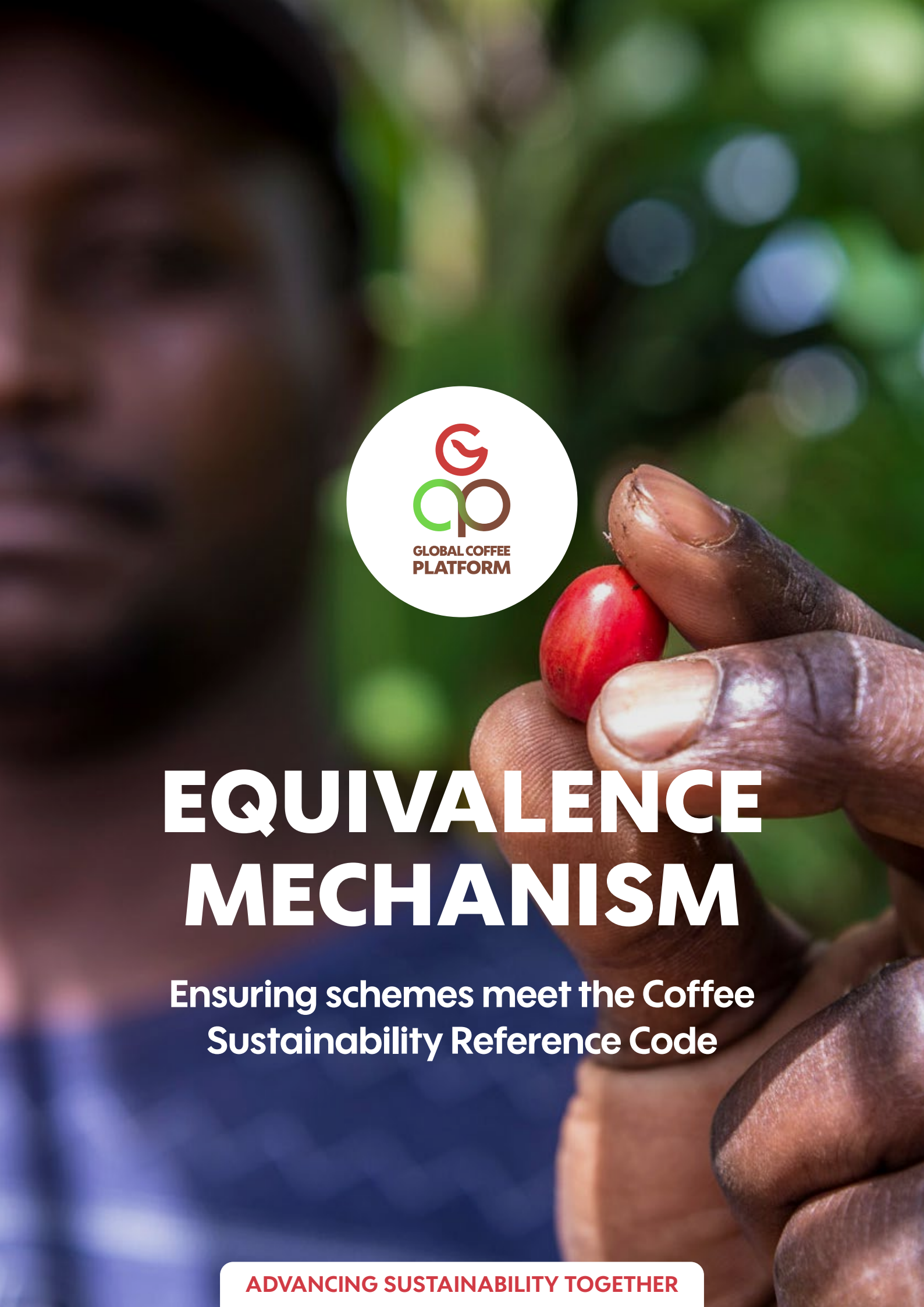

GLOBAL COFFEE PLATFORM

EQUIVALENCE MECHANISM

Ensuring schemes meet the Coffee Sustainability Reference Code

ADVANCING SUSTAINABILITY TOGETHER

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BACKGROUND

The Challenge

The vision of the Global Coffee Platform (GCP) is a thriving, sustainable coffee sector for generations to come, contributing to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

One of GCP's assets to drive collective impact is the Coffee Sustainability Reference Code (Coffee SR Code), a global reference code for baseline sustainability practices of coffee production and primary processing.

GCP, its Members and other stakeholders are committed to drive the uptake of baseline coffee sustainability practices as a threshold/starting point and encourage increasing sustainable sourcing from diverse origins. This – alongside complementary strategies such as improving the enabling environment for sustainable, profitable coffee production – can contribute to farmer prosperity, improved well-being and conserved nature.

The Response

GCP's aim is that sustainability schemes, initiatives or programs take up at least the minimum sustainability principles and practices as defined in the Coffee SR Code, and by that reach more and more coffee farmers. To facilitate this, GCP developed an Equivalence Mechanism (EM) with a set of Sustainability (performance) and Operational (system) Criteria described in this document. Sustainability schemes can be recognized for their contribution as part of a wider community moving together towards sustainability. The whole coffee sector gains in efficiency and potential synergies with a harmonized approach to baseline sustainability if all actors have the same understanding about baseline sustainability and efforts to meet this level of sustainability converge.

The EM allows different types of sustainability schemes, including voluntary standard systems, initiatives, programs, national curricula, company sustainability programs, company sourcing requirements and others[1] to be recognized as contributing to overall sustainability. Encouraging and recognizing a baseline sustainability performance of the entire sector, not just a few leaders, will move the entire sector forward on the sustainability journey.

In recent years, there has been an urgency for sector-wide transformation. Innovations in approaches include outcome-based and continuous improvement models, in addition to or within compliance schemes. These approaches encourage inclusivity and a level playing field, key principles of GCP. At the same time, there has been an increase in common measurement frameworks, recognizing individual and collective action, therefore aligned progress measurement is needed to drive sector-wide transformation. To this end, GCP launched in 2019 its Collective Reporting on "Sustainable Coffee Purchases" for Roaster & Retailer members and ICO London Declaration Signatories to report annually and collectively upon their sustainable coffee purchases.

In 2016, several schemes were assessed against the previous version of the Coffee SR Code (the Baseline Coffee Code) using the GCP EM 1.0. For the first GCP Roaster & Retailer Reporting on 2018 Sustainable Coffee Purchases the following schemes were recognized: 4C, Certifica Minas, Fairtrade, Rainforest/UTZ, C.A.F.E. Practices and Nespresso AAA.

In 2020 the EM 1.2 was adapted to accommodate evolving approaches and innovation, recognizing a wider range of both private and public sector sustainability schemes for GCP's Collective Reporting on Sustainable Coffee Purchases. This interim version EM 1.2 was developed based on a year-long process that included research of the changing landscape, best practices from international frameworks such as ISO and ISEAL Codes of Practice, interviews with schemes and stakeholders and a two-month beta testing phase with four private schemes.

