



THE SIGMA GUIDELINES- TOOLKIT

SIGMA GUIDE TO SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES



SIGMA - Sustainability issue explanations

Organisations working to become more sustainable will seek to ensure that relevant sustainability issues and stakeholder concerns are understood and acted on. The following list is intended to provide brief introduction and basic explanation of common sustainability issues. Many of the issues listed are highly complex. Where the issue is of particular relevance to your organisation or of concern to your stakeholders it is recommended you work with relevant stakeholders and organisations to understand the issue more fully and the range of perspectives about it. This list should not be considered exhaustive or definitive.

Sustainability Issue	Explanation/comment
Accidents or incidents	Unforeseen event that causes an adverse environmental, social or health impact. Risk evaluation and management can minimise the severity of the impacts.
Abuse or inhumane treatment	The threat or use of physical or verbal abuse, sexual or other harassment or intimidation of any kind in the work place.
Accessibility to key services	Communities need good access to facilities such as post offices, transport and medical help. The less accessible these become, the greater will be the disadvantages to vulnerable groups such as disabled people, older people and those living in poverty.
Air pollution	Pollution to air such as dust, particulate matter, gases from industrial processes and motor exhaust fumes that damage human health, the natural environment and quality of life.
Biodiversity	Biodiversity represents the richness and variety of plants, birds, animals and insects that exist throughout the world
Bribery and corruption	Offering, payment, soliciting or accepting bribes or substantial favours of any form to influence organisational relationships or contracts.
Child labour	Organisations recruiting or using children as labour. Ages where it is considered acceptable for children to work vary dependent on culture and location and advice should be sought. Child labour transition programmes should enable the child to attend and remain in quality education and ensure they get appropriate support in the transition to adulthood.
Community development	Organisations working with governments and the communities in which they operate, along with other relevant organisations to improve the educational, cultural, economic, social and environmental well being of those communities. See also social & community enterprise.
Compliance	Meeting the full requirements of legislation, standards or any other form of agreement governing sustainability issues such as the use of land, air and other resources, employment law, governance and finance. This applies at local, regional, national and international levels.

Contaminated Land	Pollution left in soil or over an area of land, such as from previous industrial activities on the site.
Conflicts of interest	Lack of accountability and transparency about the objectives of an individual or organization in other circumstances or roles that could lead to inappropriate decisions being made.
Crime, fear of crime	Unlawful acts or the threat of them, leading to a negative affect on people's quality of life, such as reducing people's ability to go out or live without intimidation.
Deduction of wages	Deduction of wages as punishment should not be permitted in sustainably managed organisations.
Directors' pay and unfair remuneration	The payment to Directors and other senior employees of salary, bonuses, compensation and other payments out of keeping with organisational performance or misaligned to remuneration of the full range of employees. This can have a destabilising effect on the workforce and other stakeholders, such as investors.
Diversity & opportunity	Ensuring equal opportunities for all in an organisation without unfair restrictions or barriers. Good practice in this area minimises workplace harassment, improves understanding between people, and helps an organisation 'fit' into its surroundings, matching its workforce and supplier mix to that of the locale.
Education for all/lifelong learning	Enabling people to adapt and update their skills. An educated workforce is a vital part of a successful economy. This also contributes to general social well-being.
Employee development	The provision of training and other opportunities for employees to improve their capabilities to benefit the individual, the organisation and society.
Unemployment	Lack of work for economically available people that can lead to demotivation, deprivation and social exclusion and can waste human resources. There is generally a net loss to the community from people who have lost the motivation or skills required to return to work.
Energy consumption	The use of non-renewable energy has widespread environmental impacts such as the emission of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas which creates global warming.
Environmental management systems	Systematised approaches to managing environmental impacts.
Ethics in communication	Ensuring that advertising, public relations, marketing and other forms of communication reflect sustainability ethics and values.

