Achieving the Global 2030 Agenda: What Role for Voluntary Sustainability Standards?

Axel Marx and Charline Depoorter

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a plan of action for "people, planet and prosperity". The 17 goals cover all crucial policy areas to secure a sustainable future, including education, health, economic development, social protection, environmental protection, and natural resources governance. The 17 goals are operationalised in 169 targets which need to be reached by 2030 or earlier. The SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals. A crucial difference between the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals is that the former were mainly targeted to governments, while the latter target many different stakeholders, including the private sector and voluntary sustainability standards. Indeed, a shift in approach between the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals is the recognition that policy objectives are best achieved by involving and integrating different stakeholders in the policy process. This is explicitly recognised in SDG 17, which aims to foster partnerships for these goals (see Georg von Schnurbein's introduction to this volume). As a result, the 2030 Agenda carves out an important role for private actors in governing for sustainable development.

Among private (understood as "non-state") actors, Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) can play an especially important role for the SDGs and for SDG 17 in particular, as they can both serve as implementation means and help revitalise the partnerships for these goals. First, VSS can act as enforcement mechanisms for these goals, since they share similar objectives with the SDGs (WWF 2017). Although the language of the SDGs distinguishes between "goals", "targets", and "indicators", the generic term "objectives" is used in this chapter to refer to the fact that complying with specific standards of a VSS can contribute to achieving specific targets of an SDG. Second, VSS contribute to foster partnerships, since they operate globally and connect the Global South to the Global North through values chains (Ponte 2019). In a world characterised by an exponential growth in international trade and, more importantly, a change in the nature of trade, VSS can potentially play a crucial role to contribute

to sustainable development. Products we buy and consume on a daily basis rely on the functioning of global value chains, meaning that the production process of most goods takes place in more than one country. Changes in information technology "have permitted firms to geographically splinter their 'production lines', designing international supply chains that allocate different parts of the production process to firms in different countries" (Hoekman 2014; see also Hamilton et al. 2012; Cattaneo et al. 2010). The importance of trade is also recognised under SDG 17 and is singled out as an important implementation mechanism to achieve sustainable development.

The objective of this chapter is to present how VSS can potentially make a contribution to achieving the SDGs if they overcome some main challenges. We first introduce VSS, briefly describe how they operate, and provide leading examples of VSS. Next, we discuss how they are linked to the SDGs. In a third section, some of the main developments in the landscape of VSS are identified. The fourth part discusses the challenges which VSS are confronted with. We end with a short conclusion.

2. What Are VSS and How Do They Operate?

The United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) defines VSS as "standards specifying requirements that producers, traders, manufacturers, retailers or service providers may be asked to meet, relating to a wide range of sustainability metrics, including respect for basic human rights, worker health and safety, the environmental impacts of production, community relations, land use planning and others" (UNFSS 2013, p. 3). In this chapter, the term "VSS" refers to the organisations that set, enforce, and monitor such standards. While they often emanate from a joint initiative between the private sector and civil society organisations, VSS are considered as private (i.e., non-state) governance actors.

All VSS initiatives differ in how they set and enforce rules, although there are some commonalities. In a stylised way, one could say that they aim to achieve sustainable development in three distinct steps. First, they develop standards, often embedding them in existing national and international laws by, for example, including international legal commitments in their foundational principles. In this way, they integrate public rules and standards in a private set of procedures. These standards try to cover all dimensions of sustainability. Second, they translate these principles and standards into measurable indicators and actions. VSS operationalise international norms and principles in specific standards and benchmarks, which makes compliance assessment possible. Often, VSS initiatives start with defining general principles as noted earlier, and delegate the formulation of specific standards to working groups or committees which can take local

conditions into account. These general principles are, hence, translated into specific "compliance benchmarks". These benchmarks contain more specific criteria which are related to each of the broad principles. Each of these benchmarks is, in turn, further defined and operationalised into measurable indicators. Third, they develop a comprehensive institutional framework to monitor compliance with these standards. After operationalising international norms into specific standards, VSS put systems in place to monitor compliance with standards by VSS adopters. Monitoring allows for the assessment of compliance with specific standards. Monitoring in VSS is a function of two interrelated components, namely audit-based systems and complaint systems (Marx and Wouters 2015). The former refer to the assessment of conformity, with standards and rules by independent third parties through a set of standardised procedures, primarily based on audit procedures. The latter, complaint systems, allow different stakeholders to constantly monitor compliance with commitments and, in cases of non-compliance, file a complaint. These systems empower external stakeholders by allowing them to raise issues relevant for the functioning of VSS.

