

Cerise+SPTF signature product is the Universal Standards for Social and Environmental Performance Management (“the Universal Standards”), a comprehensive manual of best practices. The Universal Standards help financial service providers put clients and the environment at the center of all strategic and operational decisions, and they show financial service providers how to align their policies and procedures with responsible business practices.

The Universal Standards were developed, tested, refined, and finalized by financial service providers all over the world, so they are highly practical. They do not just describe a vision or set forth high-level principles. Instead, the Universal Standards provide a clear roadmap that financial service providers can follow to achieve their goals. First launched in 2012 and now in their third edition, the Universal Standards have stood the test of time and proven relevant in many different geographic contexts, for many different institutional types.

The Universal Standards cover seven different dimensions of a financial institution’s operations—strategy, governance, client-centric product design, client protection, responsible human resource development, responsible growth and profits, and environmental performance management.

Financial service providers engage with social performance management at their own pace and according to their own priorities. There is no one place to begin. Typically, a financial institution will focus on the dimension(s) where they believe they have the greatest need, or where they have an opportunity for “quick wins,” meaning positive outcomes created by relatively simple and inexpensive changes.



Whether a financial service provider is interested in one dimension, several dimensions, or all of them, the Social and Environmental Performance journey follows four basic steps.

LEARN

The journey typically begins with downloading the Universal Standards and exploring the related items in the SPI Online Resource Center or following online trainings. Cerise+SPTF also publishes a monthly newsletter with relevant information and links to new resources related to social and environmental performance management.

ASSESS

Institutions use **SPI Online assessment tools** to evaluate strengths and weaknesses regarding overall social and environmental performance management. The tools are free and fully aligned to the Universal Standards. New users sometimes feel overwhelmed by the results of the initial assessment—they should not be. By design, the audit tools include every aspect of social and environmental performance management—that comprehensiveness helps providers to understand deeply what the approach is all about. It is perfectly reasonable to focus on a few practices at a time.

IMPROVE

Many resources are available to help providers put the Universal Standards into action. The Cerise+SPTF **Universal Standards Audit & Implementation Guide** walks users through how to assess and implement each of the Essential Practices contained in the Universal Standards. It also contains links to other useful industry resources. **The Resource Center on SPI Online**, which is organized around the Universal Standards, provides descriptions of, and links to, dozens of case studies, templates, tools, videos, and guidelines. During this step, it is important to be realistic. When implementation fails, it is often because the provider tries to do too much, too fast.

SHOW

There are many ways to demonstrate the results of your social and environmental performance practices, to both internal and external stakeholders. Cerise+SPTF has tools to help users create dashboard-style and other reporting tools. We manage the Client Protection Pathway which many impact investors use to help guide their investment decisions; interested financial service providers can join the Pathway and demonstrate their progress along its set trajectory. Many financial service providers also choose to commission a social rating from one of the agencies with specialized expertise in rating social and environmental performance management.

The Four Stages of Social and Environmental Performance Management



This is an ongoing process. You will find yourself repeating this journey as your own resources and priorities evolve, as we collectively improve our understanding of best practice, and as the world around us changes.

A decade of Leadership



Universal Standards for
Social and Environmental
Performance Management
10th
YEAR
ANNIVERSARY 2012–2022

After seven years of intensive global consultations, piloting, refining, and re-testing, the first edition of the Universal Standards was released in 2012. To celebrate the 10th anniversary in 2022, Cerise+SPTF interviewed stakeholders all over the world. Visit our 10th anniversary page to hear some of their insights.

"It's a lot of work to define common standards, but now we have something that everyone really trusts."



Andrée Simon
Global CEO, FINCA Impact Finance on SPTF's work to develop the Universal Standards

"It's a matter of having the right mindset . . . our main job is to develop our customers."



Edgardo Pérez Preciado
General Manager, Fundación Génesis Empresarial Member, SPTF Board of Directors

"The law is a teacher. Changing an industry's law changes its culture."



Allan Robert Sicat
Executive Director, Microfinance Council of the Philippines, Inc. (MCPI)

"The Universal Standards are a practical translation of the theory of change [that] make it more likely you achieve your social mission."



Lone Søndergaard
Senior Investment Manager, Nordic Microfinance Initiative

Ce que nous avons fait rapidement et obtenu également cette adhésion assez rapidement parce que nous avons vraiment présenté l'ensemble des Normes et tous les avantages auxquels notre institution pouvait recourir.



DJATTY Maurella Nadège
Directrice Générale Adjointe, FIDRA

Au départ, nos idées étaient floues. Mais avec l'avènement des Normes Universelles, nous avons eu la totalité des actions à mener pour pouvoir atteindre notre objectif du départ.



KOFFI A. Mélanie épouse BOSSON
Directrice Générale, Réseau MUCREFA

