Discussion Paper
Conceptual Framework on Delivering Sustainability

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Introduction

Over the past decade, we have witnessed an explosion of policies, instruments and initiatives, from both governmental and market actors, to achieve sustainable development outcomes across a broad range of economic sectors, supply chains and regions. While a range of tools are certainly necessary to address the scale of the challenges we face globally, we have yet to really understand how these can work together, or where specific tools are most likely to achieve the best outcomes. Furthermore, we have yet to grasp how to deploy tools to address sustainability as a coherent whole, in such a way as to build positive synergies and avoid unintended leakage effects. The *conceptual framework* that the ISEAL Alliance and the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the FAO have begun to develop aims to start making entries into organising our thinking as to how to move towards being better able to do this.

The expert meeting in Rome on 9-10 November is an important next step in what will be a long-term iterative process. At the meeting we hope first and foremost to sound our ideas with a small number of experts. We hope also to begin to explore some of the questions that will need answering to move forward on our journey. Comments, inputs, proposed revisions and additions are welcome and encouraged on every aspect of the conceptual framework: from its approach to its content. What is proposed here aims to serve as the starting point for on-going dialogue amongst all interested parties.

Objectives

The objectives of the meeting in Rome are aligned to those of the *conceptual framework*:

> To propose a holistic working definition of sustainability, that can serve as a basis for discussion with partners and that may drive convergence in contributing to sustainability outcomes

> To review and propose targets and indicators for the core sustainability issues identified.

> To start identifying the questions and information needs that would underpin an information centre to assess the range of tools (e.g. standards, policies, initiatives) that exist to address sustainability.

At the meeting in Rome, we will explore a number of questions:

1. Which needs can be served by a global definition of sustainability? How would the proposed definition need to evolve to ensure its practical application?

2. Is there a need to prioritise sustainability core issues? How to go about doing this?

3. Is there potential for scaleable indicators[1]? Which of those proposed would meet the needs and uses of diverse actors? (for questions 2 and 3, please focus on the tab "Dimensions & Issues" and "Targets & Core Ind" in the spreadsheet)

4. Is there a need for a global information centre where sustainability tools can be assessed and combined?

    > Who might be potential users for such information?

    > What would their information needs be?

    > Who could be partners in developing this work?

    > What are the key questions and information needs of the participants present?

ISEAL's Stake

The *conceptual framework* will inform and contribute to a range of ISEAL Alliance strategic programmes.

ISEAL Impacts Code

Throughout 2009, the ISEAL Alliance has been developing a *Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards*[2]. It is expected that by the summer of 2010 the Impacts Code will be finalised and approved for implementation, and become a requirement for the standards systems members of the ISEAL Alliance.

The Impacts Code has facilitated a process for the members of its multi-stakeholder committees to develop a draft framework of social, environmental and economic issues that are relevant to standards systems. It is expected that standards systems implementing the

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[1] Please refer to section "Guiding Principles" on page 7 for a definition of "scaleable

[2] www.isealalliance.org/impacts

FAO - ISEAL Alliance Draft Discussion Paper
Conceptual Framework on Delivering Sustainability

Impacts Code will choose to report from amongst these issues once finalised. The current draft can be found in Annex 1 of the Impacts Code.

Using the work of the ISEAL impacts committees as a starting point, the *conceptual framework* includes a similar definition of sustainability, articulated around four dimensions of sustainability: good governance, social development, environmental integrity and economic resilience.

Whilst the Impacts Code started from the specific vantage point of trying to identify the priority sustainability issues for the stakeholders of standards systems, the *conceptual framework* definition aims to represent a universally applicable definition of sustainability. It aims to capture the variety of issues that any interested party coming to define sustainability would likely include. In this definition, there are a number of core issues that may not be directly serviced by standards systems, such as health and sanitation, but which most would expect to see included in a holistic and globally applicable definition of sustainability.

