

Summary of the 2015 Universal Standards Implementation Survey

Launched in 2012 by the Social Performance Task Force (SPTF), the Universal Standards for Social Performance Management (Universal Standards) are a comprehensive manual of best practices to help financial service providers put clients at the center of all strategic and operational decisions and align their policies and procedures with responsible business practices. Today, the Universal Standards are considered the globally accepted standards for strong social performance management practices in the inclusive finance sector.



For the last three years, the SPTF has partnered with the Global Appeal for Responsible Microfinance, the MIX -and for the first time in 2015- the Microcredit Summit Campaign to conduct an annual Universal Standards Implementation Survey. This survey helps the SPTF and its partners understand the state of implementation of the Universal Standards and related tools and initiatives, progresses and challenges in implementation, and identify the best ways in which to continue to promote and support stakeholders in the responsible inclusive finance sector in the implementation of best practices of social performance management.

The 2015 survey gathered 407 responses from all stakeholders in the sector. 60% of them were financial service providers (FSPs - including NGOs, banks, and non-bank financial institutions). 13% of respondents represented networks/associations and 8% represented investors.

The results show a continued increase in the awareness and implementation of the Universal Standards across stakeholder groups. 91% of respondents mentioned being “very familiar, familiar, or aware” of the Universal Standards and 82% found the Universal Standards to be “very helpful” or “helpful” to their institutions.

As in 2014, the SPTF website ranked #1 in terms of being “the place” where to look for information, tools and resources on social performance management. The Smart Campaign, MIX, and CGAP websites were also highly ranked. (SPTF’s #1 ranking increased from 58% to 71% in one year).

The SPI4 (social assessment tool aligned with the Universal Standards) showed significant increase in awareness, with 77% of respondents being “familiar, very familiar or aware” of it (vs. 66% the previous year).

Results also showed high influence of the Universal Standards in the practices of FSPs and significant progress in change in practices. **74% of FSPs noted the Universal**



Standards influenced the implementation of SPM practices and 47% mentioned having changed practices in their organization after learning about the Universal Standards.

Dimensions related to “defining and monitoring social goals” (Dimension 1) and “ensuring board, management, and employee commitment to social goals” (Dimension 2) were indicated as the ones where the Universal Standards had highest level of influence. The dimensions of the Universal Standards that have highest levels of current implementation by FSPs were indicated to be “treat clients responsibly” (Dimension 4) and “treat employees responsibly” (Dimension 5).

Results from networks/associations were also promising, with 96% being “very familiar, familiar, or aware” of the Universal Standards. 100% of those noted having discussed the Universal Standards with stakeholders in their region (vs. 90% in 2014).

Results from social investors were also very encouraging. **100% of social investors noted being “very familiar, familiar, or aware” of the Universal Standards** (vs. 91% in 2014). 64% mentioned having discussed the Universal Standards with their investees at least once or more than once in the last year. Another significant progress was the offering of preferential terms by investors to financial institutions demonstrating strong social performance commitment. In 2015, 50% of respondents noted offering preferential terms (vs. 32% the previous year).

Despite the bias inherent to this type of survey, these results show a very encouraging trend from financial service providers, networks and investors to implement the Universal Standards and put the end client at the center of their strategy and operations. For more information please visit www.sptf.info