Although the idea of voluntary standards is quite old (Marx and Wouters 2015), their proliferation is of a more recent nature. Two databases map out all existing VSS: the International Trade Centre (ITC) Standards Map currently counts over 260 VSS (ITC 2020) and the Ecolabel Index more than 460 (Ecolabel Index 2020). To recognise them better, we give several leading examples of VSS so as to cover different commodities and economic sectors.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is a global, not-for-profit organisation that sets standards to make forest management environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, and economically viable in the long term. It was founded in 1993 by several environmental NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the National Wildlife Federation and Friends of the Earth, along with profit-making firms such as Home Depot, B&Q, and IKEA. The emergence of the FSC is a result of strong public demands for forestry industry regulation in the 1980s, and of a perceived governance gap in the matter (Klooster 2010; Cashore et al. 2007; Bloomfield 2012). The FSC, as a third-party certification scheme, is considered by several scholars as the most advanced example of VSS due to its scope and structure (Gulbrandsen 2004; Bell and Hindmoor 2012; Schepers 2010). Indeed, about 200 million hectares of forests are FSC-certified in a total of 90 countries, mostly in Europe and North America (Forest Stewardship Council 2019a). Besides, the FSC is a truly multi-stakeholder VSS, not only as it was created by environmental NGOs and profit-making firms together, but also since its membership includes individuals such as academics, students, and activists, as well as organisations such as NGOs and profit-making

firms. Its General Assembly is composed of independent members and delegates of member organisations that represent environmental, social, and economic interests. Decision-making power between these interests, as well as between Northern and Southern countries' interests, is equally distributed (Forest Stewardship Council 2019b; Pattberg 2005; Marx and Cuypers 2010; Marx et al. 2012; Moog et al. 2015).

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) was created in 1997 by the WWF and Unilever, a profit-making firm and the largest seafood buyer in the mid-1990s. It emerged as a response to the collapse of Grand Banks cod fishery off Newfoundland in the early 1990s and to the inability of governments to efficiently tackle overfishing practices and protect working conditions in the fishery industry (Marine Stewardship Counci 2019a; Gulbrandsen 2009). The MSC, therefore, sets standards on fishery practices in order to protect oceans and safeguard seafood supplies. It has certified 15 percent of global marine catch and aims to reach 30 percent by 2030. Altogether, 361 fisheries are MSC-certified in a total of 41 countries, mostly in North American and European waters, which makes the MSC the largest VSS in the fishery industry (Marine Stewardship Council 2019b). The MSC is a multi-stakeholder organisation, as its council includes representatives from the seafood industry, the environmental NGO community, the market sector, and scientists and academia. These members are divided into two categories, representing public interests on the one hand and commercial and socioeconomic interests on the other hand (Foley 2013; Ponte 2012; Gulbrandsen 2009).

The Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) is an independent organisation that works with garment brands, workers, and industry influencers in order to improve labour conditions in the garment industry. It was established in 1999 when a Dutch trade union, the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV), and the Clean Clothes Campaign, an advocacy group for garment workers, joined together to improve labour conditions in the garment industry. The FWF developed a Code of Labour Practices made up of eight labour standards derived from International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and the UN Declaration on Human Rights. Member organisations commit to this code's principles and are required to take action to fully implement them and to monitor their progress (Marx and Wouters 2016, 2017). The FWF currently counts 187 member brands across 11 countries, mostly in Asia (Fair Wear Foundation 2019). Besides, the organisation is governed by a bipartite board composed of business associations and trade unions and NGOs, which share equal power. The FWF also encourages consultation of and collaboration between brands, trade unions, NGOs, governments, and international organisations.

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) was founded in 2009 following a WWF-led round table initiative, and was supported by major organisations such as Adidas, Gap Inc., H&M, ICCO, IFAP, IFC, IKEA, Organic Exchange, Oxfam, and PAN UK. The BCI aims to make cotton a sustainable mainstream commodity by reducing the environmental impacts of cotton production and by improving the livelihoods and economic development of cotton producing areas (Zulfiqar and Thapa 2018). The BCI is the largest cotton sustainability programme in the world, with more than two million licensed BCI farmers in 21 countries, mostly in Asia, Brazil, and Africa. This makes up 19 percent of the global cotton production (Better Cotton Initiative 2019a). In order to be licensed, farmers need to comply with defined minimum standards on pesticide use, water management, decent work, record keeping, training, and other factors, but they are nonetheless encouraged to further improve their practices. To attain its missions, the BCI works with a wide range of stakeholders across the cotton supply chain. Besides, its council includes member organisations ranging from civil society organisations, producers, and retailers, to brands, suppliers and manufacturers as well as independent members (Better Cotton Initiative 2019b).

