



strategy

ISO ACTION PLAN *for developing countries*

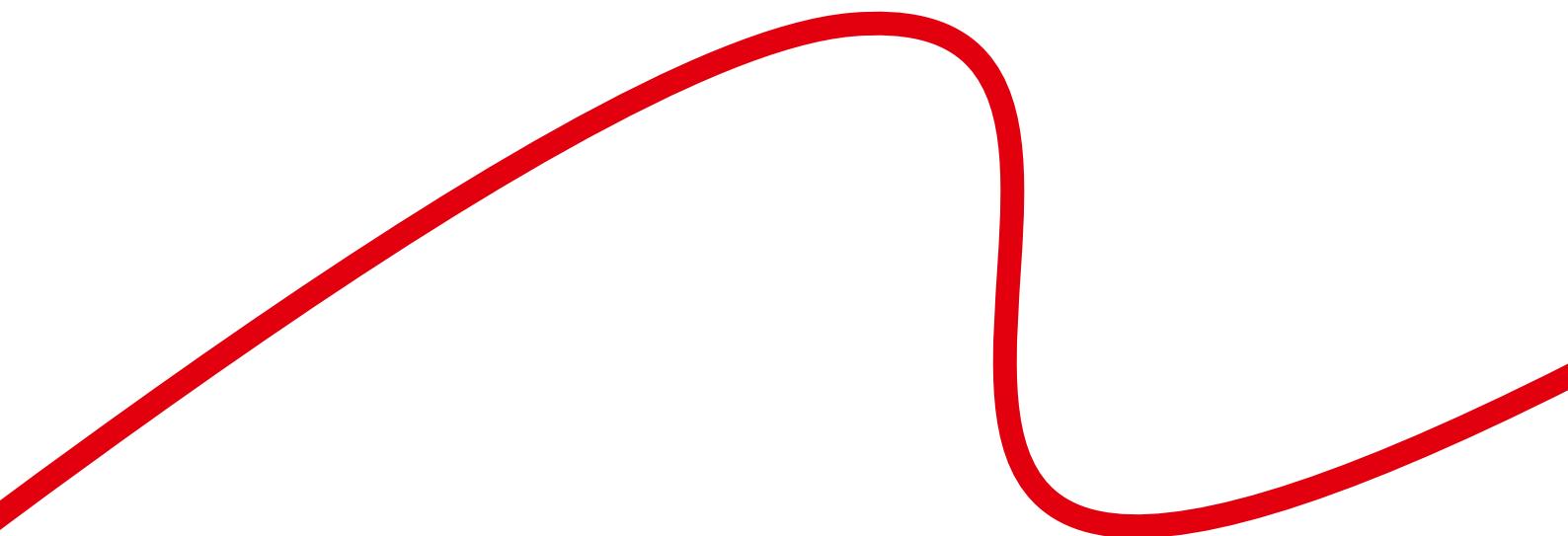
2021-2025

Strategic context

The global community is faced with an increasing set of social, economic and environmental challenges. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an ambitious framework for global collective action to address these challenges and achieve a more sustainable future, by supporting inclusive economic growth, the wellbeing of people and the protection of the planet. They present an opportunity and an aspiration to build greener, more inclusive economies and stronger, more resilient societies.

ISO standards have an essential role to play in making these development goals a reality by enabling free and fair international trade, encouraging innovation and technology development, and fostering trust through the provision of world-class, consensus-based specifications.

Developing countries can benefit significantly from using ISO standards. At a government level, standards can be used to support public policy and good regulatory practice. At a private-sector level, businesses can use standards to ensure that their processes, products and services are fit for purpose, interchangeable and compatible. Consumers benefit greatly from goods and services developed in line with standards because they can be confident that these are of good quality, safe and environmentally sound. To realize these benefits, it is important that developing countries have the skills and resources to propose new work items and participate in all stages of ISO standards development. ISO recognizes that many of its developing country members need capacity building support to benefit fully from the use of ISO standards in contributing to their countries' development objectives and advancing the SDGs.



ISO STANDARDS: Promoting inclusive sustainable development

The implementation of ISO standards goes beyond solving technical problems to delivering positive results in the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development. ISO has **mapped its International Standards** to the 17 SDGs¹⁾, identifying those standards that help organizations make the most significant contribution to each goal. This SDG mapping tool informs ISO's capacity building programme and serves as an important resource for ISO members and their stakeholders.

The importance of delivering on the SDGs has been heightened by the pandemic in 2020, which has significantly set back progress on achieving these goals, while at the same time providing a valuable opportunity to introduce radically new approaches to promote more inclusive and environmentally sustainable development.

