



**Using your
management systems
to contribute to
the UN sustainable
development
goals**





The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a complex call to action for all society. For businesses to effectively maximise their contribution, a structured approach of evaluation, prioritisation, action planning and continual improvement is required. A formal management system provides all these elements, and in this article we explain how your management systems can be used to demystify the SDGs and deliver your sustainability commitments.



The UN SDGs are the culmination of decades of work, from the adoption of Agenda 21 in 1992, which provided a plan for a global partnership for sustainable development, to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs in 2015.

What the 2030 Agenda provides is the blueprint to deliver against the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental, central to which are the 17 goals, which call for specific actions to end poverty and other deprivations, together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth, whilst tackling climate change and preserving our oceans and forests.

This graphic provides the headline for each of the 17 SDGs.





Management systems have been utilised by businesses to manage, plan, evaluate and continually improve their business since the 1970s, with the introduction of the British Standard BS5750 for quality management systems, which later became ISO 9001.

Since that time ISO management system standards have evolved to address an expansive range of subjects across the sustainability agenda, and have been further supported by many guidance documents and verification standards, which outline greater detail for quantification of specific issues. Examples of these standards are detailed here.

ISO 14001

Environmental Management Systems.

ISO 50001

Energy Management Systems.

ISO 46001

Water Efficiency Management Systems.

ISO 45001

Occupational Health & Safety Management Systems.

ISO 22000

Food Safety Management Systems.

ISO 37001

Anti-Bribery Management Systems.

ISO 26000

Guidance on Social Responsibility.

ISO 20400

Guidance on Sustainable Procurement.

ISO 14064 Series

Quantification of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions.

ISO 14046

Water Footprint.



What all of these management system standards have in common is their high-level structure, which is provided by a core document - Annex SL and which ensures that all are: aligned and compatible; their integration is straightforward; and that they are based on the underlying foundations of Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) – an iterative model to achieve continual improvement.

This means that whether your management system was implemented to deliver environmental management or anti-bribery management for example, the fundamental components can be utilised to deliver improvement in any area – including against the SDGs. For example, using your ISO 14001 environmental management system, supported by ISO 26000 guidance on social responsibility and verification of your GHG emissions against ISO 14064:1.

The SDGs are challenging and complex. With 17 goals and 169 underlying targets, businesses need to understand that it is not possible, practical or perhaps even relevant for a business to address them all at once or to the same degree. In order to approach the SDGs in a manner that is achievable and meaningful, businesses first need to understand which goals are relevant for any part of the business and its value chain. It is with these goals that a real and meaningful impact can be made.

Using the management system processes for: understanding the organisation and its context; and determining its risks and opportunities, businesses of any size, sector, or market can understand which SDGs are most material to their business and therefore how their business actions can contribute. The management system functions of action planning can enable delivery of the actions needed, whilst the performance evaluation and improvement elements (monitoring, audit and management review) can ensure performance can be tracked, compared and continually improved. Embedding sustainability throughout the organisation's core business operations, making it part of every role and function, makes it manageable.

Implementing these standards that are also supported by independent certification and verification ensures a company is identifying and taking action on a complete and accurate identification of the risks and opportunities presented, and that their actions are appropriate. It also means that the data which is reported or being used to guide key business decisions is independently scrutinised, confirming that it is materially correct and trustworthy, avoiding the reputational and financial risks of reporting inaccurate data or making investments in the wrong areas.

In light of the present global challenges to health, well-being, the environment and the economy, all businesses need to contribute to achieving the SDGs. The risks and opportunities that sustainability presents are great. Utilising independently certified management systems and verified data enables organisations to be confident that they are taking action on the goals that are material to their business and that can have the greatest contribution to these global goals for an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for all.



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LRQA's technical experts are part of the ISO technical committees that develop standards and can provide first-hand insights into their requirements and the logic behind them. Our assessors are chosen for their sector-specific knowledge and expertise, which means you can be confident that they'll understand the challenges you face and the opportunities open to you to achieve your sustainability commitments, whatever industry you are in.





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