[1] The EM aims to recognize programs that have a long-term relation with the farmers and are meant to create systemic change, rather than short-term projects.

Between 2021 and 2022, eight schemes were recognized following this version of the EM as equivalent to the Baseline Coffee Code 2nd party. For a list of recognized schemes see this link.

The development and implementation of the Equivalence Mechanism (Version 1.2) highlighted areas that required further refinement to consider the changing sustainability landscape and evolving approaches such as private-led sustainability schemes. With the recent publication of the revised Coffee SR Code, the Equivalence Mechanism needed to be updated to reflect the changes in the Code, as well as consider system aspects that needed further consultation from the last revision, e.g. governance and standard setting. These changes have been integrated in this version of the Equivalence Mechanism (Version 2.0).

Being an active member of the Global Coffee Platform is an opportunity for companies and organizations to show and enact their commitment to advance coffee sustainability in shared responsibility to achieve transformational change for more than one million coffee farmers by 2030. This can be achieved through, and with, GCP Members, the Country Platforms and partners. The EM also allows GCP Members to develop synergies and increase efficiency through alignment, collective action and co-investment, to measure progress in an aligned way, and to learn and achieve better impact with their investments.

The EM is designed to provide a means for advancing sustainable production and sourcing as it enables recognition of sustainable coffee purchases from diverse sources.Improvement of sustainability practices and performance of all coffee farmers can be scaled not only through increasing purchases of certified/ verified sustainable coffee, but also through recognizing private or public schemes which are equivalent at least to the Coffee SR Code and the Operational Criteria.

Other Benefits

- Assesses and establishes the level of equivalence of a particular scheme with the Coffee SR Code and Operational Criteria.
- Provides gap analysis for schemes to identify areas for improvement and "raising the bar".
- Provides the sector with the knowledge of where a sustainability scheme, standard system or program is with regards to the baseline sustainability practices as set out in the Coffee SR Code and Operational Criteria and therefore provides the necessary transparency to foster synergies in working together.
- Provides confidence that there is a common and comparable way of measuring progress towards the sustainability goals of the coffee sector, and to be able to communicate these in a credible way.
- Provides a measure of the continuous improvement in the sustainability journey all along the coffee value chain.
- Allows to make credible claims and supports a healthy collaboration.
- Contributes to exchange and learnings among different initiatives on ways they approach specific practices. Harmonization may be a secondary effect that could benefit farmers participating in several supply chains and facing similar but different practices on the same topic.

Principles

- **Inclusiveness** – acknowledge other approaches and innovations, especially those which recognize the different starting points along the sustainability journey
- **Transparency** for stakeholders on baseline acceptable practices and operational requirements
- **Recognizing leadership** standards and tools and ensuring the value of certification is not diluted
- **Level playing field** for different approaches focusing on baseline criteria to create a common entry point on the sustainability journey
- **Continuous improvement** recognizing different starting points to drive progress and impact
- Ensure **credibility of claims and contribution** to baseline sustainability by schemes or programs

WHAT IS EQUIVALENCE?
WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA?

The baseline Principles and Practices in the Coffee SR Code are a tangible expression of what baseline sustainability in the coffee sector looks like.

Equivalence refers to the recognition of schemes that include at least the defined equivalence criteria and their required minimum compliance level.

This means that schemes may be more comprehensive than the Coffee SR Code, but not less.

All Practices reflect a minimum baseline threshold of sustainability. However, recognizing that for mainstream coffee production and in particular for smallholders, some of these Expected Results might not yet be in place, so continuous improvement is essential.

Two schemes may look identical on paper but support different sustainability outcomes depending on how they are implemented in practice. For this reason, it is critical that the GCP EM looks at both the expected **Sustainability** (performance) Criteria, as well as the **Operational** (system) Criteria that support their uptake.

What's a Scheme?

For purposes of the Equivalence Mechanism the term "scheme" is used to generically refer to a wider variety of initiatives: voluntary sustainability standard (systems) or VSS, initiatives, programs, national curricula, company sustainability programs, company sourcing requirements among others.

Overview of EM 2.0 Criteria

A. Sustainability (performance) Criteria = Coffee SR Code

3
Dimensions

12
Coffee specific Principles

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Critical Practices

B. Operational (system) Criteria

3
Governance criteria

4
Standard-setting criteria

10
Assurance criteria

6
Data criteria

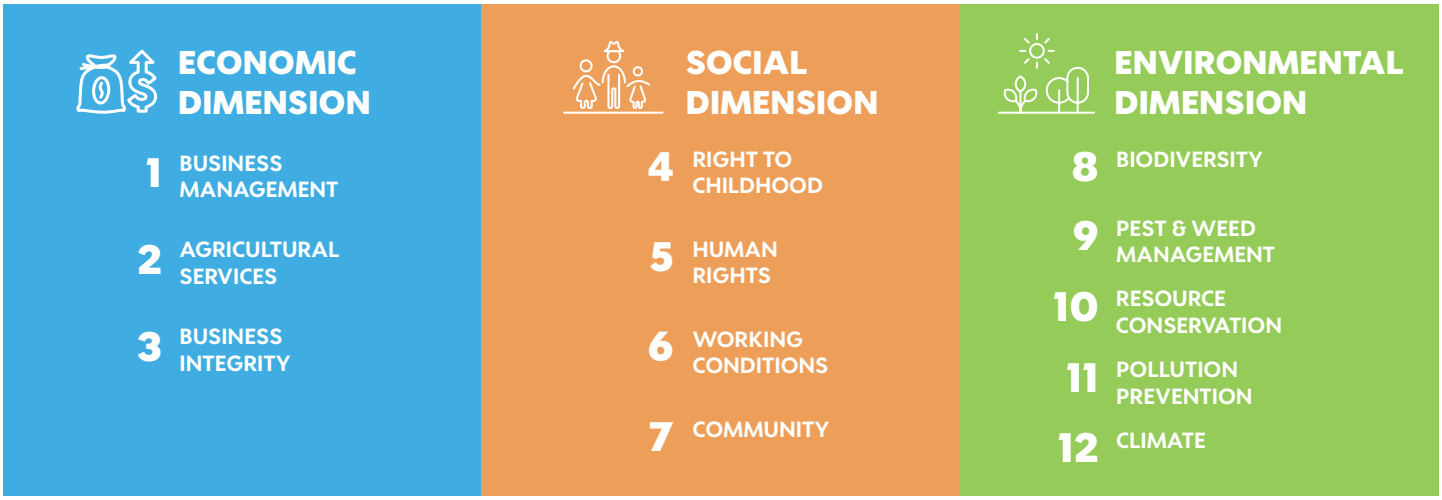
4
Claims criteria

A. Sustainability (performance) Criteria

These criteria define the expected sustainability performance as outlined in the Coffee SR Code. They are organized around 12 Principles and five Critical Practices:

Twelve (12) Principles

The Coffee SR Code is an outcomes-focused framework organized around the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental, recognizing that these dimensions are interrelated and interdependent. These Principles are based on good agricultural and management practices as well as international conventions and recognized guidelines accepted in the coffee sector. Under each dimension there are Principles, Practices and Expected Results.