The Rainforest Alliance was founded in 1987 as a non-governmental organisation that promotes responsible business. It provides certifications for sustainable forestry and agriculture, more particularly in the coffee, cocoa, tea, hazelnut, and banana sectors, but also for sustainable tourism. In 1989, the Rainforest Alliance became the first certification scheme to target forestry practices. It merged with UTZ in 2018 as both VSS were carrying similar work to address deforestation, climate change, systemic poverty, and social inequality. The organisation is active in more than 60 countries and counts over 2 million certified farmers, particularly in South America, Africa, Asia, and the US (Rainforest Alliance 2019). The Rainforest Alliance operates against standards that have been developed by the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN), which revolve around ten principles: social and environmental management system; ecosystem conservation; wildlife protection; water conservation; fair treatment and good working conditions for workers; occupational health and safety; community relations; integrated crop management; soil management and conservation; integrated waste management (Ochieng et al. 2013). The Rainforest Alliance General Assembly has a tripartite structure balancing economic, social, and environmental interests in dedicated chambers with equal voting power (Rainforest Alliance 2017). It also promotes collaboration with producers, workers organisations, traders, retailers, governments, NGOs, civil society organisations, academia, and research institutions.

3. To Which SDGs Do VSS Contribute?

VSS can serve as implementation means for these goals, since they share similar objectives. This makes VSS relevant not only to SDG 17, but to the other SDGs as well. This section describes the contribution that VSS make to the SDGs, which is summarized in Figure 1.

Intuitively, one understands that VSS can directly contribute to the achievement of SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production. VSS, by essence, aim to entrench more sustainable and transparent practices among actors at all levels of global value chains, which contributes to making global production more sustainable (WWF 2017; DIE 2015). In addition, VSS contribute to achieving sustainable consumption, as they provide end-consumers with information on the sustainability of production processes and value chains through labels, which can raise awareness and shift consumption towards sustainable products. Yet, VSS can contribute to other SDGs as well.

A broad study conducted by the UNFSS compares the requirements of 122 VSS with 10 preselected SDGs, their targets, and their indicators. Results show that there are strong complementarities between VSS requirements and SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, in particular, with 102 VSS requirements being relevant to SDG 8. Among these 102 relevant requirements, the ones with the highest coverage among the 122 VSS under study all relate to decent work (UNFSS 2018). Half of those are directly linked to ILO standards, confirming that VSS have complementarities not only with SDG 8, and more particularly, with target 8 on labour rights and safe working conditions, but also with the international labour rights regime more broadly (Marx et al. 2017). Second, the study finds that 78 VSS requirements match with SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production, and more particularly, with targets 4, 5, and 6 on issues of waste management, use of chemicals, training of staff on sustainability issues, and development of environmental and social management systems. Third, 60 VSS requirements are found relevant to SDG 15 on life on land, mostly in relation to targets 2, 3, 5, and 7 on biodiversity, on quality, contamination and erosion of soils, on sustainable use and management of forests and nature resources or ecosystems, and on protection of wildlife (UNFSS 2018).

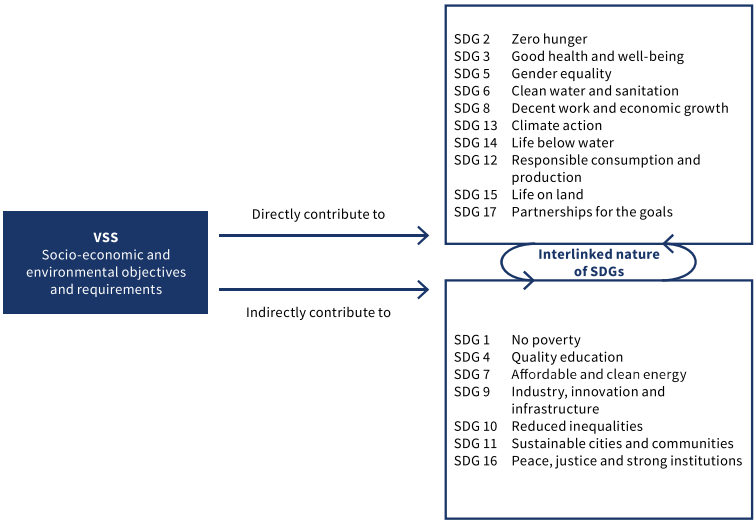

Figure 1. Contribution of Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) to the Sustainable Development Goals. Source: Own illustration.

