rainforest Alliance</b> certified cocoa farms were studying at the appropriate grade level, compared with children on non-certified farms.<sup>56</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p>Agriculture</p>  | <p>Fairtrade</p>               | <p>Global</p>        | <p><b>Fairtrade</b> trains producer networks in child protection and child rights, reaching 1,120 participants in 2014. It has supported 10 producer organisations to set up youth-led monitoring boards to tackle child labour and protection. Fairtrade has also lobbied government on child rights, for example sharing its experiences with the UK Home Office in the development of the Modern Anti-Slavery Bill.<sup>57</sup></p> |

A close-up photograph of a person's hands weaving a carpet on a loom. The background is a blurred wooden structure of the loom. A white circular graphic is overlaid on the image, containing text.

GoodWeave has rescued 3,554 children from working in carpet factories in Nepal, Afghanistan and India, and has supported **12,282 children** from weaving communities to enrol in school.

GoodWeave Annual Report, 2015

## PARTNERING TO ADDRESS KEY CHALLENGES

Research indicates further improvements are needed in some areas relevant to SDG8, including in:

- Increasing safeguards for informal workers on smallholder farms
- Supporting women workers
- Monitoring and eliminating trafficking and forced labour in supply chains
- Facilitating dialogue and improving wages
- Working with national governments to align with local laws, support enforcement and raise the bar.

Standards are working with governments, businesses and NGOs to address these challenges and drive dialogue and action. For example, the Global Living Wage Coalition is aiming to improve workers' conditions, including wage levels, in farms, factories and supply chains. Sustainability standard criteria also help businesses address human and labour rights risks in their supply chains, in order to comply with regulations such as UK's new Modern Slavery and Transparency in Supply Chains regulations.



# WATER AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY





# WATER AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

**SDG 6: ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL**

**SDG 7: ENSURE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND MODERN ENERGY FOR ALL**



**Target 6.3:** *By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally*

**Target 6.4:** *By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity*

**Target 6.6:** *By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes*

**Target 6.b:** *Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management*



**Target 7.1:** *By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix*

**Target 7.3:** *By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency*

Research shows that sustainability standards can **reduce the water and energy footprint** of certified production in many sectors, directly contributing towards SDGs 6 and 7.

Water and energy are fundamental components of development. Ensuring everyone has access to water and sanitation (SDG6) and energy (SDG7) are not just important goals in their own right, but are also critical to ending poverty (SDG1) and hunger (SDG2), ensuring good health (SDG3) and education (SDG4), and creating sustainable economic growth (SDG8), industry (SDG9) and settlements (SDG11), among other goals. At the same time, reducing the negative environmental impacts of water and energy use is integral to combating climate change (SDG12) and conserving life below water (SDG14) and on land (SDG15).

Water challenges will increase in the coming decades due to rising demands and climate change: by 2030, global freshwater demand is projected to exceed current supply by more than 40%, while almost half the world's population will be living in areas of high water stress.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, freshwater ecosystems are in dangerously poor health: globally, populations of freshwater species have fallen by 81% since 1970,

while around 30% of wetland area has been lost in the last 30 years.<sup>59</sup>

Today, 1.1 billion people live without electricity, while some 3 billion are without modern, clean fuel for cooking.<sup>60</sup> Ensuring access to affordable modern energy for all is a huge task in itself – but needs to happen in conjunction with a rapid shift to sustainable, low-carbon energy in order to combat climate change. In this context, efforts to improve energy efficiency and replace fossil fuels with renewable energy are vital.

Research shows that sustainability standards can reduce the water and energy footprint of certified production in many sectors. This section shows how ISEAL member standards are directly contributing towards achieving SDGs 6 and 7, including by improving water and energy efficiency, reducing negative impacts on water sources, and promoting a switch away from burning fossil fuels, the primary cause of climate change. These initiatives also indirectly contribute to many other SDGs.

