The Cooperation On Fair, Free, Equitable Employment (COFFEE) Project
Midterm Evaluation Report on the Socially Sustainable Sourcing Toolkit Review and Validation Process

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Introduction

Verité’s Cooperation On Fair, Free, Equitable Employment (COFFEE) Project centers on the creation and piloting of a Socially Sustainable Sourcing Toolkit (S3T) to enable industry actors to implement robust and sustainable social compliance systems, along with trainings for key stakeholders in the global coffee sector. Grounded in an assessment of participating stakeholders’ priorities and aligned with USDOL’s Comply Chain, the S3T will be a comprehensive resource that will provide companies and other coffee sector stakeholders with tools and practical guidance to improve the detection, prevention, and remediation of labor challenges in the coffee supply chain.

From its ideation, the COFFEE Project was conceived of as a participatory intervention aimed at maximizing the adoption of the tools and practices included in the S3T that promote acceptable conditions of work and the elimination of child labor and forced labor in the coffee sector. To address this objective the project adopted a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach, which is based on the idea that the people and organizations who experience a specific problem in their daily lives are best positioned and have the expertise to identify the most appropriate, effective, and sustainable solutions. An HCD approach has been integral to the project strategy and Toolkit design thus far, including a comprehensive participatory analysis of both institutional and farmworker priorities during the Pre-Situational Analysis.

For the purpose of the midterm evaluation (MTE), the COFFEE Project integrated an HCD approach into the Toolkit review and validation process to ensure that each tool included in the S3T is relevant to the Latin American coffee sector context, is responsive to stakeholder needs, and is likely to be widely adopted by private sector stakeholders. In lieu of a conventional midterm performance evaluation, the COFFEE Project used the project midpoint to implement a thorough review and validation of the S3T during the fourth quarter of 2020 into the first quarter of 2021.

This midterm evaluation report details the tool review and validation methodology, key findings and outcomes addressing the evaluation questions, and lessons learned, which will inform current and future social responsibility due diligence initiatives in the Latin American coffee sector.

Project Context

Verité launched the COFFEE Project in May 2019 with USD 2.2 million funding from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs (USDOL-ILAB). The project objective is to improve the implementation of social compliance systems that promote acceptable conditions of work and the elimination of child labor and forced labor in coffee supply chains. The project aims to address this objective via the following outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Adoption of a robust and sustainable social compliance system by private sector stakeholders in coffee supply chains.
• **Outcome 2**: Strengthened capacity of private sector stakeholders to implement a robust and sustainable social compliance system in coffee supply chains.

• **Outcome 3**: New social compliance tools on child labor, forced labor, and acceptable conditions of work piloted in coffee business operations and supply chains.

The COFFEE Project revolves around the creation of a Socially Sustainable Sourcing Toolkit (S3T) containing 12 practical tools aligned with the eight steps of USDOL’s Comply Chain model. Tools will be tested in three key coffee-producing countries: Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. Co-created with private sector and industry association partners, the pilot projects are expected to generate significant impacts and provide opportunities for expansion and replication. Learnings from these pilots will be used to refine the S3T. Throughout the project, Verité is engaging in regular consultations with major international coffee brands, coffee traders and producers, industry associations, certifiers, and other key coffee sector stakeholders.

**Methodology**

The objective of the S3T review and validation process was to solicit valuable feedback on preliminary tools from a variety of stakeholders with expertise and interest in the coffee sector—with a focus on the tools’ end-users—thereby improving the potential for widespread adoption by private sector stakeholders. Throughout the process, the COFFEE Project also aimed to document learning on private sector actors’ motivations for adopting sustainable social compliance systems.

The process built upon Verité’s primary and secondary research carried out in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico prior to the implementation of the COFFEE Project, to ensure that farmworker perspectives in the three countries of intervention are reflected in the Toolkit design. As such, the MTE aimed to address the following evaluation questions:

• What feedback do civil society (including certifier and industry association) representatives have regarding the Toolkit’s viability, relevance, utility, and potential to bring it to scale?

• What practical recommendations do private sector actors have for improving the tools?

• What are the drivers or incentives for private sector actors to adopt social compliance tools and practices in the Latin American coffee sector?

• What are the challenges and limitations inhibiting adoption of social compliance tools and practices?

To answer these questions, the MTE was implemented in three independent but interconnected phases. The process involved two strategic validation phases to understand the priorities, needs, and value gains of the S3T for the COFFEE Project stakeholder base, followed by an analysis and documentation of learning, which will ultimately inform refinement of the Toolkit in advance of pilot project implementation.
Technical Review by the Expert Committee

Phase One focused on soliciting technical feedback from an Expert Committee comprised of civil society practitioners (including NGOs and certifiers) and industry association representatives. The Expert Committee review focused on assessing the legitimacy of the S3T, through validation of the use of unbiased design processes, as well as its credibility, by reviewing each tool for its reliability and technical adequacy.

Verité identified six individuals for participation in the Expert Committee with coffee sector expertise and familiarity with issues facing coffee communities, including representatives from industry associations, civil society organizations, and certifiers. Four individuals participated in the process and provided actionable feedback on the tools, representing a participation rate of 67 percent. Given that Expert Committee members work closely with coffee communities and in some cases also the private sector, they were tasked with reviewing tools for alignment with worker priorities and the needs of vulnerable communities. Expert Committee members with expertise in corporate social responsibility and familiarity with labor issues helped to ensure that the tools are evidence-based and aligned with international standards and guidance.

The Expert Committee review phase consisted of two key activities:

- **Independent review of a subset of tools** | Feedback documented in web-based survey.
- **Consultations** | Individual or small group dialogues between the COFFEE Project Director and Expert Committee members.

During the independent review, each Expert Committee member reviewed a subset of tools tailored to their interests, experience, and type of engagement with the coffee sector. This independent review process focused on the following guiding questions:

- Are the tools aligned with industry best practices? Please provide technical feedback based on your experience in the coffee sector and/or labor issues.
- Do the tools respond to the needs and priorities of private sector actors and farmworkers? Based on your experience, please reference any relevant private sector or coffee community perspectives, including economics, sourcing logistics, fair labor, social justice, and legal perspectives.
Are there any red flags or issues that should be prioritized for revision before private sector review (related to costs, technical inaccuracies, sustainability, barriers to adoption, cultural issues, etc.)?