Scaling-Up the Impacts of the Voluntary Standards Movement

The members of the ISEAL Alliance are committed to scaling-up their collective impacts[3]. Over the next twelve months, the ISEAL Alliance will be seeking to formulate targets for scaled-up impacts for the movement to rally around, as well as the indicators needed to assess their progress towards them. These will then drive the development of a comprehensive strategy for scaling up the collective impacts of the standards movement.

A core component of the *conceptual framework* includes the identification of the most important targets and indicators that exist to monitor the variety of core sustainability issues identified. The aim is to understand how far these can be transposable to monitoring the impacts of the voluntary standards movement, or inform the development of new targets and indicators.

As work continues with the development of the ISEAL Impacts Code, the Sustainability Framework and the Scaling Up Strategy, it is expected that these tools will converge to drive a cohesive approach to setting targets and indicators and measuring progress towards global sustainability outcomes.

Working With Partners

Most importantly, with the *conceptual framework* both the FAO and the ISEAL Alliance aim to outreach and dialogue with interested parties. Both partners are keen to promote dialogue and understanding about what might constitute a holistic approach to sustainability. Both are cognizant of the limits of any individual organisation or tool to deliver at the scale needed to address the sustainability challenges we face.

Over time and with continued input and feedback from experiences of its application, it is hoped that the *conceptual framework* will evolve to serve a global need among governments, sustainability initiatives, business and civil society leaders to understand how different tools and instruments can best fit together to achieve sustainability outcomes.

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[3] For more information, please see ISEAL Alliance (2009) E058 Scaling-Up Social & Environmental Standards Systems – ISEAL Alliance Strategic Plan 2009-2013 available at www.isealalliance.org/strategicplan
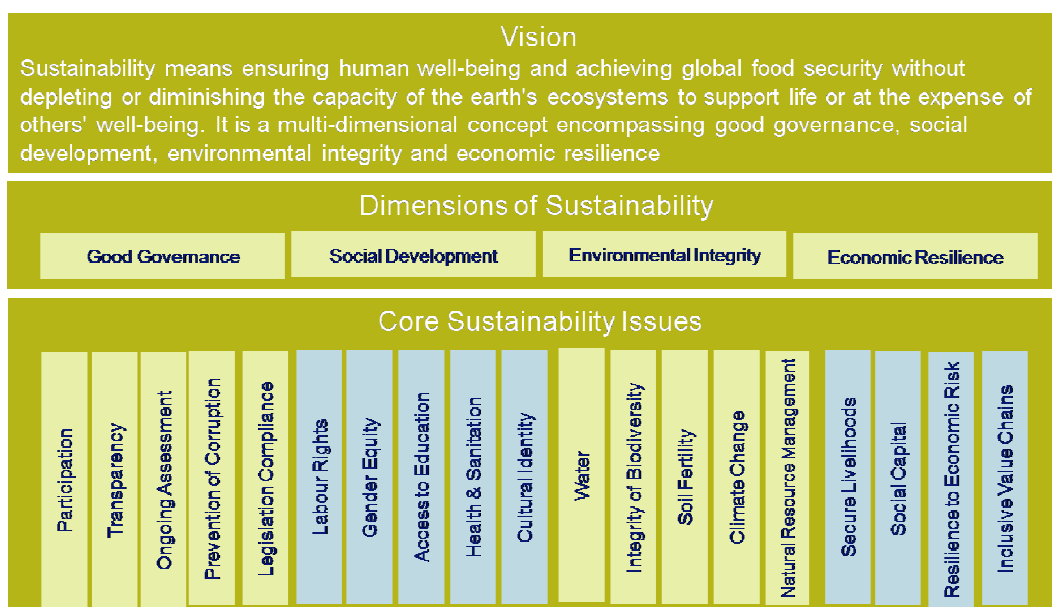
Overview

The *conceptual framework* is composed of three distinct portions:

> A definition of sustainability, articulated around a vision statement and the indentification of the four dimensions of sustainability and the core issues that underlie these four dimensions.

> A set of targets and indicators that pertain to the core sustainability issues.

> A series of frames for organising and assessing the different roles and relative contributions of different tools to delivering sustainability outcomes.