¹⁾ iso.org/sdgs



ISO Strategy 2021-2030

Making lives easier, safer and better

ISO's ten-year strategy sets out the organization's **vision, mission, goals** and **priorities** to 2030, a time frame that aligns with the SDGs. The strategy aims to ensure that ISO is well positioned within a rapidly changing global context and that ISO standards fulfil their potential in delivering ISO's vision of "**making lives easier, safer and better**".

To realize this vision, and maximize the impact of standards and standardization, ISO has identified three clear goals: ISO standards used everywhere; meeting global needs; and all voices heard. These goals are underpinned by six strategic priorities and an associated set of performance indicators. Recognizing that ISO is only as strong as its members, and that strong national standards bodies (NSBs) are key to its success, one of these strategic priorities is "to strengthen ISO members through capacity building". The ISO Strategy serves as the basis for the ISO Action Plan for developing countries: the overall framework of technical assistance and training support that ISO delivers to its developing country members.

ISO's strategic goals and priorities



Strengthening ISO members through capacity building

ISO has a long-standing commitment to provide capacity building support to its developing country members, who represent three-quarters of ISO's overall membership, to enable them to benefit fully from standardization. This support is provided under the framework of the ISO Action Plan for developing countries. There have been three such Action Plans since 2005, each of which shares common features in its approach to capacity building, including:

- **A demand-driven, needs-based approach** – Members are surveyed on a regular basis to identify their needs and priorities to ensure that assistance is linked to their specific needs and that the ISO capacity building programme remains relevant, agile and responsive to change.
- **Results-based focus** – ISO uses a “theory of change²⁾” approach to design, implement and manage project activities and monitor results.
- **Delivery through a blend of activities** – Capacity building activities are delivered at the international, regional and national level, and ISO is increasingly combining virtual and in-person activities for maximum impact and to ensure resilience in delivering its capacity building programme.
- **Continual improvement** – Results are monitored, and lessons shared, to provide input for future planning and implementation.

ISO's developing country members play a major role in the design and delivery of the Action Plan. Primarily through the ISO Committee on developing country matters (DEVCO), they inform the development of the Plan and its priority focus areas, provide input on the Plan's implementation through the annual needs assessment process, contribute resources for implementing the Plan; and commit to the Plan's success at national, regional and international level by applying the knowledge and skills they have gained.

ISO's capacity building interventions are aimed at supporting ISO members, although the real beneficiaries are the stakeholders they serve. These include governments and regulatory bodies, the private sector (including a focus on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises as well as women-owned businesses), academic and research institutions and consumer bodies. Recognizing that members have different needs and levels of capacity, ISO focuses in particular on the needs of least-developed countries.

ISO is only as strong as its members. In every aspect of the ISO system, from engaging experts to promoting the benefits of standards, a strong national standards body is key to standardization's success.

2) The results-based “theory of change” approach seeks to achieve a paradigm shift from traditional activity-oriented interventions to a structured project process that is impact-oriented, prompting the levels of behavioural change needed to achieve the long-term goals.

The results framework of the ISO Action Plan for developing countries 2021-2025

ACTIVITIES

The specific tasks administered by ISO/CS to deliver the desired outputs.

OUTPUTS

The initial changes, at the level of ISO's developing country members and their stakeholders, that are needed to achieve the intermediate outcomes. These outputs result from the capacity building activities.

- Digital learning solutions and content (e.g. eLearning, webinars)
- Distance coaching and mentoring
- Publications, guidance documents and training materials
- Seminars, training sessions and workshops (regional and national)
- Sponsorships, including pre-TC training
- In-country advisory services
- Peer learning

- Knowledge and skills to demonstrate the benefits and requirements of specific ISO standards are acquired.
- Outreach and advocacy programmes on the benefits of ISO standards are developed.
- Collaboration with relevant organizations (including academia) is enhanced.

- Knowledge and skills in good standardization practices (GSP) are acquired.
- Areas for improvement of GSP implementation are identified and applied.