Verité asked reviewers to document their high-level feedback in a web-based survey, which prompted them to rate each tool on key criteria and provide qualitative feedback in response to open-ended questions (see Annex A). Some reviewers opted to provide more detailed feedback by commenting directly within each tool.

After the independent review, the COFFEE Project Director consulted with each reviewer to gain a deeper understanding of their feedback and document additional insights. These dialogues were developed as informal and non-structured, with the only caveat that the reviewers provided feedback on a subset of the tools based on their expertise and preferences. These conversations were also an opportunity for dialogue on the key drivers for adopting social due diligence tools and the potential bottlenecks envisioned by private sector and other relevant stakeholders.

Once the Phase One review of all tools was complete, the COFFEE Project team analyzed feedback to determine whether any critical issues or red flags warranted tool revision prior to commencing Phase Two. This analysis was consolidated in a dashboard that aggregated feedback for each tool under three assessment categories—critical, standard, and minor (see Annex B). Ultimately, no feedback was deemed critical, so it was determined that the S3T did not need to undergo any revision before sharing it with the Advisory Council.

Private Sector Validation by the S3T Advisory Council

During Phase Two, members of the S3T Advisory Council reviewed the complete set of tools with a focus on relevance to the private sector and ensuring the buy-in of key stakeholders. The Advisory Council was comprised of the S3T’s intended end-users, which include coffee companies, industry associations, and other industry actors. Verité asked the Advisory Council to assess the Toolkit with an eye for practicality and ease of adoption and implementation.

To promote successful S3T design and adoption, Verité turned to business design tools from the Strategyzer1 series to inform the Advisory Council validation process. Considering that the end-users of the S3T are coffee companies and other industry actors, the validation workshop used elements of the Value Proposition Canvas for collecting actionable feedback and addressing the project’s learning questions around motivations for and challenges to adopting social due diligence tools and practices. The Value Proposition Canvas has two main elements: (1) the Customer Profile, which helps clarify user or customer perspectives on the product’s “pains” and “gains,” and (2) the Value Map, which describes how a product generates value for the user through “pain relievers” and “gain creators.”

1 Strategyzer
Verité’s vision for successful S3T design and adoption relies on alignment between the Value Map and Customer Profile. With that in mind, the first Advisory Council dialogue opened with a presentation of the COFFEE Project’s S3T Value Map (see Figure 2). Each dialogue then explored elements of the Customer Profile through a discussion of each tool and the complete Toolkit.

**Figure 2: The COFFEE Project Value Map for the Socially Sustainable Sourcing Toolkit (S3T).**
Verité invited 16 individuals across 14 institutions to participate in the Advisory Council, representing a mix of coffee companies, civil society organizations that work closely with the private sector, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and industry associations. Geographically, Advisory Council members represented global institutions as well as national and local institutions from the project’s three target countries: Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. Ten individuals representing nine institutions ultimately participated in the Advisory Council validation process, reflecting an individual participation rate of 63 percent. All the representatives of these companies are senior professionals working on sustainability or ethical sourcing, with strong authority within their company and throughout their supply chain.

The private sector validation process was comprised of two activities:

- **Independent review of all tools** | Feedback documented in a web-based survey.
- **Validation workshops** | Two workshops with Advisory Council members to solicit additional insights were facilitated on January 20th and February 3rd.

All tools were hosted on a subsite of the Verité webpage, which also included general guidance for Advisory Council members, registration information for the validation workshops, and a link to the feedback survey (see Figure 3). Advisory Council members were asked to review Tools 1-6 independently and provide their high-level feedback via a web-based survey (see Annex C) prior to participating in the first virtual validation workshop, which focused on the first six tools. Following the first workshop, Verité added Tools 7-12 to the subsite and asked Advisory Council members to conduct the same review process in advance of the second virtual validation workshop focusing on the remaining six tools.

*Figure 3: Advisory Council subsite on the Verité webpage for hosting draft tools.*
The virtual validation workshops were led by the COFFEE Project Director with facilitation support from Verité’s M&E Officer, Senior Training Manager, and Social Compliance Specialist. The validation workshop was structured as a virtual adaptation of the World Café method\(^3\) for facilitating group dialogues. The core of each workshop followed the following format for assessing the tools:

- Three rounds of dialogue based on structured discussion prompts.
- Two breakout groups per round – each group discussed one tool.
- Reconvening for report-back and group dialogue.
- Zoom poll to gauge participants’ perspectives on tools.

During each World Café round, groups responded to three broad discussion prompts:

- What are the strengths of this tool? What does this tool do well?
- How well does this tool meet your institution’s needs?
- What are the weaknesses of this tool? How could this tool be improved?

After each World Café round, participants reported back to the full group and had an opportunity to share perspectives on each tool. At the end of the second dialogue, the COFFEE Project administered an anonymous wrap-up survey for participants to provide their final perspectives on the tools and any outstanding feedback that was not addressed during the workshop (see Annex D).

**Analysis**

Once both phases of review were completed, the COFFEE team compiled all written and verbal feedback from Expert Committee and Advisory Council members from all available sources, including web-based survey results, emails, in-document comments, and notes from one-on-one conversations and virtual validation dialogues. To facilitate qualitative analysis, actionable comments and questions were listed in an Excel document, then tagged to categorize the type of feedback into recurring themes. See Table 1 for a description of common themes. Where applicable, duplicate comments were included. The Excel document and pivot table were structured to allow filtering by source, theme, or tool. Common themes arising from the qualitative analysis of each review phase are highlighted in the discussion of findings and outcomes in the following section.