Each of these portions is presented in summary below. Accompanying excel documents provide the full detail of the content developed.

Defining Sustainability

We propose the following working definition of sustainability:

Vision

Sustainability means ensuring human well-being and achieving global food security without depleting or diminishing the capacity of the earth's ecosystems to support life or at the expense of others' well-being. It is a multi-dimensional concept encompassing good governance, social development, environmental integrity and economic resilience

Dimensions of Sustainability

Good Governance | Social Development | Environmental Integrity | Economic Resilience

Core Sustainability Issues

Participation | Transparency | Ongoing Assessment | Prevention of Corruption | Legislation Compliance | Labour Rights | Gender Equity | Access to Education | Health & Sanitation | Cultural Identity | Water | Integrity of Biodiversity | Soil Fertility | Climate Change | Natural Resource Management | Secure Livelihoods | Social Capital | Resilience to Economic Risk | Inclusive Value Chains

Vision

A vision statement helps us to think through and verbalise some of the overarching purposes, values and assumptions that underlie our understandings and actions. It does so by painting a picture of what success would look like if achieved. In this case, success is sustainability.

Vision statements depend on a shared understanding of the words used by all those who read them. To this end, we use the following definitions[4] of the key terms used.

Sustainable	Of, relating to, or designating forms of human economic activity and culture that do not lead to environmental degradation, esp. avoiding the long-term

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[4] All definitions are taken from the on-line version of the Oxford English Dictionary http://dictionary.oed.com/ which is, however, only available to subscribers

FAO - ISEAL Alliance Draft Discussion Paper
Conceptual Framework on Delivering Sustainability

depletion of natural resources.

Sustainable Development	Utilization and development of natural resources in ways which are compatible with the maintenance of these resources, and with the conservation of the environment, for future generations.
Well-being	The state of being or doing well in life; food secure, healthy, or prosperous condition; moral or physical welfare (of a person or community)[5].

Dimensions & Core Sustainability Issues

The four sustainability dimensions and the nineteen core issues included in the conceptual framework are the result of a review of a broad range of governmental, corporate, non-governmental and research body materials. The review helped inform our understanding of the evolving thinking on, and expectations of, sustainability from a broad range of vantage points, as well as the ways in which sustainability is being applied within different tools.

We started our review by looking at the framework included in the draft ISEAL Impacts Code. We complemented this with information from multilateral institutions, notably a range of UN bodies (UN EcoSoc, FAO, ILO, UNEP, etc.). Normative references have been included in the excel document[6]. We looked at a number of corporate tools (e.g. WalMart Sustainability Index), NGO tools (e.g. Transparency International, Amnesty International), research materials (e.g. the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress) as well as of course, ISEAL members and other standards. Finally, we looked at a range of partner initiatives in the world of voluntary standards systems (e.g. the ITC's Trade for Sustainable Development project).

A brief explanation of what we propose for each core sustainability issue follows (colour coded as in the excel documents):

Core Issue	Explanation
Good Governance	
Participation	The need for outreach to, and ensuring the potential for involvement of, interested parties, in particular those who are materially affected
Transparency	Public access to information through both disclosure and active reporting
On-Going Assessment	Continuous monitoring, evaluation and evolution through adaptive management
Prevention of Corruption	*Corruption is [...] the abuse of entrusted power for private gain[7]*

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[5] Oxford English Dictionary definition adapted to include food security

[6] Please see "Dimensions & Issues" page of the Conceptual Framework spreadsheet

[7] The operational definition adopted by Transparency International www.transparency.org/news_room/faq/corruption_faq

FAO - ISEAL Alliance Draft Discussion Paper
Conceptual Framework on Delivering Sustainability

Compliance with Legislation	Adherence to rules-based approaches

Social Development

Labour Rights	The range of rights enshrined in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles & Rights at Work
Gender Equality	Access to opportunities and empowerment of girls and women, as well as the reduction of discrimination and inequalities based on gender
Access to Education	Access to, engagement in and attainment through education
Improved Health & Access to Sanitation	Access to medical treatment and improved sanitation, notably through access to clean water and the availability of sewage treatment, for the benefit of human health
Respect for Cultural Identity	Respect for self-determination, intellectual property, benefit sharing and religious tolerance

