ISO 26000 and the SDGs
There has never been greater pressure on society to look to the future. Organizations everywhere are starting to see the importance of addressing current threats to their long-term viability and investing in a sustainable future for all. Achieving future sustainability requires a balance between the needs of the environmental, social and economic systems. There is now a societal expectation that organizations not only have a responsibility towards social and environmental welfare, but should play a positive and integral role in achieving it.

**Sustainable development can be defined as a form of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.**

This cannot be achieved by individual organizations working in silos, which is why 193 countries have pledged their support towards the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and their 169 targets. Adopted in 2015, the SDGs are a set of aspirational goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 1  End poverty in all its forms everywhere
SDG 2  End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
SDG 3  Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
SDG 4  Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
SDG 5  Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
SDG 6  Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
SDG 7  Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
SDG 8  Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
SDG 9  Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
SDG 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries
SDG 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
SDG 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
SDG 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
SDG 14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
SDG 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
SDG 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
SDG 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development
ISO has thousands of standards that help the user contribute to the UN 2030 Agenda and its sustainable development goals, covering everything from sustainable communities and quality management to safety and measuring greenhouse gases. Almost any activity can be described in an ISO standard if relevant stakeholders meet and work towards consensus.

One of the overarching standards directed at helping businesses and organizations contribute to sustainable development is ISO 26000, Guidance on social responsibility. Developed with the consensus of more than 450 experts from 99 countries and 42 international liaison organizations, it is the repository of good practice and expertise from industry, government, labour organizations, non-governmental organizations and consumers.

ISO 26000 provides guidance on how businesses and organizations can operate in an ethical and transparent way that contributes to sustainable development while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, applicable laws and international norms of behaviour.

How much an organization contributes to sustainable development and its impacts on society and the environment is known as “social responsibility” and is becoming a critical measure of performance.

Social responsibility is the 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, including the health and welfare of society
- Takes into account the expectations of stakeholders
- Is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour
- Is integrated throughout the organization and practised in all its relationships

Extracted from ISO 26000:2010
An organization’s level of social responsibility influences everything from its reputation to its ability to attract high-calibre employees and its relationship with suppliers, clients and the communities in which it operates.

ISO 26000 was developed before the UN 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, yet offers more than 450 recommendations related to its main principles and core subjects of social responsibility that help organizations contribute to the SDG goals.

ISO 26000 offers practical guidance to any organization, anywhere in the world, wishing to contribute to sustainable development. It helps them:

- Understand how they currently impact society and contribute to sustainable development
- Identify, engage and respect their relevant stakeholder expectations
- Define which issues are relevant and significant and ensure they are prioritized for action
- Be in compliance with applicable laws and consistent with international norms of behaviour
- Integrate responsible behaviour throughout their organization and relationships

Not only does the standard help organizations identify and reduce their most significant impacts on society, the actions recommended align well with international norms such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labour Organization’s core conventions on labour practices.

Holistic in its approach, ISO 26000 addresses seven core subjects of social responsibility that are relevant to every organization (see graphic on page 5). Each of these core subjects, outlined in Clause 6 of the standard, includes a number of issues of social
responsibility – 37 in total – with related actions and expectations.
The graphic on pages 6 and 7 illustrates how the seven core subjects relate to each other. In substance, an organization should keep in mind the seven principles of sustainable development given in Clause 4 when improving its performance in the core subjects described in Clause 6. Clauses 5 and 7 offer guidance to help the organization understand its role in society and integrate the management of its impact on society.
Schematic overview

The following graphic provides an overview of ISO 26000 outlining the relationship between the various clauses of the standard.
Schematic overview of ISO 26000

Clause 5
- Recognizing social responsibility
  - Stakeholder identification and engagement

Clause 6
- Organizational governance
  - Environment
  - Fair operating practices
  - Consumer issues
  - Community involvement and development

Clause 7
- Practices for integrating social responsibility throughout an organization
- Understanding the social responsibility of the organization
- Voluntary initiatives for social responsibility
- Enhancing credibility regarding social responsibility

Annex: Examples of voluntary initiatives and tools for social responsibility

Maximizing an organization’s contribution to sustainable development
How users of ISO 26000 contribute to the sustainable development goals

An organization that takes action according to the practical recommendations offered in ISO 26000 will necessarily contribute to the SDGs. The following graphic gives a snapshot of the number of references giving guidance in the ISO 26000 core subjects:
ISO 26000 in action

SDG 8 – Promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

When Algerian drinks producer NCA Rouiba embarked on the implementation of ISO 26000, staff welfare was a key area of focus. In association with trade unions and worker representatives, they developed a new employee relations framework to prevent discrimination and promote well-being, as well as updating contracts with suppliers to insist they do the same.