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\(^3\) The World Cafe Method
The COFFEE Project conducted a simple frequency analysis of feedback themes. Although approximate results of this analysis are included in the report, quantified results were omitted given that individual agreement with comments was not systematically tracked during the group dialogues. Rather, Verité used the frequency analysis to approximate the weight of common themes and validate assumptions. Assumptions of key themes were based on the dialogue sparked by participants’ comments and the perceived agreement expressed by other participants.

In addition to qualitative analysis of feedback, the team conducted a limited quantitative analysis of survey responses and Zoom polling, where applicable. Results are described in the following section and should be considered alongside the summary of qualitative feedback.
Key Findings and Outcomes

Feedback from Civil Society and External Supply Chain Stakeholders

The COFFEE Project utilized the Expert Committee as the primary avenue for soliciting civil society feedback on the tools. Expert Committee members had two key avenues for sharing feedback: (1) the independent review and high-level survey, and (2) informal consultations with the COFFEE Project Director.

Survey Results

Results of the high-level feedback survey offer insight into Expert Committee reviewers’ initial reactions to the draft tools. Three of the four Expert Committee members submitted survey responses on a total of 11 of the 12 tools. Since Expert Committee members were not asked to review all twelve tools, the survey design allowed respondents to answer questions only on those tools they reviewed. For each tool, respondents were prompted to indicate their level of agreement with three statements using a five-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” (five points), “agree” (four points), “neutral” (three points), “disagree” (two points), and “strongly disagree” (one point).

Consultations

During informal consultations with the COFFEE Project Director, Expert Committee members shared additional feedback and insights on the tools. Their perspectives from these conversations can be grouped into three tiers:

1. **Audience targeted for the tool** | It is particularly important to clarify the user(s) for each tool and provide specific elements based on variations in audiences and their specific roles and responsibilities within the supply chain (e.g. exporters and importers are both traders, but closer to different “sides” of the supply chain). The clearer these nuances the better.

2. **Identification of best practices** | There is a need to demonstrate a tangible connection between “awareness” of practices (Why) and effective
implementation (What and How). There is a need for examples of successful experiences and best practices, along with insights into how to implement them properly, both of which were considered keys to increased impact and adoption.

3. **Balance between level of detail and usability** | There was a clear tension between the need to provide sufficient detail and examples with the need to make each tool short, digestible, and easy to use. This created a conundrum: the need for simplicity in explaining a complex subject. That said, finding a sweet spot to achieve this balance will set the S3T apart as a cutting-edge Toolkit, not only for the coffee sector but for the food and beverage industry overall.

Furthermore, conversations with the Expert Committee (and echoed by the Advisory Council) helped identify a clear gap in the connection and complementarity of the tools. For example, some content and/or sections overlapped in some tools (e.g. reporting on best practices is fully aligned with engagement strategies) or were fully discussed only in one tool. Verité found that reviewing the tools individually or in small sub-sets creates a connection gap, as reviewers do not have a complete understanding of the content presented across the full S3T. This issue went previously undetected by the Verité team that was fully engaged in the development of all tools within the Toolkit.

**Written Feedback**

A qualitative analysis of the detailed feedback provided by Expert Committee members through in-document comments and open-ended survey responses revealed that slightly over half of the comments were related to tool structure and content (see Figure 5 below).

*Figure 5: Approximate weight of common feedback themes from the Expert Committee. Weight is based on a frequency analysis of common themes; percentages are intentionally omitted.*
As expected, Expert Committee feedback was largely technical, in alignment with the COFFEE Project’s guidelines to review each tool for alignment with industry best practices and responsiveness to private sector and farmworker priorities. As such, the most notable themes arising from civil society reviewers on the S3T content were:

- Alignment with international standards and frameworks,
- Acknowledgement of on-the-ground complexities, and
- Technical considerations related to labor and social due diligence issues.

Regarding alignment with international standards, one Expert Committee member recommended a closer review of relevant international instruments related to freedom of association, grievances, access to remedy, and vulnerable workers. Specifically, reviewers recommended drawing more heavily from key frameworks in relevant tools, including ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment,\(^4\) the United Nations Guiding Principles on Human Rights,\(^5\) OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct,\(^6\) OHCHR International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,\(^7\) Sustainable Development Goals,\(^8\) UN Global Compact for Migration,\(^9\) Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (C105),\(^10\) and Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention (P029).\(^11\)

Expert Committee members’ expertise and familiarity with coffee-growing communities were evident in the substance of their feedback. One reviewer provided concrete recommendations for adapting the tools to the Latin American coffee context, such as incorporating the issue of agrochemicals and the mention of prison or military labor in the auditable standards section of the Sample Code of Conduct Revisions (Tool 4). Similarly, reviewers raised legitimate implementation considerations specific to the coffee sector, such as the tendency for social responsibility agreements to push worker protection responsibilities farther down the supply chain and the feasibility of implementing the tools on small-scale coffee farms.

In terms of technical considerations, reviewers recommended some modest restructuring, clarifications, and definitions of key terms to improve the Toolkit’s accuracy and relevance. For example, one reviewer highlighted the role of certification standards in relation to company codes of conduct. Another noted the need to define fees and costs in the Recruitment-Related Risks in the Coffee Sector guide (Tool 6). An Expert Committee

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\(^4\) ILO: General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment
\(^5\) OHCHR: Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
\(^6\) OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct
\(^7\) OHCHR: International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
\(^8\) Sustainable Development Goals
\(^9\) UN: Global Compact for Migration
\(^10\) ILO: C105 - Abolition of Forced Labour Convention - 1957
reviewer also highlighted, for example, the importance of distinguishing between binding and non-binding instruments.

**Feedback from Private Sector and In-Country Representatives**
The COFFEE Project solicited actionable feedback from the private sector and other coffee industry actors through the S3T Advisory Council. Advisory Council members had two main avenues for commenting on the tools: (1) Independent review and high-level feedback survey, and (2) the virtual validation dialogues.

**Results of High-Level Feedback Survey**
A total of three Advisory Council members completed the high-level feedback survey, which was segmented into two surveys to align with the tools reviewed during each validation dialogue. One Advisory Council member completed both surveys, providing feedback on all 12 tools, another member completed the survey on Tools 1-6, while the third respondent completed the survey on Tools 7-12—aggregate responses to each tool, therefore, reflect the perspectives of just two individuals. This low response rate is unsurprising. Verité understands that many Advisory Council members may not have been able to review all 12 tools in detail, as they constitute a total of more than 200 pages.

The survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with three statements on a five-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree:”

- This tool meets my institution’s needs.
- My institution will implement this tool.
- I will recommend this tool to our partners or suppliers.

Respondents agreed or strongly agreed with each statement for most tools and marked “don’t know” for only a few tools. A review of responses for each individual tool shows that only one respondent marked negative reactions to two tools. For Tool 8 Guidelines on Monitoring Coffee Farms, this respondent indicated “strongly disagree” with each statement. For Tool 11 Framework for Independent Verification, the respondent indicated that the tool meets their institution’s needs but disagreed with the statement on recommending the tool to partners or suppliers. Given the small sample size and the lack of trends in the data, the COFFEE team is confident that the “don’t know” and “disagree” responses accurately reflect respondents’ perspectives, rather than indicating potential respondent fatigue. Since the response rate on the high-level survey was low, the COFFEE team aimed to triangulate findings by recycling these questions during the virtual validation workshop using the Zoom polling feature.

The high-level feedback survey included an optional comment box after each set of statements for respondents to provide written feedback. A qualitative analysis of these open-ended responses shows that the three most common themes relate to tool structure and content, implementation, and accountability. It is important to note that this survey was used as a tool for capturing high-level, initial reactions to each tool, and respondents’ comments fit those expectations. For example, one respondent commented
that the Root Cause Analysis tool should provide guidance on integrating workers’ perspectives, while another highlighted the similarities between some of the tools and existing certification schemes and other programs. Deeper discussion on key issues and actionable recommendations were captured in the validation dialogues, as described below.

Validation Dialogues
The Advisory Council validation dialogues were structured around the Value Proposition Canvas using discussion prompts aimed at soliciting action-oriented feedback. Although participants shared feedback on the Toolkit structure and content, the Advisory Council dialogues revealed a greater focus on questions, concerns, and proposed solutions related to tool implementation and accountability than feedback provided by the Expert Committee (see Figure 6 below). Questions and comments around the Toolkit’s intended users and issues around accountability were also major themes emerging from the dialogues.

*Figure 6: Approximate weight of common feedback themes from the Advisory Council dialogues. Weight is based on a frequency analysis of common themes; percentages are intentionally omitted.*

Regarding implementation, workshop participants presented a variety of comments and questions related to different tools. The qualitative analysis tool shows that the Advisory Council provided implementation-related feedback for every tool except the Guidelines on Monitoring of Coffee Farms (Tool 8). General comments on implementation related to the need for clarifying who is responsible for implementation and providing more guidance on how to implement the tool, and issues around data confidentiality and protection. Tool-specific comments on implementation were related to exploring
whether a survey is the best approach for stakeholder mapping (Tool 1), determining how the Coffee Sector Risk Map will be updated (Tool 2), how to monitor the Code of Conduct implementation (Tool 4), and what to do with data from Self-Assessment Questionnaires (Tool 9).

Dialogue participants raised the issue of accountability in their review of several tools. For the Sample Code of Conduct Provisions (Tool 4), reviewers recommended including guidance on how to monitor implementation of the standards included in the code, including indicating what kind of evidence companies can use to verify suppliers’ compliance. For the Sample Social Responsibility Agreement (Tool 5), participants inquired about proper follow-up and which areas of the agreement should be verified. Regarding the Guidelines on Monitoring Coffee Farms (Tool 8), participants raised concerns about how coffee producers should be held accountable, particularly for known risks such as venomous snake bites in rural areas.

Advisory Council participants emphasized the importance of clarifying the intended user(s) of each tool. Regarding the Sample Code of Conduct (Tool 4), for example, reviewers noted that it seemed tailored to large farms and were unclear how it could be applied by smallholders. Similarly, for the Sample Social Responsibility Agreement (Tool 5), the Advisory Council noted uncertainty around how it trickles down supply chain tiers. On the Guidance on Communicating Objectives and Standards Across the Supply Chain (Tool 7), reviewers questioned who the audience is and recommended providing summary steps for different stakeholder groups, such as producers and roasters.

While the cost of implementation was discussed in relation to the full Toolkit, the issue was highlighted specifically during the dialogues on two tools. When reviewing the Self-Assessment Questionnaires (Tool 9), participants highlighted the need to consider who will absorb the costs of administrative work associated with implementing the questionnaire. In reviewing the Framework on Preventing and Remediating Labor Violations (Tool 10), participants highlighted that implementation could present an additional cost burden to smallholder farmers and discussed how this could be mitigated, such as transferring responsibility to companies.

Although the Advisory Council workshops were structured to generate feedback on each individual tool, discussion of the linkages between each tool was a natural element of the dialogue. Through these conversations, the COFFEE team identified feedback applicable to the complete S3T. Notably, Advisory Council participants emphasized a need for the following:

- **Audience** | Clarify the intended users of the S3T and individual tools and those responsible for implementation.

- **Differentiated approach** | Provide tailored guidance for different stakeholder groups (for example, large and medium farms vs smallholder farms).

- **Cost** | Consider potential resource burdens for tool implementation, particularly for smallholder producers.
• **Length and practicality** | Reviewers raised concerns around the length of some tools and noted that twelve tools might be overwhelming to companies.

After each World Café round, the COFFEE team administered a Zoom poll to capture participants’ perspectives on each tool. The poll prompted participants to indicate their level of agreement with two of the statements included in the high-level feedback survey:

- This tool meets my institution’s needs.
- My institution will adopt this tool.