## WATER CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

The adoption of sustainability standards can **reduce the water footprint of agriculture, improve water management and preserve the quality of natural water bodies.**













Globally, agriculture accounts for 70% of water withdrawals, with industry making up another 19%.<sup>61</sup> With water issues widely recognised as one of the biggest risks facing business, water stewardship is an important part of credible sustainability standards.










Many standards require certified producers and supply chain business to measure their water usage and actively conserve water. On the ground, they promote various management practices for conserving water, including using mulches and cover crops, contour planting and terracing, and planting trees and shrubs to improve water retention. A study of various certification schemes in Costa Rica showed that 56% of

certified farmers were using water conservation measures, compared to just 11% of non-certified farmers; soil conservation measures, which also aid water retention, were employed by 86%, compared to 58%.<sup>62</sup>

Standards also include criteria to protect water-related ecosystems (6.6) and improve water quality (6.3) – including creating buffer zones, reducing the use of chemicals and other pollutants, and treating wastewater. They may also include requirements to ensure access to safe water and sanitation facilities for workers and their communities (6.1, 6.2).

### Examples from ISEAL members

| Sector                                                                                             | Standard                                                                                                        | Scope                                                                                           | Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Water<br>       | AWS<br>                      | Tanzania<br> | Adoption of the <b>AWS</b> standard in Olam's Aviv Coffee Plantation contributed to improved water security for 14,286 people through better water management, action to improve sub-basin management which potentially contributes to improved water security for a sub-basin population of 295,180, reduced risk of pollution and inequitable water use through compliance with national water policy and support for the formation of a water user association. <sup>63</sup>                                                                                  |
| Agriculture<br> | LEAF Marque<br>              | Global<br>   | <b>LEAF Marque</b> certified businesses are encouraged to measure water efficiency of irrigated crops: 490 did so in 2015. <sup>64</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Cotton<br>      | Better Cotton Initiative<br> | Global<br>   | <b>BCI</b> farmers use water more efficiently than conventional cotton farmers. In Pakistan, BCI farmers introduced better management practices which resulted in a 37.5% reduction in irrigation water usage. In China, they used 16% less water on average, with particular gains from the use of drip irrigation. Less water was used for irrigation in Turkey (9%) and India (4%) too. BCI is working with local partners in these and other countries to more accurately measure water use in order to further improve efficiencies in future. <sup>65</sup> |
| Golf<br>        | GEO<br>                      | Spain<br>    | <b>GEO</b> certified Lumine Golf Course in Spain operates a closed water recycling system feeding into and sourcing from the local Waste Water treatment Plant, so irrigation sourcing is now 100% grey water. Daily meteorological and soil moisture sensor measurements, as well as reducing irrigation zones, has ensured a large reduction in water needs". <sup>66</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                                                                                                    |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Sugarcane</p>  | <p>Bonsucro</p>  | <p>Global</p>    | <p>The <b>Bonsucro</b> standard requires a maximum water consumption of 20kg of water per kilo of sugar produced. Water use has been falling steadily since 2011, and in 2014 reached its lowest level, averaging under 2kg of water per kilo of sugar produced. Bonsucro calculates the total saving from 2011 to 2014 is at least 364 million litres of water. However, water use in the field remains a challenge, with higher temperatures and droughts bringing increases in the use of irrigation on sugarcane farms.<sup>67</sup></p> |
| <p>Tea</p>        | <p>UTZ</p>       | <p>India</p>     | <p>Tea estates in Tamil Nadu, India made improvements in wastewater treatment and safe disposal of agrochemical waste in order to achieve <b>UTZ</b> certification. All certified estates established buffer zones around water bodies – compared to just one in four non-certified estates – leading to clear differences in water quality.<sup>68</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p>Coffee</p>     | <p>UTZ</p>       | <p>Colombia</p>  | <p>The use of water-saving technologies, some promoted by the programme, has led <b>UTZ</b> coffee farmers in Colombia to consume on average 11% less water during the milling process than non-certified farmers - 7.9 litres/kg of dry parchment, compared to 8.9 litres/kg.<sup>69</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

