



**New Forms of Institutional Innovation**  
**Linking Government Actions and Private Voluntary Standards to Achieve Public Policy Objectives**

A project of the ISEAL Alliance & the TSPN

With the financial support of:

SECO – State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, Switzerland

World Bank – Public Governance division

ENTWINED – IISD

March 2008

## Introduction

Around the world, a growing number of public authorities are working with private standards initiatives to deliver on their public policy objectives for the environment, social justice, poverty alleviation or food safety. These collaborations respond to a growing recognition that frequently efforts to pursue purely public or purely private solutions fall short of expectations. But also that collaboration can reinforce the efforts of governments as well as yield benefits for business.

The ways in which public authorities collaborate with private standards initiatives is quite diverse. Diverse in the objectives sought to attain –from poverty alleviation to public health, via environmental sustainability; and diverse in the ways in which governments interface with private standards, ranging from complete government-driven regulations and enforcement, on the one end, to complete private sector standards adoption and/or enforcement, at the other end.

Drawing from the breadth and scope of these collaborations, some common themes of good practice are starting to emerge. Patterns of common challenges, whether technical or political, can start to be unpicked; as can the benefits governments expect and do achieve from working with private standards.

## The Project's Objectives & Activities

The project aims to map the diversity of good practice collaborations that exist in how public bodies use private standards. Depicting a continuum of institutional arrangements, the project will analyse what underlies these collaborations: why public authorities choose to work with private standards, their benefits and challenges in doing so.

### Research

Through desk-based and in-country research, the project will:

- > depict a spectrum of potential public-private sector alignments (in the development and enforcement of standards);
- > identify the underlying roles/responsibilities/accountabilities under various collaborations;
- > identify likely prerequisites for the successful application of these approaches; and
- > identify criteria against which the success and possible replicability of the different models could be assessed.

A total of 8-10 case studies will be chosen from among the good practice examples, identified based on the following criteria:

- > Representation of different types of public-private collaborations;
- > Balance of case studies from high, middle and low income countries to ensure that different socio-economic and regulatory environments are addressed; and
- > Mix of public policy objectives and economic sectors (e.g. food safety, labour rights, environment, forestry, fisheries, agriculture, product traceability, textiles).

The analysis will be undertaken by an independent researcher, working with the support of a Steering Group composed of ISEAL Alliance, TSPN representatives and the IISD representing

the ENTWINED partners. The researcher will also be collaborating with in-country government and standards initiatives representatives for the development of the case studies.

The case study assessment and subsequent analysis will be compiled into a report for publishing.

### High-Level Conference

Having undertaken the research, the project aims to initiate a dialogue with governments to explore the strengths, limitations, replicability, and broader implications of lessons learned from the case studies examined.

To this end, a high-level conference will be organised to bring together 70-100 representatives from national governments and standards initiatives, including representatives from the case studies analysed. Additional participants will include private sector representatives, consumer organisations and social/environmental NGOs active in private standards-related issues.

Whilst the programme for the conference will be determined based on the evolution of the research, it is envisaged that it might include two key-note speakers to provide a broad overview before delving in to the specific case studies with possible topics including “Why Neither the Public nor the Private Sector Can Do It Alone” or “The Interaction between Law and Private Standards”. The case studies would be presented in parallel panels focusing on a common theme (i.e. particular models of government engagement such as public procurement or with a specific sector focus such as food safety) with 2-3 presentations per session. Case study team presenters will include a government representative and a private standards initiative representative and possibly an industry representative.

The two days conference will take place between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2008. Locations are currently being explored in Brussels (Belgium), Guatemala and Mexico. Options are being evaluated in terms of the likelihood of attracting the main target audience to attend, and the ability to engage with the local national government in the lead up to and follow up from the conference. Logistical feasibility and overall costs, as well as the feasibility and attractiveness of organising field trips to visit certified operations across a range of sectors will also be explored.

The research papers and subsequent discussions and outcomes of the conference will be compiled and incorporated into a post-conference publication that will be developed as a user-friendly resource tool for government officials and other stakeholders engaged on this topic. It will be available in limited hard copies, a CD-Rom version as well as an on-line publication.

This project is seen by the ISEAL Alliance and the TSPN as a first step in a critical dialogue to reshape the future of public-private relationships in social and environmental standard-setting.

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## The Trade and Standards Practitioners Network (TSPN)

The TSPN is an informal network of organizations whose work covers trade-related standards associated with agriculture and other rural industries. The group is seeking to cut across the traditional 'silos' of environmental standards, social standards, and food safety standards with its members representing various multilateral and bilateral agencies, private sector umbrella organizations, NGOs, and consultancy/other practitioner groups. The network's core objectives are to:

- > Share experiences and insights about the emerging evolution of social, environmental, and food safety standards and how these may affect the competitiveness of developing countries;
- > Deepen awareness among developing country stakeholders on the challenges, options, and country good practices to respond to emerging standards and regulations
- > Develop a "triple standards" information clearinghouse and learning centre to be used as a resource by various stakeholders;
- > Improve the effectiveness of technical assistance and related measures to strengthen developing country capacities in these areas by drawing lessons from implementation experiences and identifying 'good and innovative practices'.
- > Build consensus on the appropriate roles of (and scope for collaboration among) different stakeholders in the process of strengthening capacity in the developing world; and
- > Undertake joint research on selected topics and develop/strengthen partnerships in various thematic areas.

<http://www.tradestandards.org/en/Index.aspx>

## Creating a world where environmental sustainability and social justice are the normal conditions of business

The International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance is an association of leading voluntary international standard-setting and conformity assessment organisations that focus on social and environmental issues.

ISEAL members represent standards and conformity assessment systems in sectors ranging from forestry and agriculture to fisheries, manufacturing and textiles. ISEAL members are committed to the highest standards for credibility in their work including the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards and relevant ISO standards.

Working together, ISEAL members represent a holistic movement that has the potential to change the way the world does business.



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