

Contribution of Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) to SDGs in India¹

Fourth Meeting

VSS INDIA COLLABORATION

March 18, 2020



¹ Photo courtesy: www.un.org

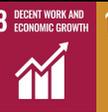
1. Introduction

There is growing body of evidence about contribution of **Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, globally. Businesses have relied on the principles and criteria of standards to pursue sustainability, especially in their value chains/supply chains. In 2017, ISEAL Alliance and WWF released a report on this issue, which asserted that credible sustainability standards and certification schemes are a key tool in market transformation and its contribution to the SDGs. Credible standards provide guidance on what better production looks like in a concrete and practical way, focused on a specific process, sector or industry. This helps businesses to address the biggest impacts in a specific sector².

Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) has been convening a group of VSS organisations in India³. There are over 20 VSS organisations which are now part of this loose coalition and take part regularly in these discussions. A fourth meeting of this coalition was organised on **March 18, 2020** on the subject of '**VSS Contribution towards SDGs in India**' with its broad objective to discuss and share their approaches, experiences and lessons in pursuing various SDGs in India. The meeting was attended by ten VSS organisations (refer to Annexure 1 for the list of participants). A representative of ISEAL Alliance was also part of this meeting. A senior official from NITI Aayog was also present in this meeting. NITI Aayog is the arm of the Government of India that is entrusted with overall management of SDGs implementation in India. In addition, CRB also updated the VSS organisations about status and process of development of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP) for India, being undertaken by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MoCA) – CRB was providing support to the Ministry.

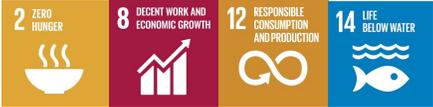
1. Meeting Summary

The representatives from different VSS organisations presented various initiatives undertaken by them in India and their alignment with specific SDGs. The participants unanimously recognised **SDG17, partnerships and collaboration**, as a key to achieving other sectoral/thematic SDGs. The table below gives an overview of the organisations and their contribution (broadly) to specific SDGs in India, based on the presentations made by the VSS organisations at this meeting.

Organisation	SDGs Contribution
Alliance for Water Stewardship	 All SDGs, specifically SDG-6
Rainforest Alliance	      

² <https://www.isealalliance.org/get-involved/resources/wwfiseal-report-sdgs-mean-business-how-credible-standards-can-help-companies>

³ Refer details at <http://www.c4rb.org/vss>

Organisation	SDGs Contribution
Social Accountability International	
Traidcraft	
Responsible Mica Initiative	
Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil	
Good Weave	
Fair Wear Foundation	
Global Organic Textile Standard	All 17 (directly/indirectly)
Marine Stewardship Council	

Ashish Bhardwaj, The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS)

- AWS is a global membership-based alliance of business, civil society, and public sector committed to working towards international framework for water use and its impact.
- Collects data at three different levels: from members, sampled monitoring activities, and in-depth impact evaluation.
- 21 sites are implementing AWS Standard across India and membership is growing in India. Data is collected from different sectors, mainly food & beverages, agriculture, and chemical.
- AWS standards contribute to all the SDGs, specifically SDG 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (good water governance, sustainable water balance, good water quality status, important water related areas, and safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all).

Saji Kadavil, Rainforest Alliance (RA)

- The Rainforest Alliance is an international non-profit organization working at the intersection of business, agriculture, and forests. It aims to “making responsible business the new normal.”
- It has four main interventions contributing to different SDGs, directly or indirectly: *Landscape and Communities* (SDG 2, 12, 9, 11), *Reimagining certification* (SDG 6,14,7,13,15), *Advocacy* (SDG 1, 5, 8, 3, 4, 10, 16), and *Tailored Supply Chain Services* (SDG 17)
- RA has coverage in different sectors in India, especially spices, tea, and coffee.
- The focus is mainly on small farmers and promoting sustainable agriculture practices.