### Water stewardship and the Sustainable Agriculture Network



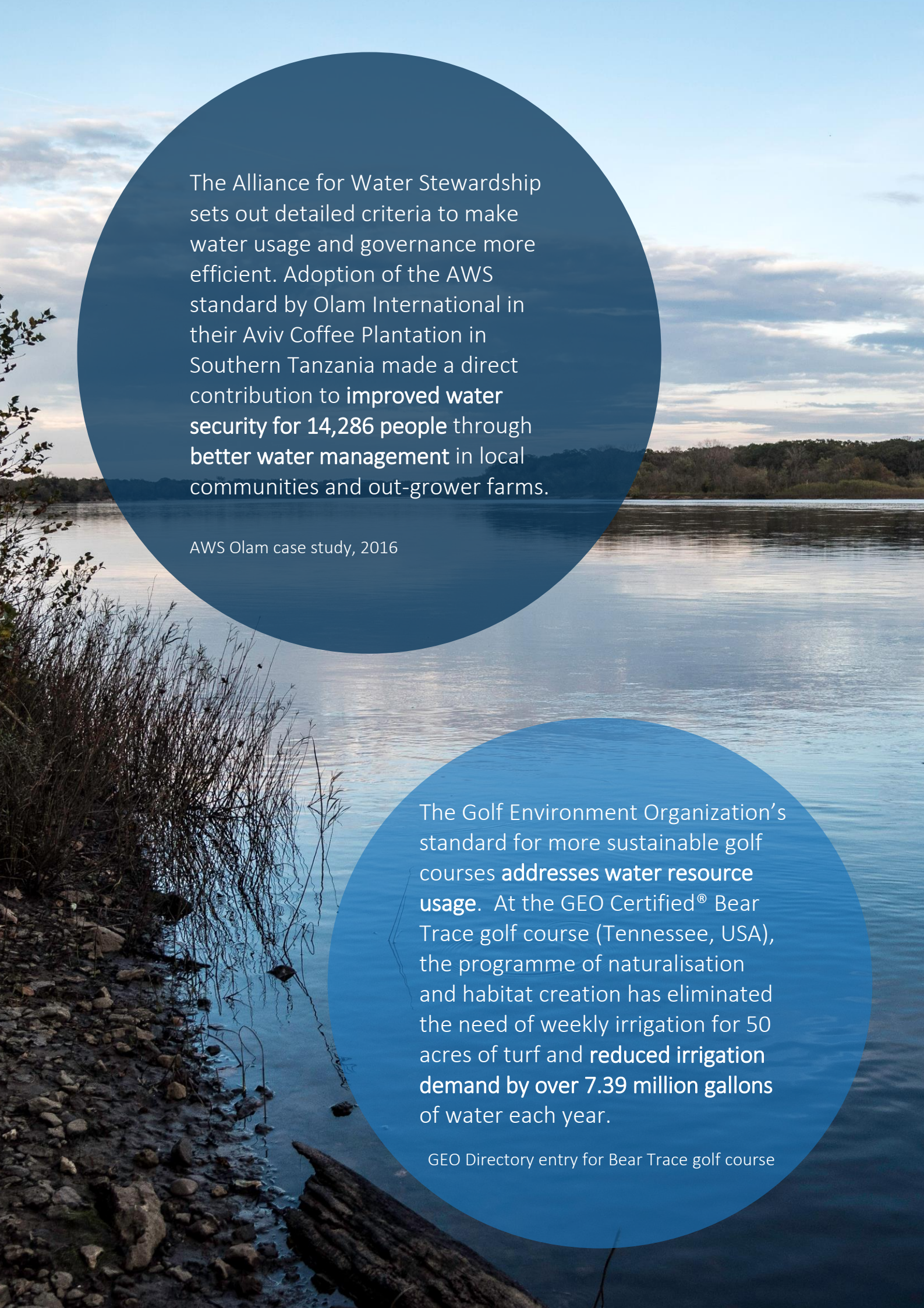
The **Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN)/Rainforest Alliance** has developed a water stewardship index to monitor the performance of certified farmers on water issues. The index is based on 26 water-related criteria in the SAN standard that can help to:

- **Reduce water pollution** from sediment, fertilisers, and toxic materials
- **Optimise water use** and reduce its potential impacts
- **Protect aquatic ecosystems** and their buffers.