Fair competition	Avoiding collusion, price fixing, and working with suppliers or customers to create unfair advantages. Competition should boost quality and fair pricing, without unfairly disadvantaging other organizations.
Fair distribution of income/revenue	Obtaining a fair balance between taking profits and revenue out of the economies from which they were generated. Organisations should pay close attention to the geography of their monetary flows: between suppliers, customers, employees and so on.
Fair trade	Trade, especially involving small-scale producers, that does not put the producers at a disadvantage and ensures they receive a reasonable price for their products and can work in decent, healthy conditions. This must adequately cover all costs for sustainable production and provides them with enough income to develop their working conditions and business
Flexible Working	Any pattern of working which is different from a standard, traditional nine to five, 48 week per year, worked on an employer's premises. The huge variety of options include: shift work; working part-time; job share; home/teleworking; flexitime; school hours; term-time work; and many other possibilities.
Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining	The right of workers to join or form trade unions, of their own choosing and to bargain collectively for the protection of their interests. Where such rights are restricted under law, parallel means to facilitate such practices should be implemented.
Freedom to choose employment	Ensuring no use or support of practices resulting in forced or bonded labour, or in any form of involuntary servitude.
Greenhouse gas emissions and Global warming	Increasing levels of gases, including Carbon dioxide (CO ₂), in the atmosphere that effect the way the earth radiates heat back out from its surface. More greenhouse gases means that more radiated heat is trapped in the atmosphere. Like a greenhouse, this warms the air, in this case around the whole earth. This is resulting in significant changes to climatic patterns that are already affecting us and could have catastrophic consequences.
Habitat protection	Awareness of the ecological balance of an area so as not to disrupt the conditions needed for particular species. Habitat protection is essential to biodiversity. This holds many untapped medicinal and technological assets, and it provides amenity value to improve quality of life. Some species and ecosystems are particularly sensitive to disruption. Special attention should be given to high-risk sites e.g. the IUCN Red List.
Harassment	Any action, or remark which a person finds uncomfortable, intimidating, offensive, humiliating, embarrassing or that puts them at risk. Harassment is usually of the individual because of: sexual persuasion; gender; age; religious beliefs; disability; stature; role in an organisation; nationality, for example.
Health & Safety at work	Preventing people from being harmed by work or becoming ill by taking the right precautions - and providing a satisfactory working environment

Homelessness	People without regular accommodation. A sustainable society will reduce the instability arising from temporary accommodation and homelessness.
Intellectual and other property rights	The organisation will recognise and afford protection to the intellectual and property rights of both individuals and communities. The organisation will respect, in accordance with appropriate jurisdictions and laws, the rights of indigenous peoples.
Involvement in countries with records of human rights abuses	Supporting regimes that have poor human rights records may help sustain the practices. Such abuse is contrary to the International Declaration on Human Rights.
Living wage/Fair pay	Everyone, without discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. Organisations will ensure that worker remuneration meets legal or industry standards, which ever is highest, as a minimum to ensure their basic needs are met. All workers shall be provided with written and understandable information with respect to their wages and terms of employment.
Noise pollution	Excessive noise which causes annoyance, stress, sleep disturbance, and ultimately degradation in overall health.
Ozone layer depletion	The degradation of the Earth's protective layer of ozone in the high atmosphere by some industrial and domestic gases. Avoiding the use of such gases is crucial to avoid damage to health, such as skin cancer, from excessive ultraviolet radiation.
(High) Ozone levels	Not to be confused with ozone layer depletion. This normally relates to high levels of ozone at ground level generated by traffic, power-plants and factories. It can cause localised air pollution leading to breathing difficulties in susceptible people.
Partnerships	Working in cooperation with other organisations or individuals for mutual and wider benefits.
Philanthropy	Donations, involvement and partnerships with civil society, especially with those without commercial sources of income.
Poverty	Where people lack the means to meet their basic needs. Poverty threatens life and an individual's opportunity to contribute to the social and economic life of their community. Poor people are more vulnerable to exploitation ¹ .
Producer Responsibility	The responsibility of producers concerning the whole life-cycle of products and services. It is about obtaining maximum value from the products and service while minimising any negative impacts of their production, use or at their end of life. Producer Responsibility also relates to a series of legislation in European Countries.
Product impacts	Responsible use and disposal of products is becoming more and more the responsibility of the manufacturer. Selling services rather than products e.g. the provision of mobility rather than cars, is important to achieving effective use of finite resources.

