

## **ISO 26000 and Sustainability: Health and Safety at Work in a Green Agriculture**

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### **Abstract**

**The strong relationship between behaviours and ethics leads to a new model of sustainability and sustainable development, whereby environment and agriculture become fields of more and more interest and activities.**

**ISO 26000 is the new guidance on social responsibility, a voluntary standard elaborated under the scope of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), whereby core subjects such as labour practises, consumer issues, the environment are defined relevant areas as well as the “organisational governance” i.e. “system by which an organization makes and implements decisions in pursuit of its objectives”.**

**Properly the core subject “The environment” includes prevention of pollution, sustainable resource use, climate change mitigation and adaptation and, also, principles of environmental responsibility and environmental risk management. In such a way it is moving from the “green agriculture” approach towards the “agricultural sustainability”, as the maintenance of the quantity, as well as the quality of agricultural produces over very long periods of time *without signs of fatigue*.**

**The safeguard of health and safety at work seem to be the natural link, leading to the role of public policies, educational campaigns and information activities.**

**In Italy recent provisional laws, soft laws and National Plans are properly focused on this, with the final aim of linking health and safety at work to well-being and ethics behaviours.**

**Keywords:** social responsibility, sustainable development, INAIL

### **Introduction**

ISO 26000 is the future international standard for social responsibility, which is being developed to help defining the scope and practises of socially and environmentally responsible management (1).

It would provide guidance on how to integrate social responsibility in the daily practise of all kind of organisations in the private, public and non profit sector, focusing toward sustainability and a sustainable approach as the global challenge of future generations.

At the same time, the European Commission defines Europa 2020 (2), the agenda for “A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; the strategy puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities:

- Smart growth for developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- Sustainable growth for promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.

– Inclusive growth for fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

Allocating the sustainable agricultural growth as a part of environment and environmental governance, the relationship between sustainability and environmental naturally leads to a different global approach, able to ensure a new economical and social growth model.

For this purpose many policies have to be implemented, inspired by European and international references and tailored at a national level to, according to an appropriate stakeholder engagement process.

## **Discussion**

ISO 26000 is the guidance on Social Responsibility, theme and concept strongly debated, especially in the last decade.


The whole document, composed by 84 pages, enriched with two annex and 175 core references, provides guidance to all types of organizations, regardless of their size or location, on:

- concepts, terms and definitions related to social responsibility;
- the background, trends and characteristics of social responsibility;
- principles and practices relating to social responsibility;
- the core subjects and issues of social responsibility;
- integrating, implementing and promoting socially responsible behaviour throughout the organization and, through its policies and practices, within its sphere of influence;
- identifying and engaging with stakeholders; and
- communicating commitments, performance and other information related to social responsibility.

The guidance is intended to assist organizations in contributing to sustainable development and is intended to encourage them to go beyond legal compliance, recognizing that compliance with law is a fundamental duty of any organization and an essential part of their social responsibility. It is intended to promote common understanding in the field of social responsibility and to complement other instruments and initiatives for social responsibility, not to replace them.

The final aim is to assist organizations in addressing their SR and provide a practical guidance related to operationalizing SR, identifying and engaging with stakeholders, and enhancing credibility of reports and claims made about SR;

It is an International standard providing guidance, it is not a management system standard and it is not intended or appropriate for certification purposes or regulatory or contractual use, labelled as reported below.

	<b>NEW WORK ITEM PROPOSAL</b>	
	Date of presentation <b>2004-10-01</b>	Reference number <b>ISO/TMB      N 26000</b>
	Proposer <b>ISO/TMB</b>	
Secretariat <b>ISO/CS</b>		
Proposal (to be completed by the proposer)		
Title of proposal (in the case of an amendment, revision or a new part of an existing document, show the reference number and current title)		

### **Figure 1. Label of ISO guidance**

So, what does social responsibility really mean? The term social responsibility came into widespread use in the early 1970s although various aspects of social responsibility were the subject of action by organizations and governments as far back as the late 19th century, and in some instances even earlier. The view that social responsibility is applicable to all organizations emerged as different types of organizations, not just those in the business world recognized that they too had responsibilities for contributing to sustainable development.