Although the UNFSS study shows that VSS have the most complementarities with SDGs 8, 12, and 15, they also share similar requirements with other SDGs. For example, VSS can contribute to SDG 2 on zero hunger, food security, and sustainable agriculture as they aim to improve agricultural productivity, increase farmers' incomes, and ensure access to natural resources. VSS also participate in achieving SDG 3 on good health and wellbeing, as some VSS requirements are targeted at improving health and safety at work, as well as ensuring water and air quality. SDG 5 on gender equality is also tackled in many VSS schemes, as they promote equal income and opportunities and seek to prevent violence and harassment. Moreover, VSS can contribute to SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, as they aim to improve water use in production, prevent water pollution, and protect freshwater ecosystems. VSS schemes also include requirements linked to SDG 13 on climate action, more particularly, on measuring and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, on increasing carbon sequestration, and on improving energy efficiency and promoting renewable energy use. Besides, VSS contribute to the achievement of SDG 14 on life below water, as some include requirements on maintaining and rebuilding fish stocks and on protecting marine and coastal ecosystems. Lastly, VSS can also help achieve SDG 17 on partnerships for these goals, since they promote multi-stakeholder participation, transparency, knowledge exchange, public–private partnerships, and sustainable investments (WWF 2017). VSS taken as a whole,

therefore, directly contribute to many SDGs. Yet, if taken individually, some VSS can contribute more to the achievement of some SDGs than others. For example, the MSC will evidently contribute more to SDG 14 on life below water than to SDG 15 on life on land, which the FSC addresses better.

Moreover, VSS can be, in some cases, indicators of progress in some SDGs. This is the case for SDG 15 on life on land, target 2 on sustainable management of forests. This target is monitored by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which uses, among other indicators, the amount of certified forests to measure progress in SDG 15.2 (FAO 2019). This synergy involves that increased uptake of and compliance with VSS goes hand in hand with progress in some SDG indicators.

Lastly, VSS can less directly but still positively participate in the achievement of other SDGs such as SDG 1 on no poverty, SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions. This is mainly due to the interlinked nature of the SDGs, meaning that progress in one SDG can impact the achievement of other SDGs. For example, the FWF aims at improving working conditions in garment factories. Upon completion of its missions, workers would be better paid and treated. This, in turn, could improve their financial ability to send their children to school, for example, thus contributing to the achievement of SDG 4 on quality education. Therefore, VSS can both directly and indirectly contribute to achieving the SDGs.

4. Developments

A first major development in VSS is their proliferation. The ITC Standards Map and the Ecolabel Index are two datasets which allow researchers to track the evolution of VSS over time. As aforementioned, the ITC Standards Map counts approximately 260 VSS, and the Ecolabel Index, which is more comprehensive in scope, currently counts 463 VSS. Figure 2 shows the evolution of the number of VSS from 1940 to 2019 based on the Ecolabel Index Database. The figure shows a strong increase in the number of initiatives between 2000 and 2010, then, a slowdown in growth, and finally, stagnation in the last 3–4 years.

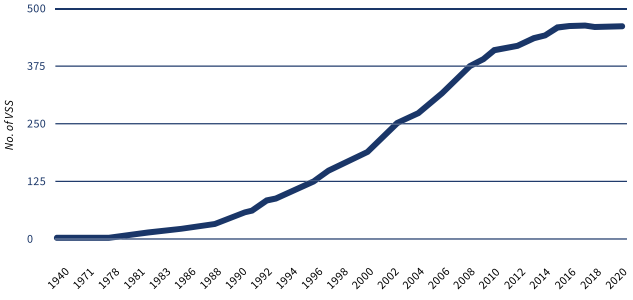

Figure 2. Evolution in the number of existing VSS (1940-2020). Source: Ecolabel Index Database—own calculation.