For Equivalence:

Acceptable as equivalent		Not acceptable as equivalent
Continuous improvement approaches which specify the Principles and Practices in the Coffee SR Code as a minimum practice, require time-bound action plans (up to three years) and monitoring of progress. **AND/OR** Schemes which measure and report on the actual outcomes of the specific criteria.	A justified rationale that a principle is not applicable (versus just not covered). As this is a baseline, there will only be rare exceptions to this. These must be documented and accepted by the GCP Secretariat.	No mention of any individual baseline practices because it is not in a scheme's objectives or scope, e.g. no requirements on workers because the scheme focuses on environmental aspects. In other words, "not covered" does not equal "not applicable". For exceptions see previous point.

Five (5) Critical Practices

The Coffee SR Code also highlights the exclusion of four Critical Practices and the Inclusion of a fifth Critical Practice which is Continuous Improvement.

Exclusion Practices: elimination of the worst forms of child labour, elimination of forced labour, no deforestation, no use of prohibited pesticides. These are recognized hotspots by the sector in terms of severity and critical in terms of the immediacy of impacts if not addressed. If these practices are found, they are to be stopped immediately. The fifth Critical Practice, Continuous Improvement, recognizes that sustainability is a journey, and that some issues have broader root causes.

For Equivalence:

Acceptable as equivalent: Continuous improvement approaches which explicitly specify the exclusion of the above-mentioned four Critical Practices. In case of a violation, an immediate time-bound plan with a system for verifying follow-up is required. See Operational Requirements/Assurance/ Remediation.

Not acceptable as equivalent: Schemes which do not specify exclusion of all or any single one of these four Critical Practices or which only recommend (i.e. do not require) that these critical practices are eliminated.

For the details on the actual Coffee SR Code Principles, Practices and Expected Results, see the latest version of the Sustainability Criteria in Coffee SR Code.

B. Operational (system) Criteria

These criteria define the core operating practices that schemes should have in place to be considered credible and effective. All the Operational Criteria in all the sections are minimum criteria. Recognizing that different models can be effective for different purposes, the Operational Criteria are not prescriptive on a specific tool or approach but require transparency on the system. Transparency for the EM 2.0 means, at a minimum, that stakeholders, including producers and partners, have access or can request any of the documentation. For some criteria, publicly accessible documents are required to enable stakeholder trust.

3 Governance criteria

- **G1** Sustainability Outcomes
- **G2** Transparency
- **G3** Complaints and Appeals

4 Standard-setting criteria

- **SS1** Transparency: Sustainability Criteria
- **SS2** Transparency: Standard Setting
- **SS3** Stakeholder Engagement
- **SS4** Consistent Interpretation

10 Assurance criteria

- **A1** Fit for purpose
- **A2** Assessment Methodology
- **A3** Continuous Improvement
- **A4** Remediation
- **A5** Group Assessment
- **A6** Assurance Providers/ Evaluators' Performance
- **A7** Exceptions
- **A8** Impartiality and Conflicts of Interest
- **A9** Chain of Custody
- **A10** Traceability

6 Data criteria

- **D1** Data management
- **D2** Transparency: Performance Insights
- **D3** Data Quality
- **D4** Data Governance
- **D5** Performance Reporting
- **D6** M&E System

4 Claims criteria

- **C1** Defined Rules for Claims
- **C2** Monitoring
- **C3** Substantiation of Claims
- **C4** Assured Claims

GOVERNANCE

The Scheme Owner (SO) governance ensures an inclusive, transparent system for accountability, coherence, and effectiveness in its decisions and operations.

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT[2]	REFERENCES
G1 Sustainability Outcomes	The SO defines and communicates publicly the scope of its scheme, specific sustainability objectives and its strategies for achieving these (its Theory of Change). **Guidance:** While this may be captured in a Theory of Change, the scheme does not have to have a formal Theory of Change – only the key elements (stated objectives and strategies to achieve those). The information on the scheme scope, objectives and strategies is available on the SO's website. The scope refers to applicability of the sustainability criteria – this could be the target group and segments of the supply chain that the sustainability scheme covers and/or specific geographies. For example, smallholders only or coffee farms of any size. The sustainability objectives refer to the broad goals the scheme aims to achieve through the implementation of the sustainability criteria. For example, farmers' prosperity, decent working conditions, conservation of nature. The strategies refer to the high-level plan of action and types of interventions to achieve its sustainability objectives. For example, farmers' trainings, improve access to inputs/knowledge for producers, advocating for changes in consumer behaviour, strengthening of producers' organizations, etc. This does not mean a detailed strategic plan needs to be public, but the key intervention areas of the scheme, so stakeholders understand the basic objectives and how the scheme works to achieve those.	Adapted ISEAL Credibility Principle Supported by ISO/IEC 17067, 6.3.4; ISEAL Impacts Code 7.1 SSCT GIZ
G2 Transparency/ Participation	The SO ensures producers are aware of their participation in the scheme. **Guidance:** Participation in the scheme can be demonstrated, for example through the signature of a commitment letter to the principles of the scheme.	
G3 Complaints and Appeals Mechanism	The SO has a publicly available and easily accessible complaints and appeals mechanism. **Guidance:** The scope of the complaints and appeals mechanism is the assurance and standard setting of the scheme. The mechanism includes information about how to make a complaint or appeal, steps taken and timelines to assess and resolve complaints/appeals. The mechanism covers all elements relevant to the scheme assurance and standard-setting and defined roles and responsibilities of different types of complaints (e.g. complaints about the scheme go to the SO, complaints about compliance decisions go to assurance providers/evaluators, assurance providers/evaluator's role in communicating the mechanism to appeal compliance decisions). The SO communicates to producers the mechanism to appeal compliance decisions. This could be evidenced – for example, in the information package for producers about the scheme, training materials, etc.	SSCT (GIZ) ISEAL Standard Code 5.11.1 OECD Due Diligence Guidance

[2] The definition of the terms underlined in the Operational Criteria can be found in the Glossary.

STANDARD SETTING

The SO develops sustainability criteria that are relevant, transparent and that reflect a balance of Stakeholder interests.