Data from audit reports was used to measure changes in the index for four groups of certificate holders: tea growers in East Africa, coffee growers in Central America, cocoa producers in West Africa, and banana farmers in Central America. Initially, average compliance with the water stewardship criteria ranged from 77.5% (cocoa) to 84.3% (bananas). By the most recent audit, up to three years later, scores had risen by around 4 percentage points for all groups. This included **big improvements in the number of coffee producers creating buffers** along water bodies (from 50% to nearly 90%) and banana growers with **adequate wastewater treatment infrastructure** and water quality monitoring (from less than 40%, to 100% and 92% respectively).

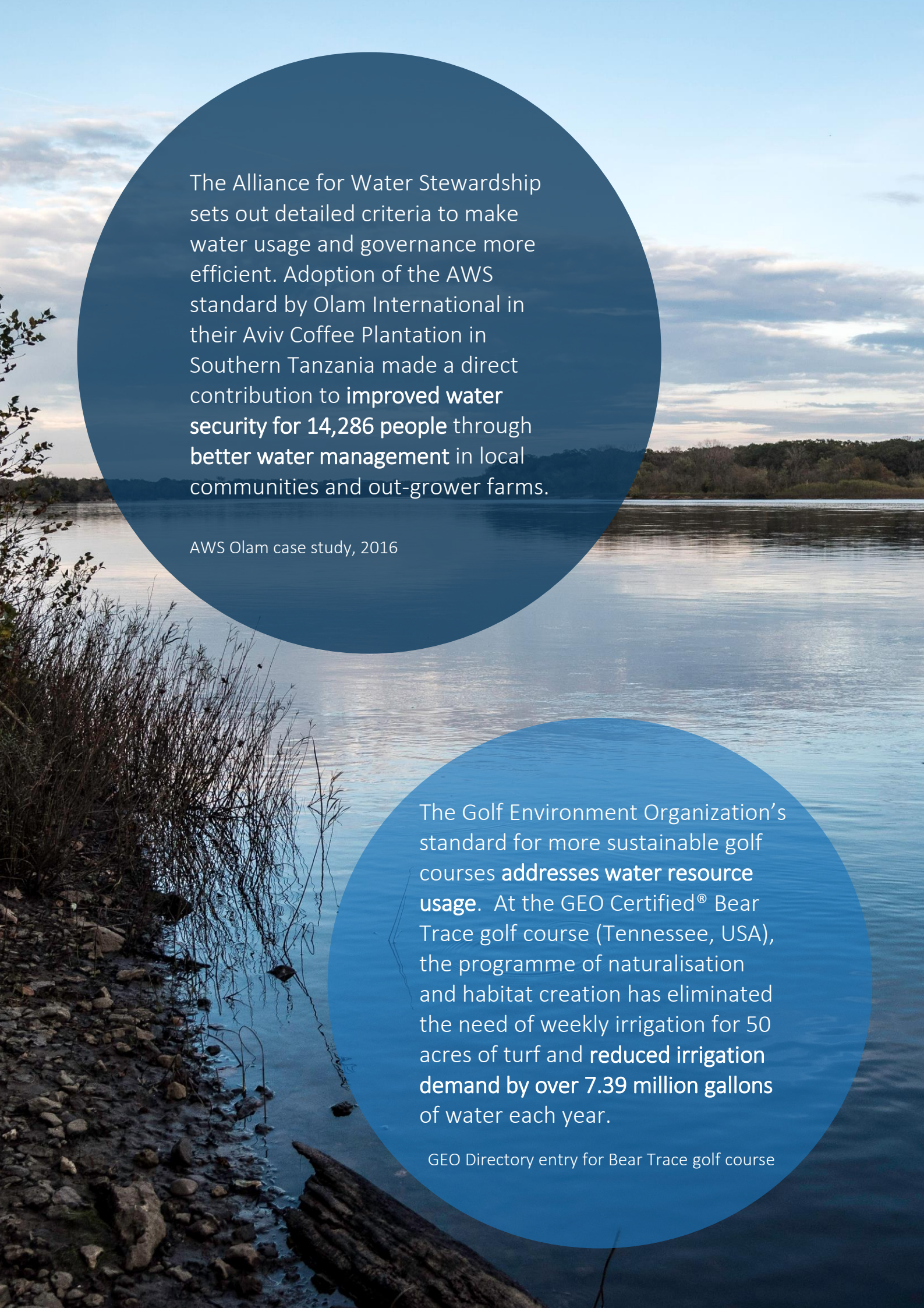
Several studies have shown Rainforest Alliance certified farms outperforming non-certified farms on a variety of measures:

