

Plotting a path to responsible sourcing

On 21 October 2013, BSI hosted a lively conversation with stakeholders interested in responsible sourcing. The aim of the event was to gain stakeholder views on how standards can help organizations deliver their responsible sourcing objectives.

Inspiring and informing

In the first session, three sustainability leaders were invited to share their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for responsible sourcing.

Mike Berners-Lee, a leading author on carbon emissions, made a call for practical approaches to assessing environmental impacts. Mike reminded the attendees that we can never measure our impacts exactly, but realistically must accept that 'good enough' really is just that.

Becky Coffin, Head of Strategy and Performance: Net Positive at Kingfisher, outlined how responsible sourcing was essential to the delivery of the 'net positive' sustainability approach being taken by Europe's largest home improvement retailer and parent company of B&Q.

Karin Kreider, Executive Director at ISEAL Alliance, explained how they have been working over the past decade to strengthen sustainability standards systems for the benefit of people and the environment.

The Vivian Partnership also reported back on the key findings from its responsible sourcing research report for BSI. Four key options were presented: business as usual; a framework (standard) on responsible sourcing; sector specific responsible sourcing standard(s) (eg circular economy, renewable energy); other (a combination of the above).

Why we badly need the two 'Cs'

The two 'Cs' of communication and collaboration were mentioned repeatedly during the event. Speakers highlighted the need for sharing success stories and lessons learned. Meanwhile, collaboration sits at the heart of sharing expert knowledge, developing meaningful standards by consensus, ensuring credibility and the momentum for success in responsible sourcing.

Building a dialogue

In the following sessions everyone participated in workshop group discussions. These aimed to start a dialogue on responsible sourcing issues and to solicit ideas around what could usefully be done next. The discussions were structured around four questions – the key words arising from the discussions are presented below:

1. What does responsible sourcing look like?



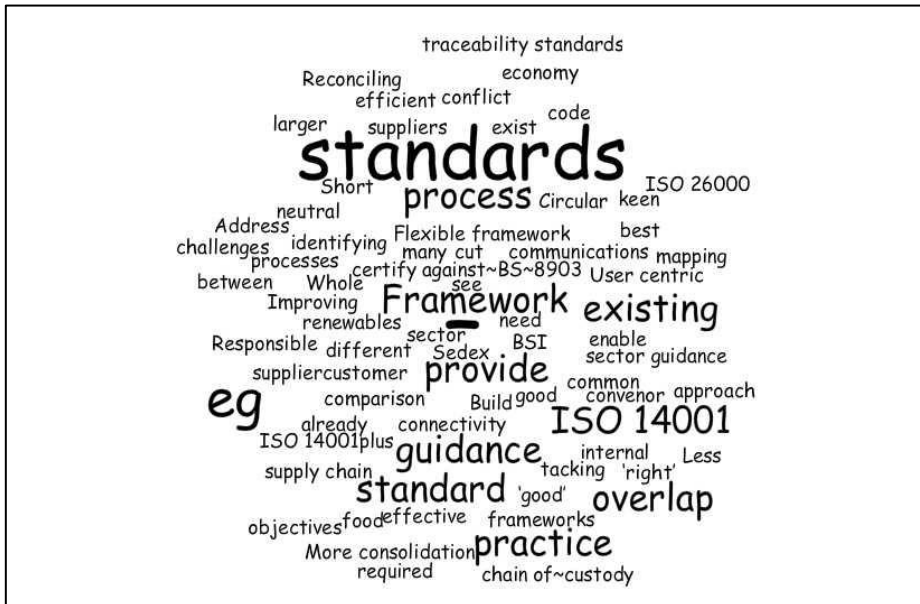
2. What are the main challenges and opportunities of responsible sourcing?



3. What is needed to support your responsible sourcing objectives?



4. What role can standards play in supporting your responsible sourcing objectives?



Outcomes and the way forward...

The Stakeholder Forum provided a better understanding of how stakeholders see responsible sourcing, and the potential role that standardization can play. Several clear signposts emerged:

- the delegates wanted more sector-specific guidance
- many participants would welcome more clarity around which standards are available and how they interconnect
- the circular economy was mentioned several times and looks likely to be an important concept going forward.

That said, some questions remained unresolved and call for more discussion. For example, two thirds of the breakout groups supported the idea of a framework standard on responsible sourcing, but one third disagreed, arguing that existing standards such as ISO 14001 and ISO 26000 could be used instead.

Next steps

Knowledge hub

It's clear that knowledge sharing is very useful in this space. For that reason, BSI will explore the possibility of creating an online responsible sourcing knowledge hub.

Standards mapping

The Forum confirmed that there is some confusion around the different standards that are already available and how they inter-relate. BSI has started work on mapping their range of sustainability standards so that practitioners will clearly see what is available and how the tools work together.

Circular economy

In response to our research, and corroborated by the Forum, BSI has also initiated some exploratory work on the topic of the circular economy. A similar stakeholder forum will be hosted in early 2014 to discuss the results of this research and how standards and BSI can assist in the move to a circular economy.

In summary

A lot of ground was covered during BSI's first Responsible Sourcing Stakeholder Forum. A warm thank you goes to everyone who took part. However, this is just the start. The debate about what standards can do in this space is now open. The findings from the event will be further analysed to determine specific actions and projects that can be taken forward, and BSI will continue the conversation with stakeholders to enable the implementation of such actions and projects. Please help maintain the momentum by keeping in touch with your ideas and thoughts via: sustainability@bsigroup.com