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
SS1 Transparency/ Sustainability Criteria	The sustainability criteria in the scheme are publicly available and free of charge. **Guidance:** Sustainability criteria are the economic, social and environmental practices that the scheme promotes to/requires from producers as a prerequisite to belong to its scheme and to achieve its goals. Sometimes called a Standard. Publicly available is at a minimum, easily accessible on the SO's website. Public availability of the sustainability criteria does not mean that the SO needs to make available proprietary information like auditors/assessors' checklists/check-points and/or related tools for the operationalization of the sustainability criteria.	Adapted GIZ SSCT ISEAL Std-Setting Code 5.7.1 ISO 14024 7.4.3 2014/24/EU Art. 43 (1)
SS2 Transparency/ Participation	Information is publicly available on how the sustainability criteria are developed, how they are revised and who is responsible for decision-making. It includes what the process is for immediate/critical changes to the sustainability criteria and how stakeholders can engage in standard-setting (see SS3). **Guidance:** Publicly available is at a minimum, easily accessible on the SO's website. The information available includes the organizational units/bodies involved in the sustainability criteria development process and their respective roles and decision-making functions. **Examples:** • "The sustainability criteria of scheme X are developed by unit X in the company/ organization and the final decision is made by the Head of Unit X. Changes to the sustainability criteria are considered based on needs. Stakeholders are invited to provide input to the sustainability criteria at any moment and their input will be considered in future reviews of the sustainability criteria." • "The sustainability criteria of scheme X are developed by unit X in the company/ organization and a final decision is made by the Committee X made up of representatives of units X, Y and Z in the company/organization. Immediate/critical changes to the sustainability criteria are only possible under a unanimous decision of the Committee X. Stakeholders will be informed of sustainability criteria revisions and provided the opportunity to provide input."	Integrated KDP, SSCT GIZ and ISEAL concepts ISEAL Standard Setting Code 4.1.1 and 5.3 ISO 14024 5.11. 2014/24/EU Art. 43 (1)
SS3 Stakeholder Engagement	Stakeholders who are directly affected by the sustainability criteria are provided the opportunity to participate in the setting of the sustainability criteria. At a minimum the SO identifies which stakeholders are directly affected by the sustainability criteria and proactively reaches out to these stakeholders and encourages their participation in standard setting. **Guidance:** Depending on the nature/purpose of the scheme, the stakeholder engagement varies. Due to their governance structure, non-for-profit sustainability schemes' stakeholder engagement may include a public consultation. For profit sustainability schemes, may use their interactions with their stakeholders (for example via producers' feedback tools) to receive input to their sustainability criteria, document it and use it later for upcoming reviews.	Adapted from GIZ SSCT ISEAL Standard-Setting Code 5.4.4 For ISO Type I: ISO 14024 5.9. and 6.2., 2014/24/EU Art. 43 (1)
SS4 Consistent Interpretation	The SO prepares guidance on the sustainability criteria to support consistent interpretation of its requirements. **Guidance:** Guidance on sustainability criteria ensures consistent interpretation across assurance providers/evaluators and geographies. The key element is how the SO ensures the consistent interpretation of their sustainability criteria. Additional guidance for a consistent interpretation of sustainability criteria can be provided for example in training materials, checklists and guidance on sustainability criteria, internal policies, procedures for the development of standard criteria, etc.	Adapted from GIZ SSCT ISEAL Standard Setting Code 6.3.2 ISEAL Std-Setting Code 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 2014/24/EU Art. 43 (1), ISO 14024 6.4

ASSURANCE

The SO has a documented methodology for assessing compliance with its sustainability criteria so that supply chain partners, investors and other stakeholders know that they can trust the results of the assessments as being accurate, consistent, rigorous and accessible.

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
A1 Fit for purpose	The SO defines its assurance structure and activities commensurate with the scope of the scheme, risks inherent in its scope of operation, type of data collected, and end uses of the scheme, including the types of claims being made. An overview of the assurance structure and activities as well as who is making decisions on the assurance is public. **Guidance:** The assurance system is based on the schemes' objectives and purpose. Transparency to stakeholders on the basic approach and scope is important for building trust and understanding any public claims. The choice of structure and activities includes definition of the types of assessment to be employed as well as methodologies. Types of assessment can include pre-assessments, full audits, surveillance audits, on-site audits, document reviews, external group or multi-site audits, unannounced audits, witness audits, parallel audits, remote audits, etc. Additionally, the level of independence of the assessments is important to link to types of claims. Transparency on who is making assurance decisions (verification or certification) means defining what entity (not individual names) is ultimately responsible for deciding if a producer/group is considered part of the scheme. **Examples of sources of evidence for this requirement include:** • A public overview description that enables stakeholders to understand the basic scope of the scheme including: the assurance structure (who, how) and activities (what) that define the types of assessments, level of independence (e.g. 2nd or 3rd party), etc. • Claims policy or guidance. Detailed tools and methodologies are NOT expected.	Adapted ISEAL Assurance Code 4.3.1 ISO 9000:2015 Quality Management Systems Vocabulary SSCT (GIZ) OECD Due Diligence Guidance

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
A2 Assessment Methodology	The SO has a defined assessment methodology to ensure consistent compliance with the scheme's sustainability criteria at the producer level (e.g. checklists, guidance). This includes: • Sampling methodology and frequency that assurance providers/evaluators are required to follow during the audit. • A documented risk management protocol to assess the risk level of clients or assurance providers and the resulting assessment frequency and intensity. • In the case of Continuous Improvement requirements, there is a documented methodology of how progress is monitored and verified, as well as measures in place in case the improvements are not being implemented adequately on time. **Guidance:** The SO defines the methodology to assess the compliance of the producer with the sustainability criteria. A regular assessment of the assessment methodology with clear outcomes, identifies if the methodology is consistent between assurance providers/evaluators where applicable, and determines if the methodology needs revising. This assessment may be done by the SO or through an oversight body. The assessment of compliance should be done in a competent, impartial and accurate manner. Such outcomes can best be achieved when the processes and other tools are conducted according to consistent methodologies. Consistency is important for impartiality and a level playing field across producers. Clearly defined requirements for sampling methodologies and frequencies increase consistency between audits and strengthen reliability of applied procedures. **Examples of sources of evidence for scheme alignment include:** • verification requirements/methodologies, sampling methodologies, risk protocols • contracts and agreements with the assurance providers/evaluators • guidance interpretation documents, • SO internal assessment system with assessment reports, • training and calibration records. For continuous improvement approaches, procedures to assess and monitor progress including corrective actions are in place. Methodologies, details and tools are NOT required to be public.	ISO/IEC 17067 ISEAL Assurance Code 5.1.2, 4.2 (risks), GENICES Schedule A2 4.3 (5)
A3 Assessment Methodology/ Continuous Improvement	**The SO has a documented methodology for continuous improvement requirements, that includes:** • how progress is monitored and verified, • how progress is reported and to whom, • measures in place in case the improvements are not being implemented adequately on time. **Guidance:** All Practices in the Coffee Sustainability Reference Code reflect a minimum baseline threshold of sustainability. However, recognizing that for mainstream coffee production and in particular for smallholders, some of these Expected Results might not yet be in place, so continuous improvement is considered critical. For that reason, Continuous Improvement is a Critical Practice in the Coffee Sustainability Reference Code for all non-critical requirements. Where the Expected Results are not met for any non-critical requirement, a time-bound action plan (up to three years) to meet the baseline level of sustainability is put in place and monitored. The SO defines the methodology to assess the compliance of the producer with the sustainability criteria, define action plans, monitoring and reporting. There are procedures in place to assess and monitor progress, including corrective actions. Methodologies, details and tools are NOT required to be public.	