Environmental Integrity

Water	Water conservation and quality, for both fresh- and marine waters
Integrity of Biodiversity	Diversity of life at the level of species, genetic diversity and ecosystems
Soil Fertility	Maintenance of organic matter, as well as conserving soil from all forms of erosion
Climate Change	Mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and strengthening the resilience and adaptation capacity of people, their livelihoods and ecosystems to climatic change
Natural Resources Management	Management of resources from production to post-consumption, by supporting the integrity of ecosystem services, maintaining harvesting levels that ensure regeneration, and the reduction and effective management of waste

Economic Resilience

Secure Livelihoods	Understood as an economic concept incorporating income, wealth, poverty and employment, whether paid, voluntary, formal or informal
Social Capital	*Social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them*[8]. It includes the concepts of knowledge sharing and social safety nets
Resilience to Economic Risk	First and foremost the assurance of self-reliance, and secondly the ability to counter risk through economic diversification and access to finance
Inclusive Value Chains	Fairness and responsibility for all those involved in a value chain, so that they operate as one step within a longer chain

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[8] Social Capital as defined by Robert Putnam www.infed.org/thinkers/putnam.htm#_Social_capital

Targets & Indicators

Guiding Principles

The indicators and targets proposed in this conceptual framework have been designed with the Bellagio STAMP (Sustainability Assessment and Measurement Principles) in mind. Bellagio STAMP is a set of guiding principles, established by a group of international experts convened by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) to measure and assess progress towards sustainability. The Bellagio STAMP is not itself a framework for carrying out sustainability assessments, but a set of guidelines on how to go about designing and implementing a conceptual framework, such as this one[9].

Different indicators can be thought of as existing at different points along a spectrum which ranges from, at one end, high-resolution, local-scale, responsive to short-term changes, detailed or fine-grained information, to, at the other end, low-resolution, global-scale, responsive to long-term changes, broad-brush or coarse-grained information.

Indicators are designed typically for one of two different purposes. *Management effectiveness* indicators are designed to measure the progress of a project, programme or institution towards a set of stated objectives; these indicators tend to be (but not exclusively) at the high-resolution end of the spectrum. *Status* indicators are designed to measure the overall state or condition of a system, irrespective of any stated objectives; these indicators tend to be at the low-resolution end of the spectrum.

The indicators proposed in this conceptual framework are management effectiveness indicators, in so far as they are designed to measure progress towards stated sustainability objectives or targets as defined by a variety of tools, organisations or enterprises. However, these indicators are also intended to be scaleable. That means that they should not be restricted to measuring changes at the local scale and short-term end of the spectrum, but also be applicable to measuring national or global-scale changes over the longer term. The idea of scaleability, generally speaking, implies that information or data used in an indicator designed to measure management effectiveness may be aggregated upwards from the local scale to create a broad-scale, status indicator.

Targets, Core Indicators & Supplementary Indicators

For each of the four sustainability dimensions used in this framework, we have proposed a set of draft targets and core indicators[10] and a set of supplementary indicators[11]. The targets and core indicators are intended to be as widely applicable as possible across different tools, enterprises, and organisations. However, they may not provide a comprehensive measure of progress for each and every sustainable development initiative, and so a set of supplementary indicators has been proposed within each dimension.