A second major development is that many of these VSS are integrated in more traditional public policies, such as public procurement or trade policies. This complementarity between public and private governance instruments is being increasingly recognised in the academic literature. In a recent paper, Lambin and Thorlakson (2018) show how new partnerships between governments, private companies, and VSS are reshaping global environmental governance. They focus specifically on the role of VSS in these new public–private partnerships. They argue that contrary to widely held views, interactions between governments, NGOs, and private companies surrounding the adoption of sustainable practices are not generally antagonistic, and public and private environmental governance regimes rarely operate independently, but rather reinforce each other (see also Lambin et al. 2014). Eberlein et al. (2014) also demonstrate the importance of interactions in transnational business governance. As they show, the number of schemes applying private authority to govern business conduct across borders has vastly expanded in numerous issue areas. Eberlein et al. (2014) argue that as these initiatives proliferate, they increasingly interact with one another and with state-based regimes.

This interaction can happen in at least three ways. First, an increasing number of bilateral trade agreements refer to the relevance of private initiatives. This is an approach taken by the European Union in its trade policy. All recent bilateral trade agreements signed by the European Union contain a commitment between the parties to work together in the area of voluntary standards and eco-labels. For example, the first of the "new generation" of trade agreements—that of the European Union with South Korea applied since 2011—mentioned that parties will cooperate in the area of fair and ethical trade, private and public certification, and labelling schemes, including eco-labelling. All subsequent FTAs of the EU contain similar language. Second, VSS and other private initiatives are increasingly integrated in

public policy. For example, the European Union's Directive on Renewable Energy requires biofuels to be certified by a recognised certification scheme in order to be considered a sustainable biofuel and count for the targets on renewable energy (Schleifer 2013). The recent revision of the Act on the Sustainable Use of Timber in South Korea explicitly recognises some VSS as proof of verification that timber and timber products are legal. The revision of this Act, which has been implemented since 1 October 2018, made South Korea one of the first East Asian countries to issue mandatory legislation that regulates the legality of imported and domestically produced timber and timber products. According to the revised Act, unverified timber cannot be sold in South Korea and has to be returned to the country of origin or destroyed. Third, governments worldwide are using their purchasing power to pursue sustainable development through sustainable public procurement. In sustainable public procurement, VSS are increasingly used as a shortcut to facilitate sustainable buying (Marx 2019; D'Hollander and Marx 2014).

5. Challenges

VSS are also confronted with significant challenges, which will determine the degree to which they can contribute to achieving the SDGs.

A first challenge has to do with credibility. VSS have been confronted with claims that they are not credible. Marx (2013) shows, on the basis of an analysis of 426 VSS, that many VSS differ in how they are designed and that quite a number of them lack any credible enforcement architecture. This is confirmed by an analysis on a smaller sample by Fiorini et al. (2016). Both studies suggest that several VSS are pure "greenwashing" instruments rather than mechanisms to achieve sustainability. However, many VSS also include stringent standards and elaborated enforcement procedures, which are detailed by many case studies on VSS. Even for these credible VSS, concerns have been raised on how legitimate they are and which interests they do represent. Although there is evidence that some VSS are more dominated by industry, several of these claims also have been countered in the literature, with some authors arguing that the way VSS operate is sometimes remarkably democratic and representative (Dingwerth 2007).

A second challenge has to do with increasing the effectiveness of these initiatives. This has two dimensions. First, VSS need to create sufficient impact on the ground to be a genuine governance tool. There are quite a few studies analysing the impact of VSS and the degree to which they contribute to sustainable development along

different socioeconomic and environmental metrics[1]. Yet, these studies show mixed results. Some show positive impact, whereas others show little or sometimes even negative impact (Oya et al. 2018; Mitiku et al. 2017; Loconto and Dankers 2014). Results are often very context specific. However, one result, which is quite consistent, is that it is difficult for VSS to perform equally well on all dimensions of sustainability, probably because it is also too much to expect standards to deliver on all dimensions of sustainability, even if that is the stated goal. Standards typically have a strong impact on some sustainable development indicators but less on others (Brandi 2017). For example, in relation to labour rights protection, VSS can have a positive impact on some labour rights, such as working hours, wage, and safety requirements, but less on others, such as freedom of association. A second dimension related to effectiveness focuses on the degree to which standards are adopted. Some scholars focus on adoption by companies and other organisations, while other scholars look at adoption at the country level. Concerning the latter, one can observe that in some countries, only a few VSS or public–private initiatives are active, while in others, many more are active. Westerwinter (2020) finds this for Transnational Governance Initiatives (TGIs), and the UNFSS (2020) find this for VSS. In relation to specific VSS, Marx and Cuypers (2010) and Marx and Wouters (2016) find a "stuck to the bottom" problem for some least developed countries which are not involved in any way in VSS dynamics. This creates a challenge of exclusion and limited adoption of these transnational governance initiatives. In order to have a significant impact, the use of many of these governance systems should be scaled up.