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
A4 Remediation	The SO has a remediation policy/protocol in the case a severe non-conformity is found at the farm or group level of a Critical Practice, or actions that have or could have severe negative impacts on people or the environment. There is engagement and improvement, rather than immediate disengagement whenever a violation is identified. There is a clear system for identifying coffee from those farms with violations and a document policy of what is done with the coffee from these producers that is in stock or in transit. The SO monitors that the remediation plan is implemented, and issues are being addressed. **Guidance:** See Glossary for a definition on remediation. There is a clear policy/protocol/system for addressing breaches at farm level that have or could cause severe negative consequences such as forced/child labour, illegal land clearing, or disposing of highly hazardous pesticides in water bodies. Remediation should not be confused with continuous improvement. Remediation applies specifically to severe breaches of requirements and is focused on the remedy to "make things right". It is not sufficient to just stop doing it, but how are those affected made good.	ISEAL Assurance Code 5.1.10 OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework
A5 Group Assessment	If the SO allows for group assessments, there is a formal internal inspection system to ensure compliance of all members of the scheme's requirements, monitor areas for improvement and eliminate non-conformities. This may be referred to as an Internal Management System (IMS), Internal Control System (ICS) or Group Management. The internal and external evaluators assess this internal inspection system for efficacy in addressing non-conformities, including a process for how group administrator(s) is/are addressing non-conformities for individual farms in the group. **Guidance:** For elements of an Internal management systems see ISEAL Assurance Code. For this requirement, internal and external evaluators refer to evaluators of the IMS, which could be internal group managers or staff, or external such as extensionist or even SO field staff. Examples of sources of evidence include assessment methodology OR group assessment methodology for the evaluation of the group IMS. No specific sampling methodology is prescribed as it will depend on many elements, including risk. However, having a clear sampling methodology for consistent application (see A2) is required. This applies to any group assessment, whether a formal cooperative or not. This requirement is not applicable when the scheme does not allow group assessments but does only individual farm-level assessments.	ISEAL Assurance Code 5.1.6/5.1.7

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
A6 Assurance Providers/ Evaluators' Performance	The SO has a defined process for reviewing the performance of assurance providers/ evaluators in conducting the assessment. **The procedures, at a minimum, include:** • the review of audit report • the review of complaints • sanctions **In the case of use of assurance providers:** • a risk-based program of office audits and witness audits of auditors/evaluators or audit firms that are approved to operate under the scheme **Guidance:** This requirement is related to A2 which helps support consistency, impartiality and accuracy of the assurance through regular monitoring and managing the performance of assurance providers and evaluators. The monitoring of the performance may take the form of a risk-based program, based on the region they operate, past complaints, number, size and complexity of assessments carried out by an auditor/evaluator or audit firm. In the case of 2nd party assurance schemes, this requirement refers to the evaluators who conduct the regular farm-level assessments with producers and not to the personnel involved in 3rd party assessments of compliance at farm level.	CGF SSCI GFSI 1.2.1 ISEAL Assurance code 4.2.1 ISEAL Assurance Code 5.5.4
A7 Exceptions	The SO has a procedure for determining and evaluating proposed exceptions to the sustainability criteria or assessment process. This procedure acknowledges the need for exceptions based on region, farm size, or other variables and defines time-bounds for the exception. (Examples include: variability in allowed pesticides by crop/region; specific practices that vary by varietal/growing region, etc.). **Elements of an exceptions procedure include:** • how exceptions can be applied for and who approves them • communication of these exceptions to all internal and external assurance providers, evaluators and clients working within the sustainability scheme so that these are applied consistently and transparently • monitoring the exceptions to ensure there are no unintended consequences. e.g. a prohibited pesticide is allowed but there is monitoring to ensure it does not affect local communities or water bodies; or an exception to working hours is allowed, forcing other groups (even those outside of the scheme) to adopt these hours to be competitive and thus become "the norm". **Guidance:** The sustainability criteria are meant to be a level playing field, but sometimes there are extraordinary factors or issues that require a SO to decide that a specific requirement/assessment process for producers may not be applicable. In other words, the SO allows an exception to their own rules and procedures. Recent examples include exceptions to office visits during COVID and allowance for specific IPM practices to combat pests that put producers' livelihoods at risks. The exceptions procedure documents when and how exceptions are made and how these are monitored. This ensures exceptions are not arbitrary decisions by individuals but are as objective as possible. The procedure requires a careful consideration of the situation and documents when, why, how and for how long exceptions to the rules are allowed. Exceptions can include exemptions, which provide for situations where a requirement is not applicable, with clear rationale. Best practice is for the SO to keep track of the exceptions provided. This is useful for learning purposes, to see where the sustainability scheme is not working or where further guidance is needed, and where there may be misalignments amongst assurance providers/evaluators and where more training might be needed.	ISEAL Assurance Code 5.1.5

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
A8 Impartiality and Conflicts of Interest	The SO has a policy/procedure to identify, manage and monitor impartiality and conflicts of interest within its assurance structure and activities. **Guidance:** This requirement is applicable to all actors within the SO assurance structure and activities as defined under A1. Conflicts of interest may be partially managed through assurance providers'/evaluators' rotation, witness auditors, increased transparency and regular reviews. This requirement does not prescribe specific policies, as this may vary according to the assurance model and other factors. ISO 17065 and 17011 and ISEAL Assurance Code Clause 5.6 can be reviewed for further specific clauses to ensure impartiality. The independence of the oversight body is a prerequisite for a scheme to be recognized by GCP as 3rd party assurance. **Examples of sources of evidence include:** • Risk management plan • Code of ethics • Annual Conflict of Interest statements • Mechanism/procedure for monitoring impartiality risks	ISO/IEC 17067 ISEAL Assurance Code 5.6.1
A9 Chain of Custody	The SO has a documented description of the Chain of Custody (CoC) model and of the mechanisms to ensure credible claims. **Guidance:** The objective of the CoC System is to validate claims made about the product, process, business or services covered by the sustainability scheme. The CoC system therefore forms the basis for any claims that can be made about the verified or certified product. The supporting assurance system (including auditing, oversight, reporting, claims approval, etc.) is then used to verify that the actor involved has met the requirements of the CoC criteria and supporting policies. The SO has procedures and documented the CoC models allowed, and the tools and systems to support any allowed claims. Examples of CoC models are: Identity Preservation, Segregation, Mass Balance and Certificate Trading. For a description of chain of custody models and definitions see ISEAL document on CoC models and definitions. Claims are consistent with the CoC Model. See ISEAL Guide. A documented description of CoC includes the list of all organisations (supply chain) that take ownership or control of a product during production, processing, shipping and retail (physically and/or administratively). The fundamental differences between CoC models lie in the handling or tracking of physical product and the handling or tracking of associated data.	ISEAL Chain of custody models and definitions V1.0 Sept 2016 ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide V1.0 May 2015
A10 Traceability	If any claims are associated with the scheme, SO has a documented system for traceability to verify the history and location of assured product throughout the supply chain in order to protect and monitor the integrity of claims. *Link to C4(CLAIMS/Assured Claims).* **Guidance:** While often used interchangeably, traceability is not the same as CoC, see Glossary. Traceability is the ability to demonstrate CoC. Examples of sources of evidence include tools and systems for tracking and/or traceback system for identifying a claim being made somewhere along the supply chain and tracing it back to the point where the claim was first assured (e.g. the farm for a sustainable farming standard).	ISEAL Assurance Code 5.1.11 ISEAL Chain of custody models and definitions V1.0 Sept 2016 ISO 17021 8.3.4

DATA

The SO manages data to ensure it is relevant and accurate for monitoring the performance of the scheme. Data is used as a learning tool and to be accountable to stakeholders about the added value of the scheme.