Many indicator frameworks are based around the concept of a cycle of cause and effect, whereby one change leads to another, which ultimately leads to a change in human behaviour at some level intended to reverse, mitigate or otherwise address those causal changes. This is the well-known Driver-Pressure-State-Impact-Response (DPSIR)

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[9] BellagioSTAMP Draft 17 October 2009, IISD (in press) contact: Lazslo Pinter (lpinter@iisd.ca)

[10] Please see "Targets and Core Ind" page of the Conceptual Framework spreadsheet

[11] Please see "Gov Ind, Soc Ind, Env Ind and Eco Ind" pages of the spreadsheet

framework. Although it was our initial intention to build a conceptual framework using the DPSIR model, we have not applied it here. This is because we are dealing with more than one dimension of sustainability, and the concepts of drivers, pressures, states and impacts start to blur and overlap with one another, depending on the dimension in question. For example, from the perspective of environmental integrity, a reduction in freshwater supply is a change in the state of the system which can lead to impacts on agricultural production or human health. However, from the perspective of social development, a decline in human health due to inadequate water supply is a change in the state of the system, not an impact. In short, DPSIR is not a particularly useful model in this conceptual framework, but it is possible to classify the indicators proposed for each sustainability dimension in terms of DPSIR if one is inclined to do so.

Good Governance

Governance is the hardest dimension of sustainability for which to define targets and indicators because it is the most difficult to measure in quantitative terms. The concept of governance is built around notions such as transparency, participation, accountability and the rule of law. These aspects of governance are not readily quantifiable, and so governance remains a largely qualitative concept. However, there are several well-know governance indicators that use scoring systems to convert qualitative judgements into quantitative measures.

The Index of Democracy developed by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), for example, ranks countries by scoring them on a 0-10 scale across five governance categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. This is done using a mixture of expert and public opinion to answer a set of 60 questions with simple two-way (yes/no) or three-way (yes/partially/no) responses. The responses are then scored (yes=1, no=0, partially=0.5) and the overall scores converted to a 0-10 scale. In this way the EIU is able to take responses to a long list of (mainly) qualitative questions such as "Are elections for the national legislature and head of government free?" (EIU refers to these questions as indicators) and convert them into a quantitative measure of democracy which can be applied to any country.

Two core governance indicators have been proposed in this framework and both of these would need to be developed and elaborated using a system of scoring by expert or public opinion, probably but not necessarily along the lines of the EIU's Democracy Index. One key difference is that the proposed indicators would be designed to apply to sub-national or local scales of governance. These two core indicators relate to the themes of participation and transparency.

Good Governance		
Core Issue	Proposed Target	Core Indicators
Participation	Target to be based on achieving a high score in the indicator	Degree of active participation by interested parties in local management and decision-making (outline concept only: needs more development and consensus on what to include)

FAO - ISEAL Alliance Draft Discussion Paper
Conceptual Framework on Delivering Sustainability

Transparency (including Assessment, Prevention of Corruption and Compliance)	Target to be based on achieving a high score in the indicator	Availability of social-economic and environmental information relating to the business or enterprise, including monitoring data, management plans, and financial accounts (outline concept only: needs more development and consensus on what to include)

In this two-target/indicator system for measuring good governance, three of the core sustainability issues – ongoing assessment, prevention of corruption and compliance with laws – have been rolled up and subsumed within the core issue of transparency. This is because all of these core issues are essentially qualitative in nature, and it is more feasible to develop and implement just two rather than five separate, survey-based, expert-opinion indicators using scoring systems to make them quantitative. In any case, whether one, two or five indicators are developed, the survey questions will need to cover the same range of issues. The survey questions have not yet been considered.

Social Development

Many social development indicators have been defined and measured by national governments and international or intergovernmental agencies, and some of these are applicable to the *conceptual framework*. All of the indicators that are proposed here can be applied to farming, forestry or fishery enterprises or organisations at the local scale, but most can also be aggregated to a national or global level, and compared with national or global averages.

The indicator and target for the first core issue, labour rights, will have to be developed along the lines of the governance indicators, because the component issues that make up labour rights are generally more qualitative than quantitative in nature. It is suggested that the indicators and its accompanying target be based on the basic labour rights of absence of child, compulsory or enforced labour, absence of discrimination, and freedom of association.

The indicators for gender equality, access to education, and improved health and access to sanitation will have to be implemented using local level data that is either already collected by local governmental authorities, or that is collected specifically for this purpose. All three relate to national-level indicators that are already being monitored by governments and UN agencies for the Millennium Development Goals.