¹There are varying views on how poverty should be defined. See for example <http://www2.geh.ox.ac.uk/pdf/gehwp/gehwps107.pdf>

Product obsolescence	The design of a product should account for environmental impacts as well as quality and resource efficiency. Making more with less and designing products to last or to be de-manufactured so the raw materials can be reused complements this approach.
Product labelling	The provision of adequate product information on sustainability impacts, especially safety, to allow consumers to make a reasoned judgement on whether to purchase them.
Radiation	Atomic changes that can be natural or artificially created, the results of which can cause damage to organisms.
Recycling	Reprocessing of a material to provide feedstock for other product. By increasing recycling we reduce the impact on the environment that receives our wastes - a sustainable society minimises, reuses, and recovers waste through recycling, composting, or energy recovery.
Regeneration and Rebuilding communities	Poverty and social marginalisation of people in deprived areas should be addressed to build communities to create jobs, fight crime, improve health, provide better and more affordable housing, educate people better, and improve local surroundings
Repatriation of profit	Where an organisation makes a profit abroad, it should achieve a fair balance of investment in the host country with repatriating business returns
Reputation	The perception of key stakeholders such as investors can be crucial to the success of a product or organisational strategy
Resource use	The use of (natural) resources to provide for our needs and wants. If not managed carefully, excessive resource use reduces our capacity to provide for our needs.
River water quality	As sources for drinking and industry, river water quality should be maintained. Looking after rivers will protect wildlife and improve recreational sites. Taking water out of rivers affects the ground water, flow, and quality.
Road traffic and congestion	It is crucial to get the balance right between road traffic's contribution to the economy and allowing people to travel whenever they want. But at the same time the quality of life and the environment must be preserved. Excess traffic creates negative impacts on health, safety, air quality, global warming, and social cohesion (keeping communities from being severed by rat-runs, noise, dangerous trunk roads, new-build roads etc.).
Social and community enterprise	Providing local services and bringing people together are crucial to moulding a sustainable society; enterprises take many forms, including community groups helping old people, time banks and other local exchange systems, and community businesses such as selling recycled furniture.
Supplier chain issues	Organisational responsibility for its indirect impacts of the suppliers, sub-contractors and vendors that are used. Organisations will understand the risk that such groups, through association pose to the economic viability of the business and will work with them to ensure that they meet the organisation's own standards.

Sustainable Construction	Sustainable construction is generally used to describe the application of sustainable development to the construction industry. This mainly concerns: regeneration planning communities to reduce car use using energy more efficiently minimising mineral extraction protection of the countryside provision of worker training
Tax laws and regulations	Organisations will understand the importance of their contribution to public finances of host countries through complying with all relevant legislation and making timely payments of taxes.
Visual intrusion	Loss of amenity - what we value from our surroundings - can be the result of buildings, roads or other developments on the landscape. Economic loss can occur if property prices are blighted by a visual intrusion.
Waste production and minimisation	The types of waste we produce, its transportation, and disposing of it all create environmental impacts. Waste is a potential resource and organisations should aim to reduce, reuse, recycling, compost and recover energy from it, in that order, following the waste management hierarchy.
Water use	There are limits to the availability of fresh water; even vulnerable parts of the UK can suffer from lack of water, which can damage wildlife and habitats. In developing countries lack of water is one of the most serious sustainability issues, and is strongly connected to additional social, health, economic and international security concerns.
Working conditions	Provision for all of just and decent working conditions and a safe and hygienic working environment to protect human health. Accidents and risks of injury to health from hazards inherent to the workplace are to be avoided.
Working hours	Organisations should ensure that work schedules are reasonable, such that workers are not required to work in excess of 48 hours a week on a regular basis (In Europe). The organisation should ensure that workers have sufficient rest and relaxation, including reasonable constraints on working hours and periods of paid holiday.
Work-life balance	Work-life balance ensures that everyone, regardless of age, race or gender or other needs can combine work with their other responsibilities or aspirations. Sustainable organisations are open to adjusting working patterns and providing flexibility in employment practices. This can help to increase productivity, attract the skilled, experienced and motivated staff needed and to retain them in a competitive market place.



About the SIGMA Project

The SIGMA Project - *Sustainability Integrated Guidelines for Management* was launched in 1999 with the support of the UK Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and is led by:

- British Standards Institution - the leading standards organisation
- Forum for the Future - a leading sustainability charity and think-tank
- AccountAbility - the international professional body for accountability.

The SIGMA project has developed the SIGMA Guidelines and a series of tools to provide clear, practical advice to organisations to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to sustainable development.

The SIGMA Guidelines consist of:

- a set of **Guiding Principles** that help organisations to understand sustainability and their contribution to it.
- a **Management Framework** that integrates sustainability issues into core processes and mainstream decision-making. It is structured into phases and sub-phases.

The SIGMA **Toolkit**, consists of targeted tools and approaches to help with specific management challenges, and case studies explaining how organisations have used the SIGMA Guidelines and Toolkit to tackle real issues.

More information including the full SIGMA Guidelines and the accompanying SIGMA Toolkit are available at: www.projectsigma.com.