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
D1 Data Management	The SO has documented procedures that describe how data to assess compliance of farmers or groups with the scheme's sustainability criteria is collected, compiled and updated and by whom. **Guidance:** Information technology systems support the scheme owner's systems by ensuring that data is safely stored and easily accessible for analysis and different purposes. This can include risk management, assurance and Monitoring and Evaluation. There are documented procedures on how data to assess compliance with the sustainability criteria is managed. This includes initial data collection through to analysis to assess compliance. This is not about personal data, but "assurance" data that is used to understand the sustainability level/performance of farmers or groups. **Examples of sources of evidence include:** • Description of the current data management system (who collects the data and who verifies it). • Screenshot of database or app	ISEAL Impacts Code 5.6 ISEAL Assurance Code 4.3
D2 Transparency/ Producer Insights	The SO provides performance insights to producers, in order for them to see the value, hence their involvement in terms of consultation to ensure they have the ownership and acceptance. **Guidance:** The purpose of this requirement is that schemes deliver additional value to clients. Performance insights can be as simple as providing the client/producers with pre-assessments or audit reports and noting changes since the previous report. However, additional value for the client can be derived from communicating improvements over time, performance in relation to peers, or in assisting clients to understand where and how they can improve. **Examples of sources of evidence include:** • Sample of performance data provided to clients • Training • Feedback meetings	Adapted ISEAL Assurance Code 6.1
D3 Data Quality	The SO has data protocols and ensures data consistency and integrity for the data it manages. **Guidance:** The purpose of this requirement is that data collected is accurate and consistent. Data quality assurance measures can also include building cross-checks into data entry systems; defining procedures for identifying and handling outliers and missing values; and following recognized data quality assurance guidelines. Examples of sources of evidence include: • Data control protocol • Description of resources allocated to data consistency and integrity.	ISEAL Impacts Code 8.4

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
D4 Data Governance	The SO has a data governance policy. The data governance policy defines who owns the data around sustainability criteria compliance and what data is available to whom and under what conditions. **Guidance:** A documented policy or description of the practices and processes used to ensure formal management of data assets within an organisation. This includes topics of data security, data privacy, data quality, data integrity etc. It should also describe or document who can access what data and under what circumstances. Under the different types of assurance systems – whether 2nd or 3rd party – there will be different data flows, actors and responsibilities. For instance, 3rd party assurance will have oversight data on assurance providers. Thus it is important to identify the governance of the data across different roles and activities.	Adapted ISEAL Impacts Code 5.7
D5 Performance Reporting	The SO defines and regularly tracks Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the scheme objectives and every year publicly reports on them. **Guidance:** The requirement refers to the performance of the scheme, not the producers. KPIs look at the annual progress of the scheme towards its objectives. There are different interpretations of KPIs and organizations will have their own definitions. However for this requirement, GCP is looking at reach and output level indicators such as number of producers/groups, land area, etc. that are expected to be reported on publicly on an annual basis. These indicate the scope, growth and potential impact of the scheme. These are not impact indicators. It is recommended that SO aligns indicators with the sector-agreed common indicators such as in the Coffee Data Standard, International Coffee Organization Coffee Public-Private Task Force (ICO CPPTF) or Sustainable Coffee Challenge (SCC). Additionally, ISEAL has developed a set of publicly available common core indicators that facilitate sector alignment and data sharing. Schemes will also have additional indicators that they monitor, track and may even publicly report on. See D6. **Examples of sources of evidence include:** • website links • annual reports	ISEAL Impacts Code 8.1 Coffee Data Standard
D6 M&E System	The SO develops, documents and implements a monitoring and evaluation system. **Guidance:** Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) helps with identifying the most valuable and efficient use of resources (internal/learning) as well as accountability to stakeholders on resources used and results. The M&E system represents all the things that need be undertaken in order to track and measure progress (and success) in achieving the scheme's objectives. This could include documented policies, practices and processes that enable the systematic and effective collection, analysis and use of information for continuous improvement and accountability. This ensures a consistent approach to the collection, analysis and use of information. A related management tool is Management by Objectives with clear goals, monitoring of these, regular review and appraisals as well as adapting for learning. The M&E system looks at both the scheme's performance (D5) in terms of effectiveness and efficiencies, as well as changes and impacts of producer performance. Where possible, it is recommended that the SO aligns indicators with the sector-agreed common indicators such as in the Coffee Data Standard, ICO CPPTF or SCC. Additionally, ISEAL has developed a set of publicly available common core indicators that facilitate sector alignment and data sharing. A description of the scheme's M&E system is not expected to be public, with the exception of reporting on KPIs (D5). **Examples of sources of evidence include:** • Documented M&E program • M&E manual	ISEAL Impacts Code 5.1 SSCT GIZ Related to ISO 17065 8.5 Management Review and 8.6 Internal audits

CLAIMS

The SO defines how and which claims can be made by producers and downstream actors in their program. Claims about the scheme are consistent with its objectives, scope and level of assurance.

