SESSION 1 SUMMARY

SESSION TITLE: PARTNERSHIP MODELS: STANDARDS ORGANIZATIONS

SESSION DATE: 25 September 2017

SPEAKERS:

Carlos Busquets, Director of Public Policy, Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition

Christian Ewert, Director General, Foreign Trade Association

Patrick Mallet, Director of Innovations, ISEAL Alliance

Xia Weijia, Vice-Director of Technology Development Department, China Association for Standardization

Reinhard Weissinger, Senior Expert, Research and Education, International Organization for Standardization (ISO)

(moderator) Eliza Anyangwe, Writer, editor and moderator, The Guardian/The Nzinga Effect

NOTES FROM THE PANEL:

Carlos Busquets, Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition

- There are lots of different models of collaboration; for EICC improving working conditions is the most crucial.
- On engaging other stakeholders, especially small producers: EICC standard is updated every 3 years through engagement of different stakeholders.

Christian Ewert, Foreign Trade Association

- On bringing standards to partnerships: since 2003 FTA recognizes the audit results of SAI 8000 which allows avoiding audit duplication and costs. The standards, in Christian’s opinion, are 95% identical, but the main point is what is really happening on the ground.
- On cost-benefit analysis of applying sustainable practices in production: there are lots of benefits of engagement with workers and providing good work conditions.

Patrick Mallet, ISEAL Alliance

- ISEAL’s role is to bring standards into a common area of interest and to build trust by bringing member organizations together.
- One of the recent successes of ISEAL’s work is the merger of two large standards Rainforest Alliance and UTZ.
- On engaging other stakeholders in standard setting and being more inclusive: many VSS are diversifying their strategies, many ISEAL members have inclusive processes, but they have other activities in place such as capacity building. It is important to see which strategies standards take to achieve their purposes.
• On building trust in ISEAL: building trust is about building a relationship. It is first, providing space for organizations for building trust, and second, it is about having a common purpose/goal. ISEAL is a neutral platform where organizations can do this. If there is a leadership and vision, high level buy-in can be achieved.

• On partnership between ISO and ISEAL: ISEAL’s decision to be part of ISO is a result of the fact that, indeed, there is an overlap. The ISEAL Code of Good Practice on setting standards is a good starting point to start discussion with ISO. ISO and ISEAL have similar ambitions and approaches to address topics.

Xia Weijia, China Association for Standardization

• The project on the national Chinese platform for voluntary sustainability standards started in 2013 with the assistance of UNFSS. The project comes through the Ministry of Commerce.

• There is a big demand from the government to have a national platform to discuss VSS, there is also a strong demand from industries as these are highly influenced by VSS as they have to be more sustainable to access supply chains.

• Companies have difficulties to find information on these VSS: hence a decision was made to establish the Chinese national platform on VSS in order to address this issue. The platform is aimed to serve as an information service for industries and to provide capacity building to enterprises.

• Chinese companies paid high certification costs to comply with VSS, and they say it is worth complying with sustainability standards, however more support is needed.

Reinhard Weissinger, ISO

• On potential for synergies between VSS and ISO standards: consensus between VSS is not as high as for ISO standards. ISO standards mainstream the procedures of VSS.

• On why it is hard to mainstream standards: there is a crucial difference – ISO speaks about mainstreaming sustainability practices rather than mainstreaming standards.

• The landscape of standards bodies is too fragmented, they work for their own stake, it is a business for them.

• On partnerships between ISO and ISEAL: ISEAL already participates in a limited number of projects, for example on Chain of Custody. There needs to be more work in terms of policy dialogue in ISO and ISEAL, maybe including UNFSS having a moderating role.

• ISO is not a VSS, it covers many fields, including sustainability.

• Consultation on standards is relative which depends on the type of stakeholders involved.

QUOTES FROM THE FLOOR:

Investments are surely needed for sustainable practices (donors, partners), but they bring benefits at the end. Many think that sustainability is a cost issue; it is a benefit as well.

CONCLUSION:

Partnerships between standards organizations are crucial, given that the field of voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) is getting more fragmented. There are various models of cooperation, what is important is trust and the actual impact which is happening on the ground.

When it comes to setting standards, inclusiveness is important, especially including more small and medium enterprises. Another important aspect is support, should it come from donors or regulators in a form of capacity building, dialogue or any other form.
RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Standards are complex, to translate standard into action is not easy. We need to bring the standards into an easier form for SMEs to understand the standards. There is a crisis in the field of sustainability.
- There is a need for Standards Map platform in Chinese language as some enterprises (particularly SMEs) cannot read technical documents in English.
- Donor agencies, regulators have to make it cheaper to internalize environmental effects. Is there an alternative in the future?