A third main challenge which emerges has to do with coordination and cooperation between the many existing initiatives. Due to the proliferation of initiatives, the policy or governance space is currently very crowded and there is only a limited degree of cooperation between different initiatives. In relation to private and public private initiatives, the lack of cooperation is very outspoken and creates different types of problems. Marx and Wouters (2015) aimed to capture the degree of cooperation between VSS by looking at the use of mutual recognition as a mechanism to coordinate between different initiatives. They found that mutual recognition between VSS is very low. This creates two types of problems. For consumers wanting to use these VSS as a means to buy sustainably, it creates confusion. For producers who need to comply with VSS requirements, it creates additional costs,

[1] Many of the leading impact studies are brought together on Evidensia, an online library aiming to provide credible research on the sustainability impacts and effectiveness of supply chain initiatives such as VSS. See https://www.evidensia.eco/ (accessed on 29 July 2020).

since they sometimes need to comply with multiple VSS. The lack of cooperation between systems is due to several factors such as different strategies and objectives, different procedures to assess conformity with VSS, or plain competition.

6. Conclusions

This chapter presented how VSS can contribute to achieving the SDGs. VSS have emerged and developed into a significant governance instrument which operates globally. They feed into SDG 17 by acting as implementation means for the 2030 Agenda, as compliance with their sustainability standards can contribute to achieving many SDGs' targets. Besides, VSS exemplify the multi-stakeholder approach and partnerships that SDG 17 aims to foster, as they link the Global South and the Global North through global value chains. VSS are, therefore, natural allies to pursue the SDGs.

However, VSS face significant challenges in terms of credibility, effectiveness, and cooperation. In particular, the potential for VSS to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs depends on their level of adoption, as well as on their sustainability impact on the ground (WWF 2017). Indeed, the more actors adopt VSS, the more the practices of these actors will shift to more sustainable ones and the more progress will be made towards the achievement of the SDGs. In addition, some VSS have more stringent requirements than others, and even within a single VSS scheme, some requirements might be more rigorous than others. More stringent VSS might create bigger impacts on the ground, and hence, contribute more significantly towards sustainability, but their stringency might also drive their adoption levels down. As a consequence, the level of adoption and the level of rigour of VSS requirements determine the scale of the impact of VSS on the achievement of the SDGs.

Author Contributions: Introduction, A.M.; Section describing VSS, A.M. and C.D.; Section link VSS—SDGs, C.D.; Sections Development and Challenges, A.M.; Conclusion, A.M. and C.D.

Funding: This research was funded by Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (FWO) International Coordination Action and European Commission H2020 project GLOBE, grant number 822654.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). 2019a. 2018 Annual Report. Available online: http://stories.bettercotton.com/2018-AnnualReport/index.html (accessed on 23 October 2019).

Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). 2019b. Who We Are. Available online: https://bettercotton.org/about-bci/who-we-are/ (accessed on 23 October 2019).

Bell, Stephen, and Andrew Hindmoor. 2012. Governance without government? The case of the Forest Stewardship Council. *Public Administration* 90: 144–59. [CrossRef]

Bloomfield, Michael J. 2012. Is Forest Certification a Hegemonic Force? The FSC and its Challengers. *Journal of Environment & Development* 21: 391–413.

Brandi, Clara. 2017. Sustainability standards and sustainable development—Synergies and trade-offs of transnational governance. *Sustainable Development* 25: 25–34. [CrossRef]

Cashore, Benjamin, Graeme Auld, Steven Bernstein, and Constance Mcdermott. 2007. Can Non-state Governance 'Ratchet up' Global Environmental Standards? Lessons from the Forest Sector. *Review of European Community & International Environmental Law* 16: 158–72.

Cattaneo, Olivier, Gary Gereffi, and Cornelia Staritz. 2010. *Global Value Chains in a Postcrisis World: A Development Perspective*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

D'Hollander, David, and Axel Marx. 2014. Strengthening Private Certification Systems through Public Regulation: The Case of Sustainable Public Procurement. *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal* 5: 2–22. [CrossRef]

DIE. 2015. Sustainability Standards, SDGs and the WTO. Available online: https://www.die-gdi.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/veranstaltungen/2016/20151220_Sustainability_Standards_MGG_One_Pager.pdf (accessed on 25 October 2019).