The indicator proposed to measure respect for cultural identity is based on a concept of "fate control" developed for indigenous peoples living in the Arctic, and will need data collection specifically for the current purpose. Access and land rights is the issue of utmost concern to indigenous and local communities, and therefore a core indicator has been proposed that relates to control of lands and waters rather than one which measures cultural or religious diversity.

Social Development		
Core Issue	Proposed Target	Core Indicators
Labour Rights	Target to be based on achieving a high score in the indicator	Absence of child or enforced labour, and absence of discrimination, existence of employment contracts and freedom of association (outline concept only: needs more development and consensus on what to include)
Gender Equality	Gender ratio from 0.95 to 1.05 by 2015, and zero gender bias by 2020	Gender ratio (female to male) for income per capita (livelihoods core indicator), under-5 mortality (health core indicator) and school enrolment ratio (education indicator) for the enterprise area
Access to Education	Doubling from 2010 level, or achieve ratio of at least 0.95, by 2020	Combined Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary or Secondary Education within enterprise area, and compared to national average
Improved Health & Access to Sanitation	Halving between 2010 and 2020	Under-5 mortality
Respect for Cultural Identity	Complete access rights and control by indigenous and local communities by 2020	Degree of access and control over traditional lands and waters by indigenous and local communities

Environmental Integrity

The core indicators proposed for water conservation and climate change mitigation are measures of eco-efficiency. That is to say they are measures of environmental pressure (or footprint) per unit of production. Simply measuring total resource use, irrespective of productivity, is less informative as it varies according to the size of the enterprise.

Carbon dioxide is the main greenhouse gas responsible for global warming, and is emitted by all farming, forestry or fishery enterprises whenever fossil fuels are consumed. Forestry and farming also emit carbon to the atmosphere through land-use, especially where trees are harvested or soils are turned over. Therefore CO_2 emissions have been chosen as the measure for the climate change core indicator.

Water is an essential input in farming and forestry, and agriculture is the largest user of water worldwide and in most countries, ahead of industrial and municipal water use. Although water use efficiency is critically important in dry or water-stressed regions, it is

important to remember that water availability varies enormously between different parts of the world, and there is not the same need or urgency to promote efficient water use in every location[12]. Nevertheless, because of the critical importance of water supply, and the water crisis facing many parts of the world, water use efficiency has been chosen for this core indicator.

The most appropriate indicator for measuring changes in the state of biodiversity, whether at the level of ecosystem, species or even genes, is to monitor trends in populations of species at the level of the farming, forestry or fishery enterprise. This is because any changes in the productivity, diversity or resilience of an ecosystem will be reflected in the abundance of wild plants and animals living in it. This indicator is well-developed at the global level, and can be applied to any biome or ecosystem type.

The soil fertility core indicator proposed here is the percentage of exposed or eroded soil. This has been selected as it is more readily measured than the organic and inorganic nutrients content of the soil, and reflects the global importance of soil loss and conservation. It is easily measured at the scale of a farm or forest but hard to compare with national, regional or global scales as the data are insufficient.

The issue of natural resources management is at the heart of sustainable development in the agriculture, forestry and fishery sectors, and there are several possibilities for a core indicator. The production ratio of certified sustainable products was chosen here because it is widely seen outside the standard-setting movement as a good indicator of sustainable resource management. However, it could be interpreted as a self-reflective or self-fulfilling measure if used in this context. Nevertheless, it would seem to be a basic error to omit this indicator from the core set, and not make good use of the data already being collected by standard-setting organisations. We can safely assume that it is counter to the interests of such organisations to over-report the level of certification simply in order to meet their own targets.

Environmental Integrity		
Core Issue	Proposed Target	Core Indicators
Water Conservation & Quality	Halving of 2010 level by 2020	Water consumption, annual and per unit of product
Biodiversity	Positive or neutral trend in species populations between 2010 and 2020	Trends in abundance of selected wild species, applied specifically to areas of productive agriculture, forestry and fisheries
Soil Fertility	Halving of 2010 level, or less than 5%, by 2020	Percentage of land with exposed or eroded soil

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[12] For this reason it is useful to provide a measure of water stress – usually measured at the river basin level – alongside water use.