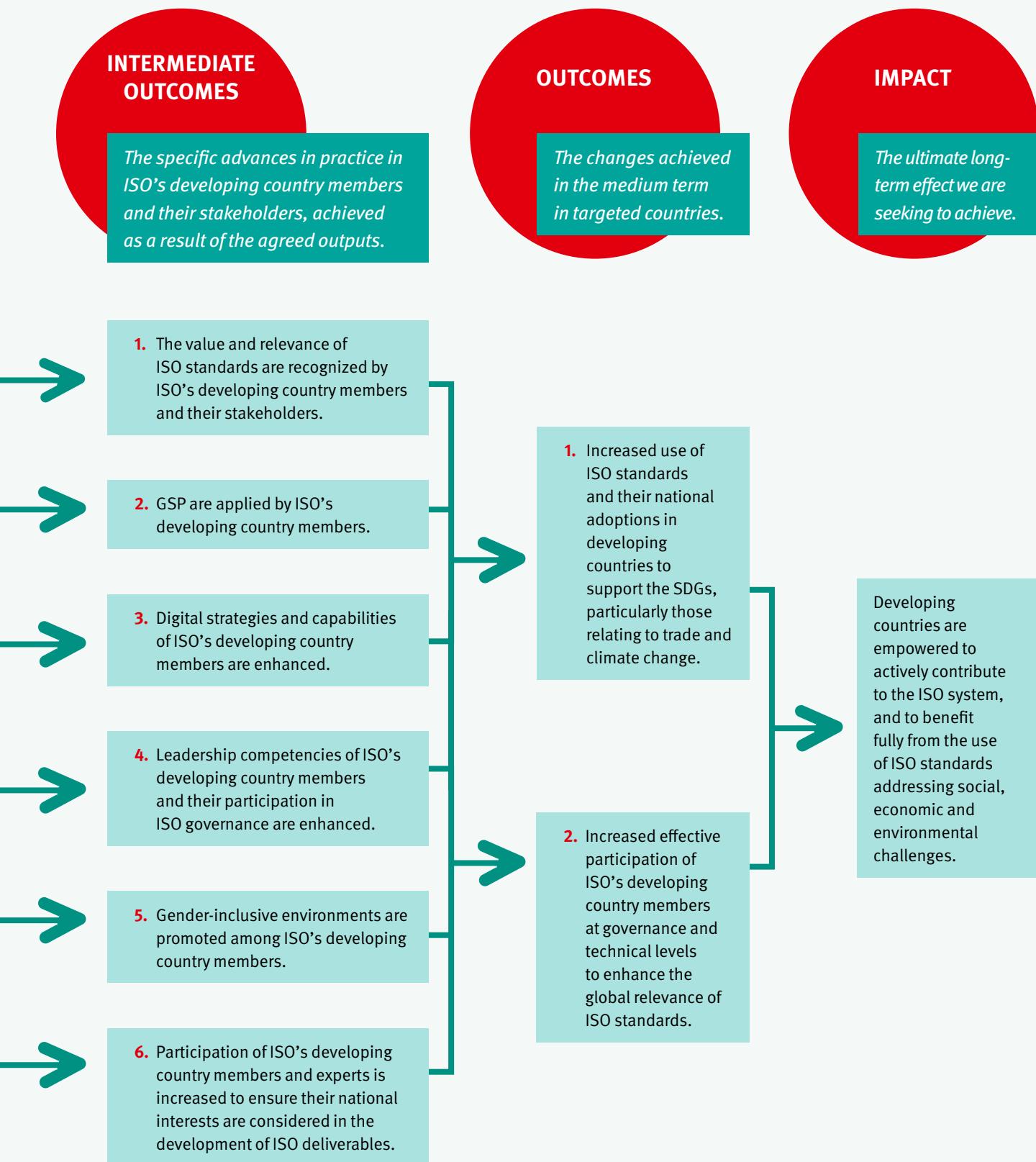
- Knowledge and skills to develop or review digital strategies are acquired.
- Business needs/requirements for enhancing digital capabilities are identified.

- Knowledge and skills of leaders are acquired.
- Needs of developing countries are addressed in ISO governance, including the ISO Policy Development Committees.

- Knowledge and skills to develop policies, procedures and activities to mainstream gender and develop gender-responsive standards are acquired.

- Participation based on national priorities is supported for both ongoing and new ISO technical work.
- Knowledge and skills on the ISO standards development process, including for leadership positions in technical work, are acquired.
- Priorities are defined and international standards work initiated that meets national interests.
- Mechanisms and tools are in place to share expertise and technical resources among ISO members, including between developing country members.

The results framework for the Action Plan (summarized below) presents the results chain and intervention logic linking the capacity building **activities** to the expected **outputs** and **outcomes** that, collectively, have the desired **impact**.



Impact

Developing countries are empowered to actively contribute to the ISO system, and to benefit fully from the use of ISO standards addressing social, economic and environmental challenges.