Archana Panda, Social Accountability International (SAI)

- SAI is a global NGO, operational since 1997 with a mission to promote and ensure human rights in workplace and to help business, workers, and communities thrive together.
- The main interventions of SAI are SA8000 standards, partnerships, training and capacity building, corporate programmes, and multi stakeholder projects.
- SA8000 has 9 elements which include *child labour, health and safety, working hours, remuneration, freedom of association, forced labour, discrimination, and management system.*
- SA8000 covers 639, 926 workers in India in 33 industries which includes garment, footwear, and pharmaceuticals. It contributes to **SDG 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and 10.**

Rakesh Supkar, TRAI DCRAFT

- Traidcraft works to support fair trade in supply chain with a focus on advocacy and private sector engagement.
- It makes an attempt to ensure that standards also reach to lower tiers and home-based workers. The organisation is looking to create transparency and works with MSIs, brands, and CSOs to create awareness and conduct research.
- Traidcraft covers 21,000 *home-based workers* in India, mainly in apparel and footwear sector, and emphasises on improving the visibility of workers to ensure that brands improve the working conditions.
- Traidcraft uses various toolkits/approaches to contextualise it for India and compile best practices. It is contributing specifically to **SDG 1, 5, 8, and 12.**

Vijay Jain, Responsible Mica Initiative (RMI)

- Mica is a minor mineral being used in most of the sectors and faces the issue of child labour in mines and community. The RMI standards are based on ILO and UN with a focus on building capacities.
- The main goal of RMI is to address child labour. The organisation realised that to address one single issue, all the other goals would also have to be included.
- RMI is directly working with 30,000 people in Jharkhand and Bihar with a focus on *quality education* and *minimum wage/living wage.* It contributes directly to **SDG 4 and 8.**

- Vijay highlighted that VSS can help in setting standards for living wages for mine workers. The focus needs to be on workplace standards and community interventions.

Kamal Prakash Seth, Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)

- RSPO was founded in 2004 with a mission to make sustainable palm oil the norm.
- 19% of the global produce of palm oil is RSPO certified; India is the largest buyer of palm oil and thus has a huge responsibility.
- RSPO is encouraging businesses in India to promote sustainable palm oil with standards for large growers, independent small holders or farmers, and supply chain actors. In India, RSPO is leading the initiative through the Sustainable Palm Oil Coalition for India (www.indiaspoc.org), a business led multi-stakeholder initiative created with a goal to promote sustainable consumption, import and trade of palm oil and its derivatives in India.
- RSPO is directly contributing to **SDG 8, 12, and 13** by ensuring that several products can be made sustainable if palm oil is made sustainable.

Sandeep Chopra, GoodWeave

- GoodWeave aims to eradicate child labour in supply chains by working with different group of stakeholders- industries, communities, schools, and local agencies.
- GoodWeave interventions contribute to **SDG 4, 8, 12, 16**.
- In India, GoodWeave has established 54 Child Friendly Community (CFC), providing educational opportunities to 41,221 children and working with 195 schools.
- It is working with exporters, contractors, sub-contractors, and home workers to check working conditions and capacity building.

Mousumi Sarangi, Fair Wear Foundation

- Fair Wear is based out of Amsterdam and works to improve the condition of garment workers. It has a membership of 130 small and medium sized brands in 12 countries.
- The organisation recognises shared responsibility approach of social compliance and the importance of SDGs.
- Fair Wear has 8 Code of Labour Conduct drawn from the ILO and Universal Declaration on Human Rights which includes child labour, payment of living wage, and safe and healthy working conditions. All the 8 codes have a 'gender lens'.
- It covers 80 factories in India as 30 of the Fair Wear's member brands source from India. The focus is on women workers and improving their condition in supply chain. It contributes directly to **SDG 5 and 8** through training, auditing, and advocacy.

Rahul Bhajekar, Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)

- GOTS has been working since 2006 globally as a leading processing standard for textiles made from organic fibres. It defines high-level environmental criteria

along the entire organic textiles supply chain and requires compliance with social criteria as well.

