Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Checklist

This checklist distils key steps in the guidance for setting up and implementing a sustainability benchmarking exercise or programme. It is intended to be used as a quick reference both for those organisations and initiatives that are setting up new programmes and for stakeholders who want to assess the credibility of existing programmes and to hold them to account. The checklist should be used in conjunction with the full guidance.

Develop the framework

1. **Audience:** identify who is the intended audience and what are their needs; speak with potential users to understand more deeply their expectations (8.1)

2. **Purpose:** define the goal or purpose of the benchmarking programme and ensure this is explicit and included in all communication about the benchmarking programme (8.1)

3. **Strategy:** assess whether a benchmarking programme is the most effective strategy to achieve your purpose and whether existing benchmarks already meet all or part of the articulated goal (8.1)

4. **Scope:** make a decision about who or what is being benchmarked, including the sector or commodity, geography, type of entity, and supply chain scope (8.2)

5. **Openness:** decide whether to target specific companies or initiatives with the benchmark and which ones, or to allow any qualifying entity to be evaluated (8.2.3)

6. **Management:** determine who will manage the benchmarking programme (8.3)

7. **Claims:** develop a publicly available claims policy that ensures claims are grounded in, and consistent with the actual results and do not misrepresent the conclusions that can be drawn from the evaluation (8.7)

Determine the benchmark

8. **Process:** set the process for determining the content of the benchmark, ensuring that contextual factors are taken into account where relevant (8.4.1)

9. **Stakeholders:** determine whether and how to engage stakeholders in the content development and, where appropriate, follow good practices in the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code for how to engage stakeholders (8.4.1.1)

10. **Definitions:** include definitions of key terms in the benchmark to support consistent interpretation (8.4.1.5)

11. **Content:** for sustainability standards, include in the benchmark consideration of both performance requirements and operational requirements (8.4.2 and Annex 3)

12. **Commonalties:** identify all the characteristics that entities to be benchmarked have in common, as a starting point for determining what is relevant to include in the benchmark (8.4.4)

13. **Relevant criteria:** Ensure that benchmark criteria are clear and incisive, supporting a consistent evaluation (8.4.1.2)

14. **Technical experts:** define the role for technical experts in content development, including their role in deciding on the content of the benchmark (8.4.1.3)

15. **References:** use international reference documents to inform content and encourage consistency (8.4.3)

16. **Alternative models:** for sustainability standards and related tools, consider how to accommodate different standards models, including those with different scoring models, different assurance models, and different strategies for incentivising uptake of more sustainable practices (8.4.4)

17. **Evaluation:** determine the evaluation structure of the benchmark (8.5)

Develop the benchmarking process

18. **Effectiveness:** find a balance in the benchmarking process that achieves credible results in an accessible and cost-effective way (8.8.2)

19. **Application:** determine the application process, where benchmarking programmes are open to qualifying entities (8.6.1)

20. **Desk review:** carry out a review of detailed documentation about the entity's procedures and practices, engaging the entity to ensure accuracy of interpretation (8.6.1)

21. **Performance data collection:** consider whether and how to gather additional information, such as an office visit or witness audit, to get a better picture of performance (8.6.1)

22. **Competence:** ensure that evaluators, decision-makers and others involved in the benchmarking process are competent for their work (8.8.1)

23. **Consistency check:** determine whether to put in place a benchmarking committee or some other mechanism (e.g. evaluator peer review) to support consistency of interpretation (8.6.1)

24. **Public consultation:** consider a public consultation on draft evaluations and put in place the steps to do so where relevant (8.6.1)

25. **Decision-making:** determine how decisions on alignment of benchmarked entities will be made (8.6.1)

26. **Dispute resolution:** put in place a dispute resolution mechanism (8.6.1)

27. **Alignment:** establish a process for monitoring continued alignment between the benchmark and the benchmarked entity over time (8.6.1)

Additional considerations

28. **Transparency:** make information about the benchmarking programme, including how it works, its governance, policies, decision-making and results publicly available and accessible (various clauses)

29. **Impartiality:** manage for potential conflicts of interest in setting of the benchmark and implementation of the benchmarking programme (8.3, 8.4.1.4, 8.6.1, 8.8.4)

30. **Improvement:** capture insights and learning from implementation of the benchmarking programme to inform its regular revision and improvement (8.8.3)