- **Better erosion control** – including protective buffer strips along water bodies on tea farms in Kenya and cocoa farms in Ghana; significantly higher percentages of streambank vegetation on coffee farms in Colombia; less erosion around water sources on coffee farms in Nicaragua; fewer signs of erosion on cocoa farms in Côte d’Ivoire.
- **Less stream pollution** through fertiliser runoff and wastewater discharges – for example, certified coffee farms in Colombia had significantly higher water quality, according to indicators such as vegetation, turbidity and invertebrate species diversity.
- **Better water and waste management** – on a 0-1 scale, banana farmers in Ecuador scored much higher than non-certified farms for both water quality practices (0.73 versus 0.27) and waste management practices (1.00 versus 0.33).<sup>70</sup>



The Alliance for Water Stewardship sets out detailed criteria to make water usage and governance more efficient. Adoption of the AWS standard by Olam International in their Aviv Coffee Plantation in Southern Tanzania made a direct contribution to **improved water security for 14,286 people** through **better water management** in local communities and out-grower farms.

AWS Olam case study, 2016



The Golf Environment Organization's standard for more sustainable golf courses **addresses water resource usage**. At the GEO Certified® Bear Trace golf course (Tennessee, USA), the programme of naturalisation and habitat creation has eliminated the need of weekly irrigation for 50 acres of turf and **reduced irrigation demand by over 7.39 million gallons** of water each year.













GEO Directory entry for Bear Trace golf course


## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The adoption of sustainability standards can significantly reduce the energy footprint of farming and fishing.

Growing food and other agricultural commodities uses large amounts of energy – from the electricity to run water pumps and synthesise fertilisers, to running machinery for harvesting and processing, to transport. Many sustainability standards require producers and supply chain businesses to monitor and reduce their energy use and greenhouse-gas emissions, and include criteria to reduce dependence on non-renewable energy sources. In addition, standards work with partners to improve uptake of energy-saving technologies and renewable energy.

### Examples from ISEAL members

| Sector                                                                                            | Standard                                                                                                                      | Scope                                                                                                  | Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agriculture<br>  | LEAF Marque<br>                              | Global<br>            | <p>All <b>Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF) Marque</b> farms must complete an annual audit covering fuel, heating, cooling and lighting use, and identify ways to reduce dependency on non-renewable energy sources. In 2015, 461 LEAF Marque certified businesses were measuring their carbon footprint, and energy consumption was monitored across 127,711 hectares of crops.</p> <p>This focus on energy efficiency can drive innovations. At Tangmere Airfield Nurseries, a LEAF demonstration farm and one of Europe's largest producers of sweet peppers, thermal screens are used along with an onsite combined heat and power system. Gas is burnt to generate heat for the company's glasshouses, and electricity which is sold to the national grid, enough to power 10,000 homes. The carbon dioxide emitted is pumped into the glasshouses to enhance plant growth.<sup>71</sup></p> |
| Coffee<br>     | UTZ<br>                                    | Central America<br> | <p><b>UTZ</b> project Energy from Coffee Waste was carried out on 19 pilot sites in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The project was set up to tackle key issues, such as the high energy usage of coffee processing and waste water disposal and methane emissions. The project demonstrated how water usage can be reduced, how to treat waste water before releasing it into the environment and how to turn methane generated in the water treatment process into biogas, rather than releasing it as emissions into the atmosphere.<sup>72</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Sugar cane<br> | Bonsucro<br>                               | Global<br>          | <p><b>Bonsucro</b> certification is related to lower greenhouse-gas emissions for sugar production. In 2012, 91% of Bonsucro certified mills had below-average emissions.<sup>73</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Biofuels<br>   | Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials<br> | Global/ Peru<br>    | <p>All biofuels certified by the <b>Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB)</b> standard must reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by at least 50% compared to their fossil-fuel equivalent over their lifecycle: by this measure, the first 17 companies to achieve RSB certification saved at least 439,500 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent over two years. Chain of custody certified businesses must conduct a full greenhouse-gas calculation, which motivates them to include energy efficiency as part of their overall emissions reduction strategy: for example, RSB certified ethanol producer Agrojibito in Peru has a 37MW cogeneration plant which powers its own operations and exports excess electricity to the Peruvian grid.</p>                                                                                                                                                 |



Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials certified businesses must conduct a full greenhouse-gas calculation, which motivates them to include **energy efficiency** as part of their overall emissions reduction strategy. RSB certified ethanol producer Agrojibito in Peru has a cogeneration plant which **powers its own operations and exports excess electricity to the Peruvian grid.**

RSB Outcome Evaluation Report, 2015

ASC certified pangasius farms in Vietnam were found to have **lower emissions**, for example less nitrogenous discharges and use fewer resources, such as **less feed per kg of fish produced and less fish-derived ingredients used in feeds** than non-certified farms.

Environmental Pollution article on ASC pangasius in Vietnam

Equitable Origin (EO) drives positive change to **reduce the impact of energy development operations** by fostering stakeholder dialogue and helping companies measure their performance against the EO100™ Standard. EO's mission is to protect people and the environment by **ensuring that energy development is conducted under the highest social and environmental standards.**

Equitable Origin 'About Us' overview

## PARTNERING TO ADDRESS KEY CHALLENGES

Research also indicates that some challenges remain:

- Scaling up of water management practices to watershed level
- Improved water efficiency and pollution reduction
- More resilient production systems to cope with changing climate patterns and resource availability
- Stricter controls on land-use change and conversion for commodity production
- Better measurement of carbon footprints and GHG emissions, especially in smallholder agriculture

Standards are working together to address these issues. For instance, eight ISEAL members have established an Integrated Pest Management Coalition in order to reduce the use of chemical pesticides, a significant cause of water pollution. The coalition aims to promote common principles for integrated pest management and alternatives to pesticide use, share strategies and techniques, and create a training manual on worker health risks and using safety equipment.



# CONCLUSION





# ISEAL members play an important role in delivering the SDGs.

As this report has shown, ISEAL member standards are already making a measurable contribution towards a number of goals and targets, including by:

- Increasing agricultural productivity and profits, especially for smallholder farmers, while reducing environmental impacts (SDG2)
- Creating economic opportunities and improving working conditions, including for many of the world's poorest people (SDG8)
- Demonstrating ways to reduce energy and water footprints (SDG6 and 7).

Positive impacts in these areas also support progress across many of the other SDGs. Committing to source products certified by ISEAL member standards is one tangible way that businesses, at every stage in the value chain, can fulfil their obligation to contribute to achieving the SDGs. Certified products also offer a better choice for consumers who want to support sustainable development. Ultimately, the greater the market for products meeting ISEAL member standards, the greater the positive impacts.

By bringing together different actors (businesses, NGOs, governments, etc.), credible standards embody the multi-stakeholder, partnership approach which is central to the SDG agenda. This increases understanding and helps pave the way for sector-wide improvements – even among producers and companies that are not certified. Even modest improvements, like putting in place waste disposal systems on farms or making safety equipment available for workers, can make a significant contribution when adopted by most businesses within a sector, or in national legislation. In addition, collaboration between ISEAL members can lead to further innovation and improvement.