ELEMENT	REQUIREMENT	REFERENCES
C1 Defined Rules for Claims	If any claims are associated/allowed by the scheme, the SO defines the use of logos and/or text claims. If the SO allows the use of logos and/or text claims related to the scheme on-products, it offers public and accurate information to consumers about the scheme and its level of assurance. **Guidance:** A claim is a message used to set apart and promote a product, process, business or service with reference to one or more of the pillars of sustainability: social, economic and/or environmental (ISEAL definition, see Glossary). Claims can be Business to Business (B2B) and/or Business to Consumer (B2C). The ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide describes the various types that exist related to a sustainability standard. For example, claims about the intent or mission of the scheme, claims about their impact, claims about compliance with the sustainability criteria (assured claims) or more general marketing or promotional type of claims. Many claims are a combination of a logo (if used), a text claim (inside and/or alongside the logo) and access to further information. The use of symbols, logos and claims can be regulated by the SO in contracts with producers or communication guidelines for buyers, amongst others.	ISO/IEC 17021-1, 8.4.1 ISO/TS 17033 5.1.5 ISO/IEC 17030 4.2 ISEAL Impacts Code 10.3 CGF SSCI, GIZ SSCT, KDP, GSSI ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide. 2.5.1, 2.1.3
C2 Monitoring	If claims are allowed by the scheme, the SO monitors the use of logos and claims. **Guidance:** Monitoring of claims can be done, for example, through setting up a system for application for making claims, regular review of this use, the inclusion of reporting on use of logos and text claims in contracts with producers and buyers, searches in internet, revisions of clients' websites.	ISO 17065 7.9.3-4, ISO 17021 8.3.5, ISO 17067 6.5.12, ISEAL Assurance Code 5.1.13.
C3 Substantiation of Claims	The SO has data to substantiate claims about meeting its scheme objectives, e.g. with impacts data or M&E results. *Link to D5(DATA/Performance Reporting) and D6 (DATA/ M&E system)* **Guidance:** When a SO in a report or statement makes a claim about the outcomes/impacts of their scheme, it has data from impact studies (internal or external) or their M&E system that corroborate these outcomes/impacts.	ISEAL Impacts Code 10.3 ISEAL Assurance Code 4.3.1
C4 Assured Claims	Claims related to compliance with the scheme correspond to level of assurance. *See A1(ASSURANCE/Fit for purpose)* **Guidance:** Any claims allowed by the scheme owner need to be transparent on the level of assurance – whether it is 2nd or 3rd party assurance – through policies, contracts or other enforceable mechanisms. This may be through qualifying language that specifies the level of assurance. For example, if the text claim is: "Ingredients of this product are sourced from farms independently certified against the X Scheme", then the level of assurance of the scheme is equal or above 3rd party assurance (also known as certification).	ISEAL Assurance Code 4.3.1, 5.1.11 ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide.

EQUIVALENCE PROCESS **FOR EM 2.0**

The Equivalence Process has three stages:

Application | **Assessment of Sustainability (Coffee SR Code) and Operational Criteria** | **Reporting to GCP**

The Equivalence Process uses best practices for benchmarking (e.g. ISEAL Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Guide) and builds on existing credible mechanisms (e.g. accredited ISO 17065, ISEAL Code Compliance membership).

The process considers alternatives to ensure credibility, transparency, independence and sustainability (cost effectiveness). This includes a partnership with the United Nations International Trade Center as the independent verifier leveraging the Standards Map[3].

For credibility and independence, GCP governance body members (Technical Committee or Board) who have a scheme or are consulting with a scheme that is currently recognized or considering recognition, cannot have a role in the EM process. In other words, to avoid a potential conflict of interest, there can be no decision-making regarding the application, assessment or approval of recognized schemes by the TC or Board.

In the case that a country has a GCP benchmarked National Sustainability Curriculum against the Coffee SR Code, the assessment of the Sustainability Criteria of national schemes applying will be vis-à-vis that curriculum.

If needed, and once a scheme has been considered equivalent to the Code, GCP reserves the right to carry out an office/on-site audit.

All schemes that have been recognized to date, will need to submit their scheme for reassessment under the EM 2.0.

The table below outlines the general steps in the Equivalence Process. During the process, priority will be given to schemes owned by GCP Members. If the scheme has undertaken a 3rd party benchmark and provides the results with details of supporting documents, the assessment process may be shortened.

Overview of steps in Equivalence Process

Application | **Self Assessment Initial Review** | **Review and Close Gaps** | **Finalize Assessment** | **Recognition** | **Reporting to GCP**

Assessment

The recognition includes an official communication to the Scheme Owner, publication on GCP website and inclusion for the GCP Collective Reporting on Sustainable Coffee Purchases.

Complaints about the results of the Equivalence process and/or recognition status of schemes can be submitted following the Complaints and Appeals procedure, see Annex 1.

[3] Currently used by several other benchmarking and equivalency mechanisms including the SAI Platform and FEFAC (https://www.standardsmap.org/fefac).

APPLICATION-ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

GCP Members put forward to the Secretariat schemes which they propose to be recognized. The following eligibility criteria apply to owners of such a scheme. Scheme Owners do not necessarily need to be a GCP Member to have their scheme recognized.

GCP reserves the right to accept/reject applications, even if all of the eligibility criteria are met and will provide the applicant a clear rationale and options.

- **The Scheme Owner is a legal entity**
- **The Scheme has been operational for at least 12 months**
- **The Scheme has developed and implemented its sustainability and operational criteria in at least 10 large farms. If the SO allows for group assessments, in at least three groups.**[4]

Reporting to GCP

The GCP recognition of a scheme as equivalent to the Coffee SR Code is for three years. The deadline to report to GCP is March 31 of each year for data related to the previous calendar year.

Under exceptional circumstances, there may be changes in the GCP Equivalence Mechanism Sustainability Criteria (i.e. Coffee SR Code) or Operational Criteria before the end of the three-year cycle. These changes may trigger an earlier reassessment.

Scheme Owners are required to confirm to GCP each year if there are no changes or to report changes in their schemes (sustainability requirements and/or operational criteria).

The Scheme Owner of a GCP-recognized scheme is required to inform the GCP Secretariat in writing about any significant change, updates to its scheme or plans for revision of their sustainability and operational criteria that are relevant to the Code or operational requirements and could affect the scheme being considered equivalent.

Significant changes include changes to its governance or ownership, management system, sustainability criteria, or normative documents, which could compromise the scheme's recognition by GCP. GCP will assess if the changes are substantive and require a reassessment. Significant changes to the scheme are to be reported to GCP immediately and may trigger a reassessment.

The following data points are to be provided annually by the Scheme Owner to GCP. These data points are aggregated figures on the scheme's reach and not the data the scheme manages about specific producers/groups.

- Aggregated key figures (# farmers (female and male), # smallholders[5], # total hectares of coffee production, # bags (60 kg) of green coffee produced, # workers (permanent/temporary, female/male).
- Performance reporting KPIs (see D5)

[4] The point of reference for implementation is when a farm or a group can be considered certified/verified. Groups includes cooperatives, associations, etc.

[5] As per the definition of smallholder of each scheme.

CLAIMS ABOUT THE **GCP RECOGNITION**

GCP will maintain on the GCP website the list of recognized schemes and include all recognized schemes for the GCP Collective Reporting on Sustainable Coffee Purchases.

During the application process the scheme needs to select for which claim it would be applying to:

- GCP-recognized schemes as equivalent 3rd party assurance (sometimes referred to as certification)
- GCP-recognized schemes as equivalent 2nd party assurance (sometimes referred to as verification)

GCP recognizes that 1st party assurance (sometimes referred to as self-assessment or internal audit) can play an important role for producer empowerment and serve as a stepping stone towards external assurance. However, the EM 2.0 does not recognize 1st party assurance schemes as equivalent for the moment but will consider this model for future versions if there is sufficient interest and it is considered credible by markets.