The response rates for the Zoom poll for each tool varied. During the first dialogue, all eight participants responded to the polls for Tools 1 and 2, but participation dropped to five respondents for polls on Tools 3 and 4 and three respondents on Tools 5 and 6. During the second dialogue, all seven participants responded to the polls for Tools 7 and 8, six responded to Tools 9 and 10, and five responded to Tools 11 and 12. A calculation of the average level of agreement across all twelve tools reveals the following:

*Figure 7: Average response to Advisory Council virtual dialogue Zoom polling questions. Respondents’ level of agreement with each statement was provided on a five-point Likert scale where 5 = “strongly agree,” 1 = “strongly disagree,” and 3 = “don’t know.” Calculated as average level of agreement across all 12 tools.*

A closer look at the average Likert score for each tool offers some insight into Advisory Council members’ perceptions of the strongest tools. See Figure 8. Responses to the Coffee Sector Risk Map Presentation (Tool 2) were highest, with 7 out of 8 respondents agreeing or strongly disagreeing with each statement. The second and third highest-rated tools were the guidance on Recruitment-Related Risks in the Coffee Sector (Tool 6) and the Self-Assessment Questionnaires for Traders, Producers, and Labor Brokers (Tool 9). All three respondents on the Zoom poll for Tool 6 agreed the tool meets their needs and that their institution would adopt the tool. For Tool 9, all six respondents agreed the tool meets their needs, but only half agreed they would adopt the tool (while three indicated “don’t know” and one disagreed).

The tool receiving the weakest response from Advisory Council members was the Framework on Preventing and Remediating Labor Violations (Tool 10). Four out of six respondents indicated that the tool does not meet their institution’s needs and that their institution would not adopt the tool. Tools 11 and 12 also received lower ratings. Only two out of five respondents agreed that the Framework for Independent Verification (Tool 11) meets their needs while none indicted that their institution would adopt the
tool (three selected “don’t know” and two selected “disagree”). For the Guide on Public Reporting (Tool 12), only one of five respondents agreed that the tool meets their institution’s needs, while none indicated that their institution would adopt it.

Figure 8: Average response to Advisory Council virtual dialogue Zoom polling questions, disaggregated by tool.

![Average Likert Score for Each Tool](image)

Private Sector Motivations and Limitations for S3T Adoption

At the end of the virtual Advisory Council dialogues, the COFFEE Project administered a brief closing survey to capture participants’ perspectives on the primary motivations for and limitations to adopting the S3T or other social due diligence tools (see Annex D). Adoption and diffusion of innovations or best practices to potential adopters (users) is usually one of the most crucial choices in the process of promoting better working conditions in the coffee sector (our social innovation challenge).

Securing social sustainability commitments from private sector companies in the coffee industry requires the establishment of as clear an understanding as possible of leverage points (motivations) and blocks (limitations) for adoption and diffusion of the tools and best practices incorporated in the COFFEE S3T. Considering this, the survey prompted participants to share their insights on each issue in the form of a multiple-select question type with pre-populated response options and an “other” option. The survey also included a comment option for participants to provide additional context on their responses.

A total of five out of the seven participants of the second Advisory Council dialogue completed the closing survey, representing a 71 percent response rate. When asked what they considered to be the greatest benefits of, or motivations for, companies to adopt the S3T or other social due diligence tools/practices, participants selected the following responses in order from most to least common:

- Improved knowledge of labor issues (3 respondents).
• Tested approaches and methodologies for social compliance (3 respondents).
• Business orientation on sustainability and ethical sourcing (3 respondents).
• Increased supply chain efficiency – supply chain relationships and communications (2 respondents).
• Cost neutrality (1 respondent).
• Brand reputation (1 respondent).

Also, in the open-ended comment box, one participant noted that for their company to adopt the Toolkit, they would like to see the development and testing of impact measurement approaches to ensure that tool implementation makes a difference in producers’ livelihoods. Another participant commented on the need to transfer the cost of Toolkit implementation to coffee roasters and traders rather than smallholder farmers and to clarify the benefits of such tools for smallholders.

When asked what they saw as the primary challenges or barriers for their company to adopt the Toolkit or other social due diligence tools/practices, the most common response was cost and related investments for compliance and/or implementation of best practices (selected by 4 out of 5 respondents). The remaining challenges selected by respondents are as follows, from most to least common:

• Tools and practices are too technical and not adapted to business operations (2 respondents).
• Limited leverage and engagement capacity with supply chain business partners (2 respondents).
• Supply chain complexity and size of operations (2 respondents).
• Knowledge and capacity gaps in social issues within your company (2 respondents).

In the open-ended comment box, one respondent noted that the costs of implementation are not covered by the current market price for coffee.

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<tr>
<th>Driving Forces</th>
<th>Restraining Forces</th>
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<td>Improved knowledge (awareness)</td>
<td>• Approaches and methodologies not tested</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emerging business orientation to</td>
<td>• Cost and investments for best practices and/or compliance (direct and</td>
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<td>sustainability and ethical</td>
<td>indirect)</td>
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<tr>
<td>sourcing</td>
<td>• Limited body of knowledge and evidence of impact of ethical sourcing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved supply chain relationships and communications</td>
<td>best practices on farmers/farmworkers</td>
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<td>Brand reputation protection and liability</td>
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</table>
Using a field force analysis, we can summarize the feedback provided by Advisory Council members highlighting four key driving forces (positive trends to maximize our impact) and three major bottlenecks (fears or gaps that need to be removed or mitigated to facilitate adoption) for promoting better working conditions in the Latin America coffee sector:

This learning is relevant to the COFFEE Project’s implementation strategy, since the three restraining forces (tested approaches, cost neutrality, and impact assessment) will be addressed in the pilot projects in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. Furthermore, the project is already leveraging several driving forces as part of project development, particularly the coupled training curriculums for the S3T and pilot projects and the communications plan developed for improving learning, stakeholder engagement, and influence activities (more detail is provided in the Project Plans for Applying Learning and Feedback section below).

**Good Practices and Lessons Learned**

The COFFEE Project’s Toolkit review and validation process revealed replicable best practices applicable to a variety of social due diligence projects, as well as critical learning for enhancing the remainder of the project and promoting Toolkit uptake.