ISEAL member standards are increasingly looking to align their criteria and indicators with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, and to use the SDG framework to measure their impact. We look forward to seeing and collecting further evidence of their contribution.



## Further reading on standards and the SDGs.

- Read the [WWF and ISEAL report \(2017\) SDGs mean business: How credible standards can help companies deliver the 2030 Agenda](#)
- View the [ISEAL infographics on SDG 2: Zero Hunger, SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth](#) and [SDGs 6&7: Clean water and sanitation and Affordable and clean energy](#)



MSC certification is worth an estimated US\$ 300 million to South Africa's hake fishery – approximately 37.6% of its current estimated net value.

Fisheries Research study on economic benefits of MSC for South African hake, 2016

# Annex

## Source of evidence: data sources and literature reviewed

The evidence in this report is drawn from two main sources:

- Research and impact reports published by ISEAL member standards in recent years. These include reports authored by standards themselves (such as annual performance monitoring reports, annual reports or policy reports) and those commissioned and published by ISEAL member standards but undertaken by external researchers.
- Research reports and articles written by external researchers and published directly by their academic institutions or in academic journals.

All reports consulted were published in 2015 or 2016. The full reference list is available at the end of this report. While close to 90% of the evidence presented here is sourced from reports that are publicly available, some evidence is from articles in academic journals that are not open-access. ISEAL is happy to share a copy of these articles upon request. All ISEAL member reports referenced are publicly available from the relevant member's website.

As is clear from the reference list, we reviewed a large variety of publications. As a result, the type of evidence used to generate both this report and the accompanying infographics varies. The main types of evidence are:

- Performance monitoring data generated by the standard at one point in time
- Performance monitoring data generated by the standard over a period of time (i.e. trends in performance monitoring data)
- Performance monitoring data generated by the standard, in comparison with counterfactual<sup>74</sup> data from non-certified entities
- Data derived from impact evaluation studies – both commissioned by members and by others – that includes a counterfactual
- Data derived from individual research studies, often focused on one geography or certified entity, that does not have a counterfactual
- Data from cost-benefit studies undertaken by researchers on particular standards
- Data from project evaluation reports published by member standards that include a research or impact evaluation component.

In addition to the type of data, the quality of evidence also varies due to differences in the methodology adopted in each study. The ISEAL Alliance screened the literature thoroughly to ensure that only reports that we adjudged to be of sufficiently high quality were used.

We believe all the evidence used here can be labelled as being credibly produced. However, given the wide variety of evidence gathered, and more importantly that not all evidence presented here has a counterfactual, this should not be treated as an 'impact report'. Rather, it is a research report that synthesises and collates evidence (of varying types and quality) against the framework of four SDGs. It is collective insofar as it does not focus on one member standard, but collates available evidence across the spectrum of ISEAL members to issue 'claims' of how these standards are contributing towards the SDGs.

## Literature review as method to collate and analyse evidence

We used the methodology of a qualitative literature review to check, collate and synthesise the evidence gathered. The review was conducted by staff from ISEAL's Impacts Team and reviewed by monitoring and evaluation staff from ISEAL member organisations.

No attempt has been made to collate and analyse specific data sets across members, as this was simply not possible with the large variety of reports used. Such an approach is being adopted in a truer 'collective reporting' exercise being undertaken as part of ISEAL's DIPI (Demonstrating and Improving Poverty Impacts of Standards) project, which focuses on a subset of members working in agriculture.

The present report pulls together all the evidence generated in this literature review as it relates to the four SDGs specified above. It is supplemented by three infographics that aim to provide a snapshot of the evidence against each theme. The evidence in these infographics is drawn from the same publicly available evidence base as this report, with references given in the endnotes. All evidence is specific to the standard, product or country/region stated, with limited generalisability. The nature of evidence varies according to research design and methodology used and not all evidence presented here has a counterfactual. Where a comparison is made, the 'certified' refers to the standard in the sub-title.



# End notes

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