FAO - ISEAL Alliance Draft Discussion Paper
Conceptual Framework on Delivering Sustainability

Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation	Halving of 2010 level by 2020	Carbon dioxide emissions, annual and per unit of product
Natural Resources Management	Doubling of 2010 level by 2020, and globally at least 20% by 2020	Annual production ratio of certified sustainable products, by product and/or sector (agriculture, forestry, fisheries), to total production

Economic Resilience

The core livelihoods target and indicator selected is based on average per capita income of the farm, forestry or fishery enterprise. This can be measured in absolute terms, or compared with the national average and expressed as a ratio. Net income per capita of an enterprise can be calculated as its gross value added (pay plus profits) divided by the number of employees. Of course, the average per capita income does not take inequality into account, which can also be calculated if required. Average income is probably a more generally useful indicator than a measure of absolute poverty which is only meaningful in the poorest countries and communities.

Diversity of income is proposed as the core indicator for resilience to economic risk. Diversity in this sense can be calculated in exactly the same way as measuring the species diversity of an ecosystem, or the linguistic diversity of a region. One way that ecologists and linguists do this is to ask "*what is the probability that two organisms/people selected at random in a given area will belong to the same species/speak the same language*". The more diverse the area, the lower the probability that they will be the same. One could also ask what is the probability that two random euros earned by an enterprise come from the same source.

The core indicator for inclusive value chain is the ratio of the average premium price paid for a certified product to the average market price paid for a non-certified product in a given area. The average market price should be determined according to the prevailing local, rather than national, market conditions. The premium price can also be compared to the world average market price. It is thought that the share of the final consumer price that is received by the producer is not a reliable indicator of fairness.

Social capital, relationships and networks are fundamentally difficult to measure, and are qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. In this respect, the core indicator for this issue will resemble the governance and labour rights indicators, and the most successful approach is likely to be an index based on surveys of public and expert opinion. Surveys should take into consideration issues such as civic and political engagement, membership and voluntary work in various organisations, relationship with neighbours and family members, and how people get information and news. A scoring system would give the appropriate weight to these aspects of social capital, relationships and networks. More work needs to be done to achieve consensus on which the important issues are, and how to score them.

Economic Resilience		
Core Issue	Proposed Target	Core Indicators
Secure Livelihoods	Ratio of 1.2 in low-income countries, 1.1 in middle-income countries and 1.0 in high-income countries, by 2020	Ratio of income per capita of farm, forest or fishing enterprise or organization to national average for that sector
Social Capital, Relationships & Networks	Target to be based on achieving a high score in the indicator	Degree of social interaction and connectedness (concept only: needs more development and consensus about what to include).
Resilience to Economic Risk	Positive trend in income diversity between 2010 and 2020	Diversity of farm, forest or fishery products and practices
Inclusive Production & Consumption Along the Value Chain	Ratio > 1 in each year from 2010 to 2020	Ratio of premium price to average market price paid to farmer, fisher or producer

Assessment Framework for a Tools[13] Information Centre

The ISEAL Alliance is interested in understanding what are the most effective contributions that standards systems can make to achieve sustainability outcomes, and where it is that they can be more effective in achieving impact when working in combination with other organisations and the tools they deploy. Similarly, the FAO is interested in identifying the variety of public and private initiatives that its member governments may be able to use in combination with their own public policies, to address sustainability outcomes.

At present, there are no frameworks, or information centres, that allow a diversity of users to become aware of the range of tools that are being deployed to achieve sustainability outcomes, nor assessments of the attributes and performance of these tools[14].

Users

Different users are likely to have different information needs and interests:

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[13] Tools are here defined as the collective of diverse policies, programmes, initiatives and interventions that any organisation develops and implements.

[14] Such frameworks are starting to be developed for voluntary standards systems, for example, the International Trade Centre's "Trade for Sustainable Development" information repository.