The Scheme Owner can make reference to its scheme supporting GCP's mission and vision. The Scheme Owner can only make claims about the GCP recognition together with the level of assurance as per the approved EM 2.0 assessment (Assurance section[6]), in line with ISO 9001/ISO/IEC 17000 Conformity Assessment and ISEAL "Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide" v1.0 May 2015. This must be included in their own policies and procedures on allowable claims of downstream actors.

Depending on the characteristics of the scheme, the claim the scheme can make about the recognition by GCP differs. To differentiate between the different models of assurance, GCP classifies the scope of the assessment as follows.

Examples:

- "Scheme Owner X supports a thriving, sustainable coffee sector for generations to come and works as GCP Member/ works with GCP towards sustainability, together with other leading organizations. GCP has recognized the X-Scheme as Coffee SR Code equivalent 3rd party assurance" – if the EM-recognized assessment defines the Scheme as using a 3rd-party assurance provider with independent oversight.
- "Scheme Owner X supports a thriving, sustainable coffee sector for generations to come and works as GCP Member/ works with GCP towards sustainability, together with other leading organizations. GCP has recognized the X-Scheme as Coffee SR Code equivalent 2nd party assurance" – if the EM-recognized assessment defines the Scheme as using a 2nd party assurance model (e.g. supplier, Scheme Owner or other non-independent party).

No claims regarding GCP or Equivalence to Coffee SR Code can be made by the scheme on products in any form.

Statements/claims regarding the recognition need to be neutral and approved by the GCP Secretariat.

ASSURANCE MODELS

The table on the following page defines the different assurance models eligible to be recognized under the GCP EM 2.0. These models are considered equally credible when the baseline elements are met. While the definitions are based on ISO and ISEAL, GCP has adapted these to ensure credibility while encouraging innovation.

The scope of the assurance for the models is farm/group level compliance with the sustainability criteria of the scheme as per ISO and ISEAL. It does not refer to the impacts of the implementation of the scheme at farm/group level – or program impact. While GCP encourages that, those aspects are covered under the Operational Criteria/Data section (Monitoring and Evaluation system) and not Assurance.

[6] International references and normative documents are used to define the different levels of assurance. As per the ISEAL Assurance Code, it is important that claims are clearly linked to the assurance model used.

GCP EM Recognition Claims – Based on ISO and ISEAL

Examples

3rd party assurance
(also referred to as Certification)

The following are considered characteristics of GCP EM 2.0 – 3rd party assurance and all must be met:

1. Independent assurance at farm level of compliance with the Scheme Owner's requirements. A 3rd-party audit is performed by an audit organization independent[7] of the customer-supplier relationship and is free of any conflict of interest.
   - **a.** The Scheme Owner is independent of the farm level assessment/audit provider AND
   - **b.** The assurance decision of compliance with the scheme's sustainability criteria is made by a body that does not have any ties to the party being evaluated
2. Independent oversight of the competency of the entity performing the assessment/audit to ensure effectiveness and impartiality. This may be in the form of accreditation as per ISO 17021.
   - **a.** The Scheme Owner specifies the oversight mechanism and requirements through an Integrity Program*
   - **b.** There is monitoring of the competency of the assessment/audit provider including sanctions
3. The scheme is not managed or owned by the certificate holder, audit firms or buyer (NEW)

*Integrity Program – program to ensure the accuracy and consistency of assessments include witness audits, regular performance assessments of assurance providers and mechanism to appeal compliance decisions.

Schemes that use certification bodies accredited ISO 17065 against their scheme.

Schemes that use certification bodies that are ISO 17065 accredited to other schemes (proxy accreditation) AND have a defined oversight or Integrity Program AND are not involved in the decision of compliance with the scheme requirements AND scheme is not managed or owned by certificate holder, audit firms or buyer.

2nd party assurance
(sometimes referred to as Verification)

The following are considered characteristics of GCP EM 2.0 – 2nd party assurance:

4. A related or interested party** (e.g. buyer, Scheme Owner or field staff) assures compliance with the scheme requirements. A 2nd-party audit is an external[8] audit performed by a supplier, customer, or contractor, often against their proprietary requirements.
5. Independent assurance providers are not subject to integrity programs or oversight by an independent body.

**Interested party is a legal organization that participates or could participate in the supply chain.

Schemes that use their staff, or contracted independents, to assure farm-level compliance and have:

- periodic external independent evaluations of farm-level impacts by researchers (no oversight of assurance mechanism)
- periodic external independent assessment of farm-level performance by ISO 17065 accredited assurance providers (not subject to independent oversight or integrity program)

Schemes that use certification bodies that are ISO 17065 accredited to their own or other schemes (proxy accreditation) AND have a defined independent oversight or Integrity Program BUT make the final decision of compliance with the scheme requirements.

[7] Financial and managerial independence.

[8] External refers to external to the producer/group versus an internal self-assessment. So while there may be a clear interest or relationship, the audit is conducted by an entity separate from the producer.

Transition period

Schemes that have been recognized by GCP under previous versions of the Equivalence Mechanism have until November 2023 to go through the Equivalence Process and reassess their schemes. New schemes that are interested in going through the Equivalence Process and become recognized by GCP will be assessed against the Equivalence Mechanism 2.0.

Version validity

The revision of the Equivalence Mechanism during 2021-2022 followed the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards (version 6.0 – December 2014).

The Equivalence Mechanism 2.0 was approved by the GCP Board in July 2022 and is valid from November 2022 onwards.

Acronyms

Coffee SR Code	Coffee Sustainability Reference Code
EM	Equivalence Mechanism
GCP	Global Coffee Platform
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SO	Scheme Owner
TC	Technical Committee of GCP
VSS	Voluntary Sustainability Standards

Annexes

Next revision of the Equivalence Mechanism

The process and procedure for regular revision follows the recommendations and requirements of the ISEAL Alliance for credible sustainability standard systems to ensure it is relevant and up to date. Stakeholders will be notified with sufficient notice of the next scheduled review. The next revision would be in 2027 latest.

For more information on the Equivalence Mechanism visit the Global Coffee Platform website.

Document history

Version	Effective date/as of	Details of Change
V1.0	September 2016	First Version of the Concept of the Equivalence Mechanism
V1.1	December 2016	Second Version of the Concept of the Equivalence Mechanism
V1.2	October 2020	Third Version as interim Equivalence Mechanism until further review. Expansion of EM to include continuous improvement and outcome-based approaches. No changes in the Sustainability (performance) Criteria in EM 1.2. The "yellow" criteria in the Baseline Coffee Code are used as the baseline for the Sustainability Criteria. Changes in the Operational (system) Criteria to recognize changes in the context and innovations in approaches. These include adjusted criteria around data, traceability, performance, as well as recognizing different assurance models that are fit for purpose next to/beyond third-party certification.
V2.0	November 2022	Fourth version. Full revision. Addition of sections on governance and standard setting. Revision and addition of guidance and references to all Operational Criteria. Revision of claims about the GCP recognition, including the deletion of 1st party assurance as assurance model eligible to be recognized. Alignment of Sustainability (performance) Criteria with the Coffee Sustainability Reference Code.

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