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Guide for addressing sustainability in standards

Guide relatif au traitement de la durabilité dans les normes

ICS 77.040.10

In accordance with the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1, 2011, clause A.5, this draft Guide is submitted to the ISO member bodies for approval by the date shown above.

Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

Draft Guides adopted by the responsible Committee or Group are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as a Guide requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO Guide 82 was prepared by the ISO Technical Management Board Sustainability Drafting Group.

Introduction

Sustainability is the goal of sustainable development. It refers to the state of the global system in which the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustinability is continually evolving. Achieving a balance between environmental, social and economic systems is considered essential for achieving sustainability. The achievement of sustainability is now recognized as one of the most important considerations in every human endeavour and activity.

Often the term "sustainable development" is used to describe development that leads to sustainability, and the term "social responsibility" is used to describe how an individual company or organization can contribute to sustainable development.

International Standards can contribute to the achievement of sustainability either directly, where they specifically address sustainability issues, or indirectly, where they relate to testing, products, procedures, services, terminology, management systems or auditing.

This Guide is intended for use by all those involved in the development of ISO standards. It is intended to:

a)   raise awareness of sustainability issues arising from the application of International Standards;

c)   provide a systematic approach to addressing sustainability issues in a coherent and consistent manner by standards writers, with regard to both new and revised standards, and related to the objective and scope of the standard being developed

d)   promote consistency, where appropriate, among standards that address sustainability.

Other related guides, such as ISO Guide 64 for addressing environmental issues in product standards, and ISO 26000, Guidance on social responsibility (in organizations) are referred to in this Guide, as appropriate.

At any stage in the standards development process, standards writers are encouraged to consider sustainability issues in their work. The lack of consideration of sustainability issues may be a valid reason to initiate the revision of a standard. Also, the significance or relevance of specific issues may have changed since the first drafting or the last review of a standard. Whenever a new standard is drafted or an existing standard is revised or intended to be revised, the standard writers (including project leaders and their technical committee chairman/convenors) are all encouraged to actively promote the application of this Guide.

Guide for addressing sustainability in standards

1 Scope

This Guide provides guidance to standards writers on how to take account of sustainability in the drafting of ISO standards and similar deliverables.

It outlines a methodology for ISO standards writers to develop their own approach to the task on a subject specific basis.

2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC Guide 2, *Standardization and related activities — General vocabulary*

ISO 14050, *Environmental management — Vocabulary*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC Guide 2, ISO 14050 and the following apply.

3.1
sustainability
goal of sustainable development.

Note 1 to entry: The environmental, social and economic subsystems of the global system interact and are interdependent. They are often referred to with phrases such as the three dimensions or pillars of sustainability.

3.2
sustainable development
development that meets the environmental, social and economic needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Note derived from the Brundtland Report].

3.3
stakeholder
individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organization

[SOURCE: ISO 26000:2010, definition 2.20]

3.4
social responsibility
responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behaviour that:

☐   contributes to sustainable development (3.2), including the health and the welfare of society;

☐ takes into account the expectations of stakeholders (3.3);

☐ is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour; and

☐ is integrated throughout the organization and practised in its relationships

Note 1 to entry: Activities include products, services and processes.

Note 2 to entry: Relationships refer to an organization's activities within its sphere of influence.

[SOURCE: ISO 26000:2010, definition 2.18]

3.5
standards writer
individual or group taking part in the preparation of a standard

4   What is sustainability?

Sustainability, as the goal of sustainable development, is a widely applied concept that gained international recognition following the publication in 1987 of the Report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development: "Our common future". Since 1987, the importance of sustainability and sustainable development has been reiterated in numerous international forums, such as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 (the "Rio Declaration"), the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 ("Rio+20").

Sustainability encompasses three dimensions – economic, environmental and social – which are interdependent and can be mutually reinforcing. The environment sets natural limits to the social system which is made up of human institutions and individuals. The economy, as one part of the social system, includes the consumption of resources, employment, meeting the needs of populations (which are typically growing), income and the distribution and use of products. Sustainability has been misunderstood by some as primarily an environmental concept, including issues such as climate change, non-sustainable resource use or depletion, and loss of fertile soil and biodiversity. However sustainability also includes social and economic issues, such as social disparities, standards of living, poverty, consumption of resources, employment, income and the distribution and use of products.

Sustainability is relevant to all levels of human activity, from the global level to the national, regional and community levels, as well as to the behaviour of individuals. It is also affected by all kinds of organizations, including governments, non-governmental organizations, companies, co-operatives, federations and unions. Sustainability is much more likely to be achieved by society as a whole by addressing social, economic and environmental aspects in an integrated manner.

Sustainability refers to a state of the global system, encompassing the environmental, social and economic subsystems, in which the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Given the intergenerational nature of sustainability (e.g., the needs of future generations cannot be fully defined by the present generation) and the constant changes in the environmental, societal (e.g., population growth) and economic subsystems, sustainability cannot be uniquely described in terms of a single fixed end point. From this perspective, sustainability is a characteristic of the planet as a whole, not of any particular activity or organisation.   However, sustainable development does address the activities, products and services of particular organisations (or communities, nations, etc.) and the ability to engage in such development in a manner that contributes to sustainability. Such development is necessary to meet the needs of both present and future generations, and is thus essential to sustainability.

In this context, sustainability and sustainable development issues may be viewed as concerns about changes to the environmental, societal, or economic subsystems, whether adverse or beneficial, resulting from development, that may affect the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability issues may arise from a wide range of activities, products or services that interact with, or may have an impact on, society, the economy or the environment.

The terms "sustainability", "sustainable development" and "social responsibility" have been used interchangeably by some stakeholders, and although there is a close relationship between the three, they are different concepts and thus not interchangeable.

Social responsibility encompasses the responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment and thus its contribution to sustainable development and sustainability. Although "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) may be a more familiar term than "social responsibility", the view that "social responsibility" is applicable to all organizations has recently emerged, as different types of entities or groups of people and facilities, not just those in the business world, recognize that they too have responsibilities for contributing to current sustainable development and future sustainability.

The standards development process provides standards writers with the opportunity to contribute to sustainable development.

5   Addressing sustainability in standards

Addressing sustainability in standards has some parallels to addressing the sustainability issues of an organization, though the nature of standards writing (e.g., largely done by volunteers from a variety of organizations who meet only occasionally, and often disband after a particular project is completed) create some unique challenges. After an initial discussion around relevant principles of the work at hand, the main task is to identify those sustainability issues that are relevant and significant, and address these through the integration of specific provisions into standards.

Existing information about or related to sustainable development, including that which has already been the subject of standardization, can be used for identifying and evaluating relevant issues (see Annex B). For example, ISO TC59/SC17 has provided guidance on sustainability issues related to buildings and civil engineering works. However, at times there may be a need to draw on specific sustainability expertise, for example in complex fields such as human rights or the environment. It can also be useful to include other relevant, current sector-specific guidance related to environmental, social or economic provisions identified in related International Standards.

Clause 5 discusses how sustainable development may be taken into account at the planning stages of standards work, Clause 6 provides specific guidance on identifying sustainable development issues (including principles and approaches), and Clause 7 discusses how those issues may be addressed in the standards writing process. A process for identifying and addressing sustainability issues is illustrated in Figure 1, noting that this linear depiction may not be the only valid approach.