Nowadays an organization's performance in relation to the society in which it operates and to its impact on the environment has become a critical part of measuring its overall performance and its ability to continue operating effectively; moreover the expectations of whole society regarding the performance of organizations continue to grow.

And how does ISO 26000 define social responsibility? It 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 health and the welfare of society;
- takes into account the expectations of stakeholders;
- is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour; and is integrated throughout the organization and practised in its relationships”.

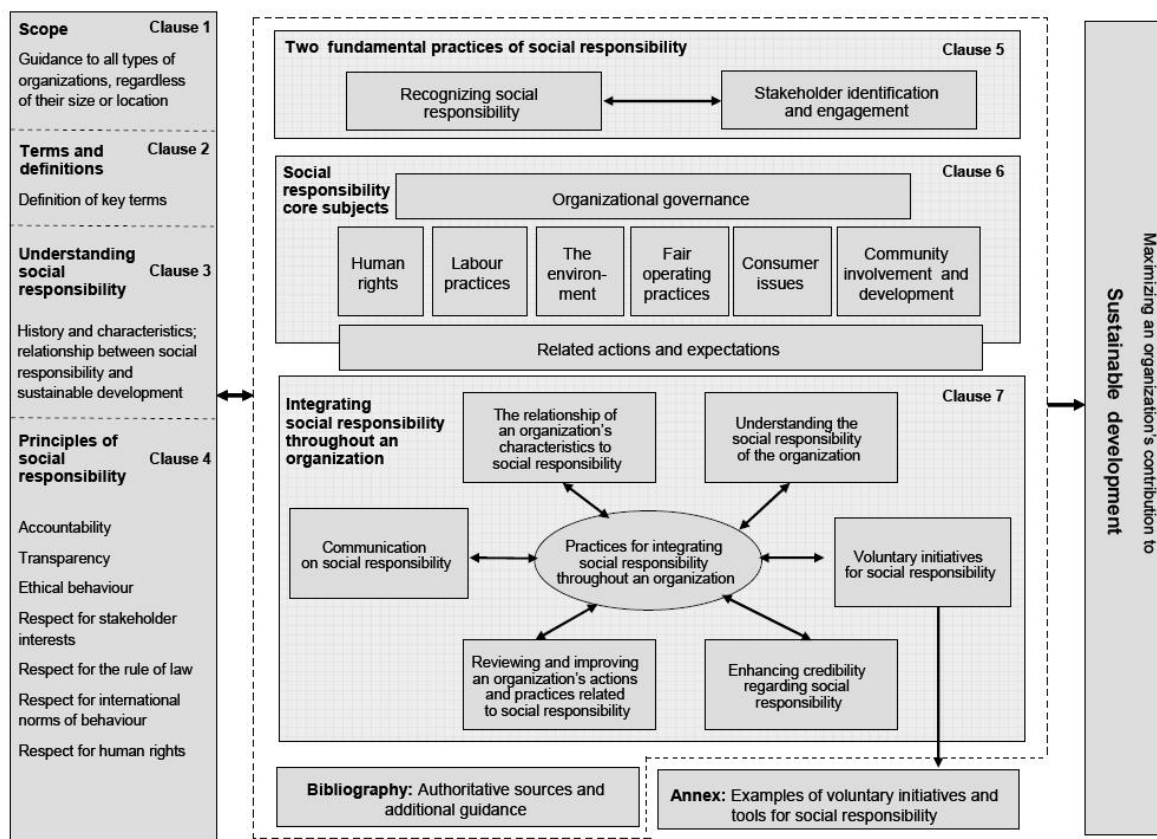
So the starting point is knowing the extension of social responsibility; for that effect the organisation should consider the economical, social and environmental impacts of its direct and indirect activities. It also should address three relationships: between the organisation and society, between the organisation and its stakeholders, between those stakeholders and broader society.

The engagement of the organisation with people, communities and organisations that have identifiable interest in the organisation’s activities is an essential element.

Owing to the difficulty of identifying all SR related topics, the guidance organizes them into seven big core subjects, each one of them including many issues. Some topics, such as health and safety, value chain and economical aspects, don’t have only one core subject but are handled as crosscutting issues.

