SAAS and Verification Audits

SAAS supports social responsibility by **ensuring the implementation of credible social standards designed to protect people and their communities.** SAAS evaluates and accredits auditing organizations to assure they are qualified to hold their clients accountable to such social standards.

Over time, an evolution from rare best practice to the integration of CSR principles in corporate strategies has led to the realization of rights of workers and their families through strong CSR systems – this has always been the core of Social Accountability International's mission. The mission of SAI is to advance the human rights of workers around the world – part of this mission is implemented by the creation and development of socially responsible standards including the SA8000 Standard.

➢ **Many individuals and organizations are committed to improving the lives of workers – one tool used to measure a company's commitment to social responsibility and ethical practices is social auditing and implementation of social codes in the workplace.** Third party certification, or external auditing resulting in an SA8000 certificate, is one method used to confirm compliance to the basic elements found in ILO Conventions and international human rights norms.

➢ **SAAS supports SAI's mission by evaluating and accrediting those auditing companies to assure they are qualified to hold their clients accountable to SA8000.**

➢ **SA8000 is the gold standard in social auditing** – but there are other systems that exist that support human rights for workers. Some companies practice corporate social responsibility to lower the risk of contributing to social harm by creating and requiring implementation of a code of conduct within their own company and throughout their supply chain – rather than choosing to utilize a certification scheme such as SA8000.

➢ In both instances, **effective social accountability programs are characterized by transparency, engagement with stakeholders, and a long-term, systematic approach leading to improvement in the lives of workers.** Both SA8000 and these other systems provide a positive impact in the lives of those individuals affected.

➢ **The goal of implementing a social code and monitoring its use within the supply chain is to ensure that the company's business partners and suppliers abide by the company's commitment to corporate social responsibility.** These codes, based on ILO conventions and human rights norms, while not as rigorous as SA8000, still fall in line with SAI's mission and have a positive impact by raising the bar on employers and increasing expectations for treatment of employees.

➢ **Compliance against a social code of conduct within a company's supply chain is usually measured by undertaking a second party audit of the supplier.** A second party audit is an audit of another organization's system – not under the direct control of the auditing organization. In general, second party audits are usually performed by the customer upon its suppliers (or potential suppliers) to measure whether the supplier can meet the code of conduct imposed on it by the brand or retailer.

➢ At this time, the market for SA8000 is limited to those companies willing and able to achieve the gold standard set by SA8000. **For those other companies unable or unwilling to get to the level of SA8000, they often must still abide by a code of conduct set by a brand or retailer.**

➢ To validate transparency, consistency and integrity, most companies use an external auditing company to conduct the social accountability compliance audits**. Companies and organizations that have created social codes of conduct must be committed to maintaining the integrity of these systems by ensuring oversight and verification of implementation by companies within their supply chain.**

- The process of verification of another organization's systems by an external party, such as an auditing company or certification body, **supports social responsibility by ensuring the implementation of credible social standards designed to protect people and their communities.** Utilizing an external auditing company can provide a benefit in that they often determine the effectiveness of a system and provide valuable information regarding the structure of the systems that could inevitably create improvements.

- In turn, it is important that these auditing companies be monitored to assure stakeholders that they are able to consistently, reliably and effectively perform the audit and that these audits are carried out in a professional manner. **Monitoring services by an accreditation body, such as SAAS, strengthens and supports corporate social responsibility programs by offering a layer of quality assurance to auditing systems.**

- Monitoring auditing companies holds these organizations to strict compliance of the policies and systems they are required to implement. Through external auditing and sampling methodologies, SAAS enables code developers, companies and organizations to verify that their codes are being implemented in accordance with requirements and **provides independent assurance to stakeholders that the system is being used consistently and appropriately.**

- **The end result is that SAAS promotes human rights in the workplace by providing a quality assurance framework and oversight linking social standards and labor codes, auditing bodies and individual facilities.** This framework ensures quality control over those audits designed to manage ethical workplace conditions and improve the lives of those throughout global supply chains.

- **SAAS is the only global accreditation body whose mission is to support implementation of social and labor standards.** These monitoring measures provide better insight into the audit quality and, at minimum, include a regular schedule of office and witnessed audits to provide assurance that the auditing company is in compliance with performance criteria, required management system and auditor qualification policies.

- In addition to its accreditation services for SA8000, **SAAS has already developed systems for quality assurance and monitoring of social code and second party audits.** These systems provide structure, policies and procedures for oversight and implementation of social auditing programs.

- Code developers and standard setters alike can choose to contract with **SAAS to conduct surveillance and validation of the code audits and auditing companies who conduct them to verify that the required auditing protocols are being followed.** Currently, SAAS provides technical assistance and verification to the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) as a means of promoting workplace conditions in accordance with human rights, ILO conventions and national labor law.

- SAAS also offers guidance and technical assistance in the development of policies and associated verification systems. **The SAAS monitoring process includes documentation review, office audits and observation of auditors and trainers in the field.** SAAS undertakes impartial assessment and surveillance of auditing companies to ensure that the process is functioning and continues to meet the SAAS criteria. These monitoring systems provide external assurance that the auditing bodies conducting external assessments are consistent and effective, leading to improvements in the lives of those employed at factories and farms within the supply chain.