- Globally, GOTS has 4,500 certified entities in 70 countries, covering 3.1 million workers covered.
- The standards contribute to all the **17 SDGs** in some form or the other.
- The standard is crucial for India as India is the single largest producer of organic textile in this region.

Ranjit Suseelan, Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)

- MSC is an international NGO, recognizing and rewarding *sustainable fishing practices* through certification and ecolabelling program.
- It contributes to **SDG 14, 2, 8, 12, and 17** as organisations are using MSC certification as integral to their operation.
- MSC hold special relevance in India as India is the second largest producer of fisheries after China. It is working closely with ICAR-CMFRI and WWF-India to improve the ecolabelling process in the country.
- MSC opened its operation in India in 2017 and has taken multi- pronged approach for certification: fishery scanning, fishery prioritization, fishery mapping, pre-assessment, action plan development, FIP, and full assessment.

Vidya Rangan of ISEAL Alliance emphasized that a lot of good work with respect to SDGs is happening in India driven by VSS, yet there is lack of their documentation. She mentioned that ISEAL Alliance does have the mandate to gather information/data pertaining to the activities of all of their members (VSS Organisations) and could consider joining hands with CRB to map VSS contribution to SDGs in India. She also talked about the *Evidensia* (<https://www.evidensia.eco/>) initiative launched by ISEAL Alliance, WWF and Rainforest Alliance in 2019 – providing easy access to credible research on the sustainability impacts of supply chain initiatives and tools, including standards and certification.

Sundar Mishra of NITI Aayog gave the overview of activities by NITI Aayog to coordinate the implementation and achievement of SDGs in India which includes working with the state government, Union Territories, private sector, public sector, and civil society organisations. He also encouraged and requested support from the participating organisations in measuring the contributions to “leaving no one behind” in pursuance of the SDGs.

On the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP), **Rijit Sengupta, CRB** gave the participants an overview of the relevance of the NAP⁴, its structure and the process being followed in its preparation. He urged all participants to submit their opinion/comments to the ministry (Ministry of Corporate Affairs) given the Ministry is keen to gather viewpoints and perspectives from all relevant stakeholders.

⁴ Being developed by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Govt of India - pursuant to India being a signatory to the 'UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights' and following the release of a Zero Draft on Business and Human Rights by the Ministry in December 2018
(http://www.mca.gov.in/Ministry/pdf/ZeroDraft_11032020.pdf)

The meeting ended with the agreement that the ecosystem of VSS is getting stronger in India and can be made more effective in its contribution to SDGs only through meaningful partnerships and collaboration. Multi-stakeholder consultations and initiatives are the way forward. India has a critical role to play globally on SDGs and should take a lead in demonstrating how to best integrate experiences and perspectives of various stakeholders in the process of pursuing them.

Annexure 1: List of Participants

S. No	Name of the participant	Organisation
1	Archana Panda	Social Accountability International
2	Ashish Bhardwaj	Alliance for Water Stewardship
3	Ankush Khanna	GoodWeave
4	Devyani Hari	Centre for Responsible Business
5	Kamal Prakash Seth	Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil
6	Mousumi Sarangi	Fair Wear Foundation
7	Nandini Sharma	Centre for Responsible Business
8	Priyanka Chhaparia	Centre for Responsible Business
9	Rahul Bhajekar	Global Organic Textile Standards
10	Rakesh Supkar	Traidcraft
11	Ranjit Suseelan	Marine Stewardship Council
12	Rijit Sengupta	Centre for Responsible Business
13	Saji Kadavil	Rainforest Alliance
14	Sandeep Chopra	GoodWeave
15	Sundar N Mishra	NITI Aayog
16	Vidya Rangan	ISEAL Alliance
17	Vijay Jain	Responsible Mica Initiative
18	Vivek Singh	Centre for Responsible Business