“Social responsibility is not only an internal process; it requires the collective dynamic of organizations across different sectors and regions.”
For example, for the first SDG (No poverty), Subclause 6.4.4.2 of ISO 26000 under the core subject “Labour practices” states: “An organization should pay wages at least adequate for the needs of workers and their families. In doing so, it should take into account the general level of wages in the country, the cost of living, social security benefits and the relative living standards of other social groups.”

When it comes to SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), Subclause 6.3.9.2 of ISO 26000 under the core subject “Human rights” recommends that “an organization may consider, for example, facilitating access to, and where possible providing support and facilities for, education and lifelong learning for community members”.

One of the many recommendations that contribute towards SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) can be found in Subclause 6.7.9.2 of ISO 26000 under the core subject “Consumer issues”: “In educating consumers, an organization, when appropriate, should address environmental protection, efficient use of materials, energy and water; sustainable consumption; and proper disposal of wrapping, waste and products.”

As a final example, Subclause 6.7.3.2 of ISO 26000 under the core subject “Consumer issues” contributes towards SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production): “When communicating with consumers, an organization should provide complete, accurate, and understandable information that can be compared in official or commonly used languages at the point of sale and according to applicable regulations.”
Getting started with ISO 26000

The standard offers guidance (found mainly in Clause 7) on how to integrate social responsibility throughout your organization, but here are a few other tips to get you started.

**Tip 1**

Use the seven main principles to make a quick analysis of your performance in relation to each of the seven core subjects. What is your role in society and what impacts, especially negative impacts, do your activities have? What value do you create for sustainable development?

**Tip 2**

Create a stakeholder map, i.e. a list of expectations from those stakeholders that affect, or are affected by, your organization. What is expected from you through rule of law, international norms of behaviour and your own organization?
Tip 3
Refine your **self-analysis** through **due diligence** or developing **a gap analysis** between your current operations and the detailed guidance found in Clause 6 of the standard. Are there recommendations that you need to act on immediately?

Tip 4
Define your **objectives and targets** after stakeholder input. How will you show continual improvement of your socially responsible behaviour over the long and short term?

Tip 5
**Integrate** social responsibility in all relevant parts of the organization. How, for example, will you reach relevant parts of top management and the board, line managers and procurement functions?
ISO 26000 in action

**SDG 2** – Ending hunger  
**SDG 6** – Ensuring access to water and sanitation for all

Donating food to food banks, improving the distribution of tips, replacing taps and toilets with water-efficient alternatives and introducing power-saving key cards are just some of the initiatives that Domina Coral Bay Hotel, Resort, Spa & Casino, a large holiday resort in Egypt’s popular Sharm el-Sheikh region, undertook as part of implementing ISO 26000. The result? Improved working conditions for employees, a more rational consumption of resources such as water and energy and greater involvement in the community.

“Through implementing ISO 26000, we have learned that a project will not achieve its business goals successfully without embracing the standard’s seven principles and core subjects. Such a tool will guarantee success that is sustainable.”

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## The 7 core subjects and 37 issues of ISO 26000

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Useful links

ISO 26000 may be purchased from ISO’s national member bodies, which are listed at www.iso.org/members.html, and from the ISO Store at www.iso.org.

For more guidance on getting started with ISO 26000, refer to the brochure Discovering ISO 26000 at www.iso.org/publication/PUB100258.html.

For additional information on the United Nations 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, visit sustainabledevelopment.un.org.

Further information can be found at www.iso26000.info.

ISO Website: www.iso.org
ISO Website section on ISO 26000: www.iso.org/iso/home/standards/iso26000
ISOfocus magazine: www.iso.org/isofocus
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Contributors

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About ISO

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 162* national standards bodies. Through its members, it brings together experts to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market-relevant International Standards that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges.

ISO has published more than 22 000* International Standards and related documents covering almost every industry, from technology to food safety, to agriculture and healthcare. For more information, please visit www.iso.org.

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