The ultimate long-term objective of this Action Plan is to empower ISO's developing country members to contribute actively to the ISO system and fully realize the benefits of using ISO standards that address social, economic and environmental challenges. Meaningful participation of developing countries in international standardization is fundamental to ensuring the global relevance of ISO standards and establishing the right conditions for their effective implementation. Achieving this objective will make an important contribution towards the delivery of the SDGs and ISO's vision of "making lives easier, safer and better" by 2030.

Outcomes

*To deliver on the desired long-term **impact**, two main areas of improvement (**outcomes**) have been identified for ISO's developing country members.*

Outcome 1: Increased use of ISO standards and their national adoptions in developing countries to support the UN SDGs, particularly those relating to trade and climate change.

The Action Plan will build in-country awareness and expertise of ISO standards to encourage their use and adoption among all stakeholders and support the achievement of the UN SDGs. While the Action Plan will seek to promote the use and adoption of ISO standards relating to all 17 SDGs (see Box on [page 1](#)), the priority focus is on international trade and climate change.

International trade is a key catalyst for economic development and poverty reduction, and one of the most important drivers of prosperity, particularly in developing countries. The application of ISO standards reduces technical barriers to trade and increases developing countries' trade opportunities. The Plan will enable developing countries to use ISO standards effectively to benefit from trade and contribute to their economic development.

Given the profound threat of climate change, the Plan has also prioritized providing support to developing countries so that they can develop, adopt and apply ISO standards relating to all aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Outcome 2: Increased effective participation of ISO's developing country members at governance and technical levels to enhance the global relevance of ISO standards.

ISO standards will only be globally relevant and effectively adopted and used if they sufficiently represent the views and interests of as many countries as possible. To ensure that developing countries' interests are fairly represented and provided for, the Action Plan will assist developing countries in participating more effectively at both the governance and technical levels within the ISO system.



Intermediate outcomes

To deliver the two **outcomes** and ultimate **impact**, the Action Plan has identified six **intermediate outcomes** as specific advances in practice to be achieved within the targeted countries. Each **intermediate outcome** includes an associated set of **outputs** – the initial changes, at the level of ISO's developing country members and their stakeholders, that are needed to achieve the intermediate outcomes. These **outputs**, in turn, result from the capacity building **activities**.

Intermediate Outcome 1: The value and relevance of ISO standards are recognized by ISO's developing country members and their stakeholders.

Recognizing the role of standards in achieving development objectives and enabling trade is an essential condition for enhancing the uptake and adoption of these standards by national stakeholders. The Action Plan seeks to enhance the capacity of developing country NSBs to effectively promote and demonstrate the value of standards to relevant stakeholder groups and decision makers, leveraging on ISO's experience and ability to disseminate knowledge and raise awareness.

Outputs

- Knowledge and skills to demonstrate the benefits and requirements of specific ISO standards are acquired.
- Outreach and advocacy programmes on the benefits of ISO standards are developed.
- Collaboration with relevant organizations (including academia) is enhanced.

Intermediate Outcome 2: Good standardization practices (GSPs) are applied by ISO's developing country members.

Standardization is one of the main elements of a country's national quality infrastructure (NQI) together with metrology, accreditation, conformity assessment services and market surveillance. However, standardization plays a particularly important role as all the elements of the NQI use standards to perform their operations. By applying good standardization practices, NSBs optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of their national standardization system and thereby strengthen their NQI. This, in turn, enables them to comply with the commitments of the World Trade Organization and enhance their countries' economic competitiveness. In response to the needs expressed by developing country members, ISO has developed comprehensive guidance on GSP, including a diagnostic tool for NSBs to assess their own standardization system. The Action Plan will use this and additional tools to deepen members' understanding and application of GSP.

Outputs

- Knowledge and skills in GSP are acquired.
- Areas for improvement of GSP implementation are identified and applied.





Intermediate Outcome 3: Digital strategies and capabilities of ISO's developing country members are enhanced.

Digital technologies are impacting a wide range of sectors and activities, including standards development. The Action Plan will enhance the digitalization strategies and capabilities of NSBs linked to their standardization activities. This will enable them to leverage the use of digital technologies in their standards development work, as well as to promote and disseminate standards.

Outputs

- Knowledge and skills to develop or review digital strategies are acquired.
- Business needs/requirements for enhancing digital capabilities are identified.



Intermediate Outcome 4: Leadership competencies of ISO's developing country members and their participation in ISO governance are enhanced.

Enhancing developing countries' participation in ISO's governance processes has been on the ISO agenda for many years. However, there remains significant opportunity to further improve the level and effectiveness of developing country representation within ISO governance and advisory groups. Building on experience acquired in previous iterations of the Action Plan, an important objective of this Plan is to enhance the leadership capacity of ISO's developing country members to strengthen their participation in ISO's governance activities, and to ensure that developing country priorities effectively inform the global standardization agenda.