Inspiring and addressing the seven principles of SR, each organisation, together with its stakeholders, should evaluate and prioritize its actions, seeking to integrate SR throughout its decision and activities. This involves practices such as: making social responsibility integral to its policies, organizational culture, strategies and operations; building internal competency for social responsibility; undertaking internal and external communication on social responsibility; and regularly reviewing these actions and practices related to social responsibility.

A schematic overview of ISO 26000 better explains the whole process.



**Figure 2. Schematic overview of ISO 26000**

The Annex includes a list of broadly recognised voluntary initiatives and tools available to assist the integration into an organisation's activities.

The SR core subject "The environment" includes a relevant overview on Organizations and the environment and reports that "the decisions and activities of organizations invariably have an impact on the environment no matter where the organizations are located. These impacts may be associated with the organization's use of resources, the location of the activities of the organization, the generation of pollution and wastes, and the impacts of the organization's activities on natural habitats. To reduce their environmental impacts, organizations should adopt an integrated approach that takes into consideration the direct and indirect economic, social, health and environmental implications of their decisions and activities".

It is clear that agriculture, properly following a green approach is the best way to fit all these goals; in fact in the long run, all organizations' activities depend on the health of the world's ecosystems.

For this to happen, principles of sustainability must be a core part of agricultural policies, to provide incentives and enabling conditions for sustainable resource use. Such principles should also be reflected in macro policies that can potentially influence different groups of people, the resources they use and their scope for positive adaptation.

A good practise of global approach is the "Rural Development policy" of the European Union, which objectives focus on the enhancement of the social and economic cohesion, on

the improvement of competitiveness in farming and forestry sectors, and on the amelioration of the environment aiming at landscape conservation and sustainable development.

Regarding the programming period 2007-2013, the European Union has adopted a so-called “multi-level” approach, including: Community Strategic Guidelines, National Strategy Plan and Rural Development Programme. The Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) define the community strategic priorities; the National Strategy Plan (NSP) sets the strategic priorities of the Member State and the Rural Development Programme (RDP) is the operational Programme designed to implement NSP and CSG.

In Italy, according to the defined strategy, the Italian Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies (Mipaaf) has developed a National Strategy Plan, that is the outcome of consultations, partnerships and negotiations with the major institutional, economic and social actors. It identifies four strategic priorities in

- 1) improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector;
- 2) improving the environment and the countryside;
- 3) quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy;
- 4) Leader approach.

For these goals a National Rural Network (NRN) (3) has been implemented; properly it is a project that gives Italy the chance to take part into the wider European Network for Rural Development project, thus joining and completing all the activities as to rural area development for the whole period 2007-2013.

The Italian project aims at supporting rural area development policies and even at fostering a greater and more efficient level of interaction and exchange of expertise between the related stakeholders, institutions and those working and living in rural areas.

One of the related key goals is to strengthen the flows of information and communication between the different levels of rural stakeholders. On the one hand, it would increase the value of Italian territory productive potentials and, on the other hand, it identifies critical points, thus improving its governance.

A “National Prevention Plan on Agriculture and Forestry”, as part of the NRN strategies, has been developed, according to the existing "Patto per la tutela della salute e la prevenzione nei luoghi di lavoro" and aiming to drastically reduce occupational accidents and diseases. .

INAIL, Italian Workers’ Compensation Authority, (4) as partner of the plan, strongly supports it and all related prevention activities.

Furthermore, INAIL focuses its own activity towards the agricultural sector with tailored formation and information campaigns; also involving foreign workers, largely involved into this sector and frequently affected by work accidents and occupational diseases.

## **Conclusion**

The concurrent actions towards a sustainable development, moving both from a global approach of social responsibility and ethical behaviours and a tangible need of reducing occupational risk and enhancing prevention planning and well-being, lead to a new culture of health and safety at work, whereby environment and agriculture are to be considered relevant parts of the whole life cycle.

It really goes back to the sustainable development and ISO 26000 concepts, whereby ISO standard is a tools which supports the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, environmental integrity and social equity.

## **References**

- (1) ISO/TMB WG SR N 191 Guidance on social responsibility
- (2) Europa 2020 [http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm)
- (3) Rete Rurale Nazionale <http://www.reterurale.it/>
- (4) INAIL [www.inail.it](http://www.inail.it)