FAO - ISEAL Alliance Draft Discussion Paper
Conceptual Framework on Delivering Sustainability

User	Interest
Government Procurement Authority	How can I ensure my purchases from paper and furniture to building materials and transport or catering arrangements are sustainable?
Retailer	What initiatives can I use to help me manage and demonstrate sustainable management of our global supply chains across thousands of product categories? How do they fit together?
Manufacturing Brand	What combination of tools can I rely on to ensure the long-term sustainability of my supply of (e.g. cocoa)?
Environmental NGO	What are the most effective pathways for achieving to reach critical climate change mitigation targets?
Forest Plantation Owner	How can I understand and meet legislative requirements?
Ministry of Agriculture	Who are the different organisations that share my rural development objectives, and how can my policies and programmes build on theirs?

Identifying potential users, and their specific information needs, is a critical first step to identifying the questions and data that will need to be collected in the tools assessment framework to ensure its usefulness. We hope to begin this process at the meeting in Rome.

Key Questions

In order to be able to start making entries into organising our thinking as to how to relate the many policies, instruments and initiatives that we see being deployed to address sustainability outcomes, we need to identify:

> the key questions that we want answered in order to be able to assess tools

> the information variables that we will need to collect to answer the key questions

> the sources of that information

In advance of having mapped potential users and their information needs, we can start to identify some of the questions that may provide core information of interest to most users. A first proposed outline of these is presented in the table below.

Key Questions	Examples of Variables Pertaining to the Questions	Sources of Information
What tools exist?	> By sector, function, beneficiary, geography, etc... > ...	> The content of standards and standards systems websites, upcoming T4SD global sustainability database of the ITC, legislation, corporate strategy programmes > ...
What is the accountability of each tool?	> Who owns the tool (e.g. government, NGO)? > Does the tool have a clear purpose	> Compliance with accountability standards (e.g. ISEAL Codes, GRI, UNPRI, Equator

	(e.g. forest management)? > Are the tools' beneficiaries solicited to engage in its definition? > ...	Principles...) > Existence of a transparency policy for governments / authorities...
What are the impacts of each tool?	> Is the data collected coherent with widely used indicators and methodologies? > How does the tool deliver on its stated objectives? > ...	> Management programmes > M&E programmes > Application of ISEAL Impacts Code > ...
How effective is each tool?	> What are the strengths of this tool? What are its weaknesses/limitations? > What is the breadth of applicability? How easy is it to apply the tool? > How cost-effective is the tool for its users? > ...	>
What are the criteria that will allow us to assess how to optimally fit together different tools to achieve greatest sustainability effectiveness?	> How does the legislative context within which the tools will apply support or hinder them? > How is the commodity chain structured (e.g. dispersed or concentrated)? Tools-Related > Do the tools have mechanisms in place for mutual recognition, referral or coordination? > ...	>

Identifying the key questions is clearly critical, as this will determine the type of information that will need to be collected. Just as important will be understanding how to break that information into single units of data. The questions themselves are likely to lead to different type of data collected. Some of the attributes may be possible to address by means of a binary (yes/no) or check-box answers. Many more are likely to require narrative answers, with qualitative assessments.

This suggests that the amount of information that would be collated within such a tools assessment framework is very significant. For the purposes of the Rome meeting, information is being presented in this background paper and in an excel format. However, these clearly show the limitations of trying to present relational information without the possibility of linking data sets.

It is likely that most users will in fact seek answers to questions in relation to specific contexts, rather than in relation to specific tools. Users may be interested, for example, in knowing which tools are available within the coffee sector globally, or on forestry within a specific country, or NGO initiatives on water. For the tools assessment framework to be

useful, it must be imagined as a relational database, where data can be recombined in many different ways in order to answer a variety of different questions.

An initial snapshot of how information on different tools could be collected is provided in the excel document in annex to this note (see tab "List of Tools Tabs"). The examples relate to variables pertaining to the key initial question "what tools exists"?