Outputs

- Knowledge and skills of leaders are acquired.
- Needs of developing countries are addressed in ISO governance, including the ISO Policy Development Committees.



Intermediate Outcome 5: Gender-inclusive environments are promoted among ISO's developing country members.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for economic growth, to promote social development and to enhance business performance. The Action Plan includes a strong commitment to enhance gender inclusiveness among ISO's developing country members. Members will be supported to mainstream gender considerations within new and existing standards, ensure balanced participation in standardization processes and develop specific standards in support of this intermediate outcome.

Output

- Knowledge and skills to develop policies, procedures and activities to mainstream gender and develop gender-responsive standards are acquired.

Intermediate Outcome 6: Participation of ISO's developing country members and experts is increased to ensure their national interests are considered in the development of ISO deliverables.

Ensuring the global relevance of ISO standards, and enhancing their implementation, requires that developing countries' interests are properly considered in the development of ISO standards. The Action Plan aims to bring developing country voices to ISO's technical work by strengthening the participation of developing country representatives in international standardization, particularly in areas of national priority.

Outputs

- Participation based on national priorities is supported for both ongoing and new ISO technical work.
- Knowledge and skills on the ISO standards development process, including for leadership positions in technical work, are acquired.
- Priorities are defined and international standards work initiated that meets national interests.
- Mechanisms and tools are in place to share expertise and technical resources among ISO members, including between developing country members.



Activities

The outputs, outcomes and impact identified in this Action Plan will be achieved through the various capacity building activities organized at the global, regional and country level – also in different languages, if need be.

Informed by the results-based management framework presented in this document, activities will always be selected and designed to reach the end goal, using a combination of activities that most effectively meet members' needs. It is envisaged that this Plan will make greater use of digital platforms, adopting a “blended learning approach” that combines virtual and in-person activities for maximum impact. The types of activities that will be administered by ISO/CS as part of the Plan include:

- Digital learning solutions and content, such as eLearning courses, virtual classroom activities, microlearning videos and webinars
- Distance coaching and mentoring
- Publications, guidance documents and training materials
- Seminars, training sessions and workshops (regional and national)
- Sponsorships, including training prior to specific technical committee meetings
- In-country advisory services
- Peer learning

ISO CAPACITY BUILDING UNIT: Working in partnership with others

ISO is deeply committed to supporting its members in developing countries.

A team of professionals within the ISO Central Secretariat, supported by a network of skilled and vetted experts, is responsible for the design, delivery and monitoring of the capacity building programme. ISO collaborates with many international and regional organizations to build synergies and avoid duplication of effort.

ISO's capacity building programme is funded by the organization's core budget and voluntary payments by its members to the ISO Funds-in-Trust.

ISO also relies on financial support granted by various national development agencies and government ministries.

A robust results-based monitoring and evaluation system

Effective monitoring of the Action Plan's implementation and regular evaluation of its results are fundamental to ensuring the success of ISO's ongoing work with developing countries. Each level of the Plan (impact, outcome, intermediate outcomes, outputs and activities) has an associated set of performance indicators. Performance against these indicators will be monitored and measured on a regular basis, informed by quality management principles supporting continual improvement.

An effective monitoring system helps to nurture learning about the programme, to track what does and does not work, and under which conditions. Regularly reviewing and reflecting on the changes delivered by the capacity building programme is also intended to increase the evidence that standardization enables sustainable development and contributes to poverty alleviation. Formal governance oversight for the Action Plan rests with ISO DEVCO and the DEVCO Chair's Advisory Group.

About ISO

The International Organization for Standardization is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership base of more than 160 national standards bodies, coordinated by the ISO Central Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland.

ISO and its members bring together a global network of experts to share knowledge and expertise with a view to developing voluntary, consensus-based, market-relevant International Standards. ISO is built around an ethos of collaboration and believes that international standardization plays a critical role in supporting inclusive sustainable development. ISO has published more than 23 500 International Standards and related documents covering a wide range of areas, from technology to food safety, to agriculture, healthcare and governance.

ISO's internationally recognized conformity assessment standards are used to determine whether products and services meet technical regulations and specifications, thus contributing to global economic competitiveness.

For more information, please visit www.iso.org.

International Organization for Standardization

ISO Central Secretariat
Chemin de Blandonnet 8
Case Postale 401
CH – 1214 Vernier, Geneva
Switzerland

iso.org

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