First and foremost, Verité sees the creation of an Advisory Council as a good practice for facilitating meaningful stakeholder engagement and promoting buy-in. This approach allowed the project to intimately understand key industry actors’ priorities and concerns around social due diligence, which informed a valuable co-design process to ensure the Toolkit meets the needs of end-users. Verité is confident that this meaningful engagement of coffee industry actors and incorporating their feedback throughout the participatory design process will increase buy-in and ultimate tool uptake. Feedback provided by participants in the virtual validation dialogues confirmed that the process was a positive experience for Advisory Council members as well. When asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the workshop on a scale from zero to ten (where zero represents “not at all satisfied” and ten represents “extremely satisfied”), the average rating across the five respondents was 9.2. In the open-ended comment field, participants noted that the workshop structure was engaging and efficient. Multiple participants expressed satisfaction with the use of small breakout groups and the engaging discussions they generated. One participant recommended opening participation to more actors.

Verité recognizes the variety of feedback mechanisms deployed during the Toolkit review and validation process as another good practice. Both Expert Committee and Advisory Council members had multiple opportunities to comment on the tools throughout the review period, including surveys, group dialogues, one-on-one discussions with the COFFEE Project Director, and direct commenting in the tools themselves. Providing several avenues for feedback proved mutually beneficial in that it (a) allowed participants to comment on the tools according to their preferred format and timeframe, and (b) allowed the project to triangulate results across multiple feedback channels.

A key lesson learned through the tool review process is the importance of considering how users will navigate the Toolkit. Questions raised during the Advisory Council
dialogues highlighted that the connections between related tools should be clear. Furthermore, participants’ feedback emphasized the need for the COFFEE Project to thoughtfully consider the Toolkit navigation, or learning path, by which users will access and browse each tool online. Another important learning extracted from the dialogues is that the project should provide overarching guidance or a pathway to help Toolkit users determine where to start and to quickly identify the most relevant tools and guidance materials to fit their needs.

**Project Plans for Applying Learning and Integrating Feedback**

The COFFEE Project plans to integrate feedback and learning from the Toolkit review and validation process into three interrelated project components:

- In-country pilot projects,
- Toolkit trainings, and
- Finalization of the Socially Sustainable Sourcing Toolkit (S3T).

Refinement and finalization of the S3T will be an iterative process, integral to each of the core project components, as illustrated below. It is important to note that these workstreams will not be completed chronologically. Rather, they may be carried out in a more cyclical fashion with some elements implemented simultaneously. The COFFEE Project will begin by prioritizing actionable feedback from Expert Committee and Advisory Council members and determining which revisions need to be made to the tools in advance of pilot project implementation, through which tools will be piloted in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico.
Learning from the S3T review and validation process will inform the Toolkit training curriculum design. The COFFEE Project made note of recurring questions and common themes among reviewers and will ensure that those concerns are addressed during the Toolkit trainings. For example, feedback falling under the categories of implementation and intended users is particularly relevant to the trainings. As such, the COFFEE team will be mindful to include that guidance in the training.

Similarly, feedback from the Toolkit review process will inform the implementation of relevant pilot projects. Notably, pilot projects will explore the three restraining forces inhibiting the adoption of social due diligence practices noted by the Advisory Council (tested approaches, cost neutrality, and impact assessment). In the case of some tools, reviewers highlighted gaps in the guidance provided. Although the COFFEE Project will aim to provide that guidance during pilot projects, the piloting process will also serve as a live feedback loop for improving the tools based on field experience. Through implementation of these tools in the Brazilian, Colombian, and Mexican coffee sectors, the COFFEE Project and its implementing partners will gain an on-the-ground understanding of what specific guidance is both necessary and effective within each country context and whether there is a need for further refinement of the tools to ensure that they are as relevant and user friendly as possible. Each pilot project will provide unique and valuable insights for improving both the management structure of the S3T and the best approaches for refining and adapting each tool to specific contexts and audiences. This knowledge, in turn, will be used to enhance the tools during the S3T finalization process.

The Toolkit review process also informed the selection of tools for piloting in each country (see the S3T tools to be tested in each country in Table 2, below). For the first part, feedback provided by the Expert Committee and Advisory Council contributed to the project’s understanding of the coffee supply chain and social due diligence contexts within and between each target country, which was critical to the pilot project design. Brazil’s conventional large farm structure highlighted a clear need for ethical recruitment-related tools. For Mexico, the review process revealed priorities around awareness, communication, and capacity building of supporting institutions, including government agencies, certification bodies, and industry professionals working in the field. For Colombia, the Toolkit review and validation process pointed to a more thorough and complex intervention due to the size of the industry and the complex operating environment. As a result, the COFFEE Project plans to pilot test 10 out of 12 S3T tools in Colombia. Finally, the review process highlighted the need to test all tools in at least one pilot project. Considering that the three initial steps of Comply Chain—engagement, risks/impacts assessment, and code of conduct—are considered the most important steps for establishing a sound compliance system (as validated by the Advisory Council and Expert Committee feedback), tools relevant to these steps will be tested in all three target countries.
Lastly, the COFFEE Project will integrate learnings from the S3T review process into the design of the Toolkit management structure. A recurring theme observed by facilitators during the Advisory Council dialogues was participants’ limited awareness of the relationship between tools, as evidenced by the questions and comments presented throughout each workshop. This emphasized the need for the project to think strategically about how to present the full set of tools to an audience of intended users. Reviewers noted that twelve tools may be overwhelming or unrealistic for some companies, and they may already have some practices in place. Verité sees the S3T as offering a suite of tools for à la carte use but recognizes the need to highlight relationships and links between the tools. To address those concerns, the project will facilitate an internal discussion on the design of the management structure, which will determine how users navigate and interact with the tools. For example, the management structure may include a simple needs assessment to help users determine which tools they may benefit from or which tool they should begin with. This conversation will be informed by feedback and learning gleaned from the tool review process.