Dingwerth, Klaus. 2007. *The New Transnationalism: Transnational Governance and Democratic Legitimacy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Eberlein, Burkard, Kenneth Abbott, Julia Black, Errol Meidinger, and Stepan Wood. 2014. Transnational Business Governance Interactions: conceptualization and framework for analysis. *Regulation and Governance* 8: 1–21. [CrossRef]

Ecolabel Index. 2020. Ecolabel Index. Available online: http://www.ecolabelindex.com/ecolabels/ (accessed on 11 April 2020).

Fair Wear Foundation. 2019. Our Partners. Available online: https://fairwear.org/about-us/our-partners (accessed on 23 October 2019).

FAO. 2019. SDG Indicator 15.2.1—Progress towards Sustainable Forest Management. Available online: http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/indicators/1521/en/ (accessed on 22 October 2019).

Fiorini, Matteo, Olga Solleder, Bernard Hoekman, Regina Taimasova, Marion Jansen, Joseph Wozniak, and Philip Schleifer. 2016. *Exploring Voluntary Sustainability Standards Using ITC Standards Map: On the Accessibility of Voluntary Sustainability Standards for Suppliers*. ITC-Working Paper 04-2016. Geneva: ITC.

Foley, Paul. 2013. National Government Responses to Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Fisheries Certification: Insights from Atlantic Canada. *New Political Economy* 18: 284–307. [CrossRef]

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). 2019a. Facts and Figures. Available online: https://fsc.org/en/page/facts-figures (accessed on 21 October 2019).

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). 2019b. Strategic Plan and Governance Structure. Available online: https://fsc.org/en/page/governance-strategy (accessed on 21 October 2019).

Gulbrandsen, Lars H. 2004. Overlapping Public and Private Governance: Can Forest Certification Fill the Gaps in the Global Forest Regime? *Global Environmental Politics* 4: 75–99. [CrossRef]

Gulbrandsen, Lars H. 2009. The emergence and effectiveness of the Marine Stewardship Council. *Marine Policy* 33: 654–60. [CrossRef]

Hamilton, Gary G., Misha Petrovic, and Benjamin Senauer. 2012. *The Market Makers. How Retailers are Reshaping the Global Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hoekman, Bernard. 2014. *Supply Chains, Mega-Regionals and Multilateralism. A Road Map for the WTO*. London: CEPR Press.

ITC. 2020. Standards Map. Available online: https://sustainabilitymap.org/standards?q=eyJzZWxlY3RlZENsaWVudCI6Ik5PIEFGRklMSUFUSU9OIn0%3D (accessed on 11 April 2020).

Klooster, Dan. 2010. Standardizing sustainable development? The Forest Stewardship Council's plantation policy review process as neoliberal environmental governance. *Geoforum* 41: 117–29. [CrossRef]

Lambin, Eric F., and Tannis Thorlakson. 2018. Sustainability Standards: Interactions between private actors, civil society and governments. *Annual Review Environmental Resources* 43: 369–93. [CrossRef]

Lambin, Eric F., Patrick Meyfroidt, Ximena Rueda, Allen Blackman, Jan Börner, Paolo Omar Cerutti, Thomas Dietsch, Laura Jungmannet, Pénélope Lamarque, Jane Lister, and et al. 2014. Effectiveness and Synergies of Policy Instruments for Land Use Governance in Tropical Regions. *Global Environmental Change* 28: 129–40. [CrossRef]

Loconto, Allison, and Cora Dankers. 2014. *Impact of International Voluntary Standards on Smallholder Market Participation in Developing Countries: A Review of the Literature*. Rome: FAO.

Marx, Axel. 2013. Varieties of Legitimacy: A Configurational Institutional Design Analysis of Eco-labels. *Innovation: European Journal for Social Science Research* 26: 268–87. [CrossRef]

Marx, Axel. 2019. Public procurement and human rights: current role and potential of voluntary sustainability standards. In *Public Procurement and Human Rights: Opportunities, Risks and Dilemmas for the State as Buyer*. Edited by Olga Martin-Ortega and Claire Methven O'Brien. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Marx, Axel, and Dieter Cuypers. 2010. Forest certification as a global environmental governance tool: What is the macro-effectiveness of the Forest Stewardship Council? *Regulation & Governance* 4: 408–34.