**Recommendations for Replication and Scaling**

One of the key considerations for replicating and scaling the COFFEE Project’s tool review and validation process is the fact that no model can serve all contexts nor address all needs for creating sustainable impact. Although the COFFEE Project is focused on one

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12 The Risk Map is not officially part of the COFFEE pilot projects, although it will be applied in all three target countries and in additional coffee-producing countries in the region.
sector in one region of the world, working across three different countries has highlighted the need for flexible approaches that are tailored to each context. Furthermore, scaling should be viewed as not only as a challenge of more but also better, which necessitates continuous learning and perseverance to untangle complex contexts. Finally, personal and institutional commitment to tackling labor issues is critical. Labor issues are created by people and institutions, and therefore can only be solved with the commitment of key actors.

Replication and scaling should consider the following recommendations, which are informed by the COFFEE Project’s stakeholder engagement experience throughout the S3T design and review process:

1. **Clarify intention and define your core group.** From the inception of the COFFEE Project, Verité was able to share the specific rationale driving the outreach and engagement strategy (i.e., promoting better working conditions and the eradication of forced labor and child labor in the Latin American coffee sector), which established clear parameters for exploring opportunities to collaborate. Relatedly, it is essential to gain an understanding of the stakeholder base—not only the institutions themselves, but also their strategies and priorities.

   A clear intention facilitates initial communication and the prioritization of activities, which reduces tension during initial networking activities and clears a pathway for properly identifying a core group of stakeholders.

2. **Leverage research and evidence.** Verité’s rapid appraisals on labor issues (carried out in Brazil, Colombia, and México) and other complementary assessments provided sound insights that informed the project’s strategy for communicating contextualized findings, identifying major bottlenecks, and engaging with relevant solutions for global and national stakeholders. Research served as a platform for facilitating positive, solution-oriented dialogues.

   Based on an understanding of stakeholders’ needs and capacity/knowledge gaps, Verité was able to improve communication channels and collaboration priorities. The different data collection and communication tools used (e.g., rapid appraisal of labor issues, questionnaires, consultations, etc.) served as building blocks for promoting trust and positive advocacy. Finally, incorporating workers’ voices should not only be an absolute priority, but also represent an opportunity for developing a shared definition of success and promoting long-term commitments.

3. **Create nurturing and open dialogue channels.** More is always better when it comes to communication, particularly if your message is clear and consistent, backed by evidence, and based on an understanding of the stakeholder base. These three elements will support the development of proper communication channels, tools, and methodologies for fostering dialogue and trust. It is
important to consider that effective dialogue is an evolving process that requires both skills and empathy to understand shifting perspectives and needs.

Furthermore, it is essential to create appropriate environments for improving the resonance of messaging and feedback. Effective dialogue is efficient, and the creation of various communication channels (e.g., local dialogues, an Expert Committee, an Advisory Council) enables more information gathering while minimizing time commitments for participating stakeholders.

4. **Learn and create actionable solutions.** Scaling must be understood as a continuous process that requires a long-term perspective. Projects and strategies are usually time-bound, limiting the options to scaling impact to SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) indicators. This indicator-driven approach often leads to shallow commitments from supply chain actors, particularly when solutions to root causes are deemed beyond the scope of these initiatives. Long-term perspectives and accountability require having skin in the game and focusing not only on impacts linked to specific (and usually external) initiatives, but also a consideration of sustainability beyond those initiatives.

To mitigate short-term thinking and facilitate long-term dialogue, a good strategy is to create and implement pilot projects that allow for the testing of innovative long-term solutions to complex problems. Firstly, incorporating the strategy or intervention into a broader learning process increases potential for catalyzing further interventions and informing others. Secondly, testing approaches and insights generates trust and engagement, and short-term victories can pave the way for long-term commitments. The reduced financial and time commitment required by small-scale pilot projects also helps to move intention to action, create learning from real experiences, and shift the focus to long-term solutions.

Understood as a cycle (from one to four) of embedded activities, this recommended process supports the design of scaling strategies that can be refined and improved with each iteration.
Thank you for your willingness to provide feedback on the COFFEE Project’s Socially Sustainable Sourcing Toolkit (S3T). Your participation in the Expert Committee and broader tool validation process is vital to ensuring that the S3T is relevant, technically sound, and aligned with industry best practices.

After reviewing the tools, please respond to the following questions, which prompt you to rate each tool on key criteria and provide open-ended feedback.

1) Name:*

2) Which of the following tools did you review?*

[ ] Tool 1 - Guidance on Stakeholder Engagement
Tool 1 - Guidance on Stakeholder Engagement

In the following questions, please provide your feedback on the Guidance on Stakeholder Engagement.

3) This tool aligns with industry best practices for due diligence on labor issues in the coffee sector.*

( ) Strongly disagree   ( ) Disagree   ( ) Neutral   ( ) Agree   ( ) Strongly agree

4) This tool addresses an important need for coffee brands and/or supply chain actors.*

( ) Strongly disagree   ( ) Disagree   ( ) Neutral   ( ) Agree   ( ) Strongly agree

5) This tool responds to the needs of farmworkers and/or coffee communities.*

( ) Strongly disagree   ( ) Disagree   ( ) Neutral   ( ) Agree   ( ) Strongly agree

6) Are there any red flags or issues that should be addressed before this tool is shared with private sector actors for review?
Consider issues related to cost, technical inaccuracies, sustainability, barriers to adoption, cultural issues, etc.
7) Please provide any additional feedback or comments on the tool:

____________________________________________
## Annex B – Expert Committee Feedback Assessment Dashboard

This table shows feedback on each tool from five reviewers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guidance on Stakeholder Engagement</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Coffee Sector Risk Map Presentation</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Root Cause Analysis of Labor Violations in the Coffee Sector</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Sample Code of Conduct Provisions</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Sample Social Responsibility Agreements</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Recruitment-Related Risks in the Coffee Sector</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Guidance on Communicating Objectives and Standards Across the Supply Chain</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Guidelines on Monitoring of Coffee Farms</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Self-Assessment Questionnaires for Traders, Producers, and Labor Brokers</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Framework on Preventing and Remediating Labor Violations</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Framework for Independent Verification</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Guide on Public Reporting for Private Sector Stakeholders</td>
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### Table Key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Issue Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical issues to solve. Content is missing relevant sources, frameworks, best practices being applied on labor/sustainability issues in the coffee or related ag sectors. The structure is weak and not possible to adapt in coffee sourcing systems.</td>
<td>critical issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaps identified and good chances for improvement. Content is good enough, and addresses all relevant issues, incorporating the most relevant sources, frameworks and best practices being applied on labor and sustainable sourcing in the coffee sector or related ag sector. The structure is reliable and with key refinements would be a relevant reference for coffee industry stakeholders.</td>
<td>(S) standard issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Minor (or no gaps) to solve. Content is comprehensive and clear, incorporating all relevant sources, frameworks, and best practices being applied on labor/sustainability issues in the coffee or related ag sectors. The structure is strong and even with small refinements still required, it would be a relevant reference for coffee industry stakeholders.</td>
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<td>(M) minor issues</td>
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Annex C – Advisory Council Feedback Survey

THE COFFEE PROJECT

Advisory Council - S3T Feedback (Tools 1-6)

Introduction

Thank you for your willingness to provide feedback on the COFFEE Project’s Socially Sustainable Sourcing Toolkit (S3T). Your participation in the Advisory Council and broader tool validation process is vital to ensuring that the S3T is practical, addresses end users’ needs, and has potential for scaling up.

After reviewing the Toolkit, please provide your high-level feedback by responding to the following questions, which prompt you to rate each tool on key criteria and provide optional comments. The COFFEE team will solicit more detailed feedback during the upcoming validation workshop.

1) Name:* 

_________________________________________________

Tool 1 - Guidance on Stakeholder Engagement

In the following questions, please provide your feedback on the Guidance on Stakeholder Engagement tool.

2) Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.*
Level of Agreement.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree*</th>
<th>Disagree*</th>
<th>Don't know*</th>
<th>Agree*</th>
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<td>I will recommend this tool to our partners or suppliers.</td>
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3) Please provide any comments or recommendations for improving this tool.

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Tool 2 - Coffee Sector Risk Map Presentation

*In the following questions, please provide your feedback on the Coffee Sector Risk Map Presentation.*

4) Please rate your agreement with the following statements.*

Level of Agreement.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree*</th>
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5) Please provide any comments or recommendations for improving this tool.

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Tool 3 - Root Cause Analysis of Labor Violations in the Coffee Sector

*In the following questions, please provide your feedback on the Root Cause Analysis of Labor Violations in the Coffee Sector tool.*
6) Please rate your agreement with the following statements.*

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<th>Level of Agreement.</th>
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<td>Strongly disagree*</td>
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7) Please provide any comments or recommendations for improving this tool.

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Tool 4 - Sample Code of Conduct Provisions

In the following questions, please provide your feedback on the Sample Code of Conduct Provisions.

8) Please rate your agreement with the following statements.*

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<th>Level of Agreement.</th>
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<td>Strongly disagree*</td>
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9) Please provide any comments or recommendations for improving this tool.

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Tool 5 - Sample Social Responsibility Agreement

In the following questions, please provide your feedback on the Sample Social Responsibility Agreement.

10) Please rate your agreement with the following statements.*
Level of Agreement.

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<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree*</th>
<th>Disagree*</th>
<th>Don't know*</th>
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<th>Strongly agree*</th>
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<td>I will recommend this tool to our partners or suppliers.</td>
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11) Please provide any comments or recommendations for improving this tool.

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Tool 6 - Recruitment-Related Risks in the Coffee Sector

In the following questions, please provide your feedback on the Recruitment-Related Risks in the Coffee Sector tool.

12) Please rate your agreement with the following statements.*

Level of Agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree*</th>
<th>Disagree*</th>
<th>Don't know*</th>
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<td>My institution will implement this tool.</td>
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13) Please provide any comments or recommendations for improving this tool.

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Thank You!

Thank you for your valuable feedback on the COFFEE S3T! We look forward to discussing in greater detail during the upcoming validation workshop.
Annex D – Advisory Council Anonymous Closing Survey

Advisory Council S3T Validation Workshop - Feedback Survey

Thank you for your participation in the COFFEE Project's S3T Advisory Council. After participating in the Toolkit validation dialogue(s), we would appreciate your feedback on the workshop as well as your final insights into motivations and challenges to adopting the Toolkit. Please provide candid responses to the questions below.

1) On a scale from 0 to 10, please rate your level of satisfaction with the workshop.*

(0 = not at all satisfied and 10 = extremely satisfied)

( ) 0  ( ) 1  ( ) 2  ( ) 3  ( ) 4  ( ) 5  ( ) 6  ( ) 7  ( ) 8  ( ) 9  ( ) 10

2) Please provide any comments on the workshop structure or content, including recommendations for improving similar events or tool validation processes in the future:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

3) After participating in the workshop, what do you consider to be the greatest benefits of or motivations for your company to adopt the Socially Sustainable Sourcing Toolkit (S3T) or other social due diligence tools/practices?*

Please check all that apply.

[ ] Cost neutrality
[ ] Improved knowledge of labor issues (technical & legal)
[ ] Tested approaches and methodologies for social compliance
[ ] Brand reputation
[ ] Business orientation on sustainability and ethical sourcing
[ ] Increased supply chain efficiency (supply chain relationships and communications)
4) After participating in the workshop, what do you see as the primary challenges or barriers for your company to adopt the Toolkit or other social due diligence tools/practices?*

Please check all that apply.

[ ] Knowledge and capacity gaps in social issues within your company

[ ] Knowledge and capacity gaps in social issues within your supply chain

[ ] Cost and related investments for compliance and/or best practices implementation

[ ] Tools and practices too technical and not adapted to business operations

[ ] Limited leverage and engagement capacity with supply chain business partners

[ ] Supply chain complexity and size of sourcing operations

[ ] Other - Write In (Required): ________________________

Comments: ____________________________________________

5) Please provide any additional comments or feedback on the Toolkit which were not addressed during the workshop:

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Thank You!

Thank you for your insights and active participation in the S3T development! The COFFEE Team will carefully assess and incorporate Advisory Council feedback into the final Toolkit publication.