Marx, Axel, and Jan Wouters. 2015. Competition and Cooperation in the Market of Voluntary Standards Sustainability Standards. In *International standardization—Law, Economics and Politics*. Edited by Delimatsis Panagiotis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marx, Axel, and Jan Wouters. 2016. Is Everybody on Board? Voluntary Sustainability Standards and Green Restructuring. *Development, the Quarterly Journal of the Society for International Development* 58: 511–20. [CrossRef]

Marx, Axel, and Jan Wouters. 2017. Rule Intermediaries in Global Labor Governance. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 670: 189–206. [CrossRef]

Marx, Axel, Emilie Becault, and Jan Wouters. 2012. Private Standards in Forestry: Assessing the Legitimacy and Effectiveness of the Forest Stewardship Council. In *Global Governance and Private Standards. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Edited by Marx Axel, Miet Maertens, Johan Swinnen and Jan Wouters. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Marx, Axel, Nicolás Brando, and Brecht Lein. 2017. Strengthening Labour Rights Provisions in Bilateral Trade Agreements: Making the Case for Voluntary Sustainability Standards. *Global Policy* 8: 78–88. [CrossRef]

Mitiku, Fikadu, Yann De Mey, Jan Nyssen, and Miet Maertens. 2017. Do Private Sustainability Standards Contribute to Income Growth and Poverty Alleviation? A Comparison of Different Coffee Certification Schemes in Ethiopia. *Sustainability* 9: 246. [CrossRef]

Moog, Sandra, André Spicer, and Steffen Böhm. 2015. The Politics of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives: The Crisis of the Forest Stewardship Council. *Journal of Business Ethics* 128: 469–93. [CrossRef]

Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). 2019a. Our History. Available online: https://www.msc.org/about-the-msc/our-history (accessed on 21 October 2019).

Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). 2019b. Working Together for Thriving Oceans: The MSC Annual Report 2018–2019. Available online: https://www.msc.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/about-the-msc/msc-annual-report-2018-2019.pdf?sfvrsn=e37c6f59_7 (accessed on 21 October 2019).

Ochieng, Bernard, Kenneth Hughey, and Hugh Bigsby. 2013. Rainforest Alliance Certification of Kenyan tea farms: A contribution to sustainability or tokenism? *Journal of Cleaner Production* 39: 285–93. [CrossRef]

Oya, Carlos, Florian Schaefer, and Dafni Skalidou. 2018. The effectiveness of agricultural certification in developing countries: A systematic review. *World Development* 112: 282–312. [CrossRef]

Pattberg, Philipp. 2005. The Forest Stewardship Council: Risk and Potential of Private Forest Governance. *The Journal of Environment & Development* 14: 356–74.

Ponte, Stefano. 2012. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the Making of a Market for 'Sustainable Fish'. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 12: 300–15. [CrossRef]

Ponte, Stefano. 2019. *Business, Power and Sustainability in a World of Global Value Chains*. London: ZED Books.

Rainforest Alliance. 2017. Our History at the FSC General Assembly. Available online: https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/blog/2017/10/10/our-history-at-the-fsc-general-assembly/ (accessed on 24 October 2019).

Rainforest Alliance. 2019. 2018 Annual Report. Available online: https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/AR18.pdf (accessed on 25 October 2019).

Schepers, Donald H. 2010. Challenges to Legitimacy at the Forest Stewardship Council. *Journal of Business Ethics* 92: 279–90. [CrossRef]

Schleifer, Philip. 2013. Orchestrating sustainability: The case of European Union biofuel governance. *Regulation and Governance* 7: 533–46. [CrossRef]

UNFSS. 2013. *Voluntary Sustainability Standards. Today's Landscape of Issues and Initiatives to Achieve Public Policy Objectives*. Geneva: United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards.

UNFSS. 2018. *Voluntary Sustainability Standards, Trade and Sustainable Development*. Geneva: United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards.

UNFSS. 2020. *Scaling up VSS Through Sustainable Public Procurement and Trade Policy*. Geneva: United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards.

Westerwinter, Oliver. 2020. Transnational Public-Private Governance Initiatives in World Politics: Introducing a New Dataset. *Review of International Organizations.*.

WWF. 2017. *SDGs Mean Business: How Credible Standards Can Help Companies Deliver the 2030 Agenda.* WWF-ISEAL Joint Report. Available online: https://d3nehc6yl9qzo4.cloudfront.net/downloads/wwf_iseal_sdg_2017_final_20_feb17_1.pdf (accessed on 24 October 2019).

Zulfiqar, Farhad, and Gopal B. Thapa. 2018. Determinants and intensity of adoption of "better cotton" as an innovative cleaner production alternative. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 172: 3468–78. [CrossRef]