

**BRIDGING THE SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING GAP: ISSB IMPLEMENTATION
AND ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS IN COLOMBIAN FIRMS**

**Angela María Vargas Ariza¹, Martha Janeth Bonilla Gómez²,
Mayeth Lizeth Durán Durán³**

¹Universidad de investigación y desarrollo UDI
avargas13@udi.edu.co

ORCID: 0000-0003-4146-0014

²Universidad de Investigación y Desarrollo UDI
mbonilla4@udi.edu.co

ORCID: 0000-0002-9536-854X

³Universidad Minuto de Dios

ORCID: 0009-0000-6229-1307

dmayethlizeth@gmail.com

Abstract

The growing demand for transparent sustainability reporting has increased global attention on the adoption of standardized frameworks. The standards issued by the International Sustainability Standards Board aim to improve the comparability and reliability of sustainability disclosures. However, their effective implementation remains a challenge, particularly in emerging economies where institutional and organizational conditions may differ significantly from those in developed markets.

This study analyzes the implementation gap of ISSB sustainability standards in Colombia by examining the perceptions and practices of corporate managers and accounting professionals. Using a sequential mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative survey data with qualitative insights to explore the relationship between awareness of sustainability standards and their practical adoption within organizations.

The findings reveal a significant perception–implementation gap: although professionals recognize the strategic relevance of sustainability reporting, many firms have not yet incorporated ISSB standards into their reporting processes. The results suggest that institutional factors, limited regulatory pressure, and organizational readiness may influence the pace of adoption.

This study contributes to the emerging literature on sustainability reporting by providing empirical evidence from a Latin American context and highlighting the challenges organizations face when transitioning toward globally harmonized sustainability reporting frameworks.

Keywords: Sustainability reporting; ISSB standards; Emerging economies; Corporate sustainability disclosure; Accounting professionals; Latin America.

1. Introducción

The global corporate reporting landscape is undergoing a paradigm shift, with sustainability disclosure transitioning from voluntary practice to fundamental component of financial markets (IFRS Foundation, 2023). The creation of the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) in 2021 marked a critical milestone by establishing a comprehensive global baseline for sustainability-related financial disclosures (ISSB, 2023a). The subsequent issuance of IFRS S1 and S2 in 2023 represents the most significant advancement to date in standardizing corporate reporting of climate-related risks and opportunities, aiming to meet the escalating information demands of capital market participants (ISSB, 2023b).

For emerging economies, the adoption of these standards constitutes not merely a technical compliance exercise but a strategic imperative to access global capital, enhance international competitiveness, and align with evolving best practices in corporate transparency (Amran and Keat Ooi, 2014; Deloitte, 2022). The institutionalization of sustainability reporting through ISSB standards reflects a broader transition toward what (Bebbington et al., 2019) term accounting for sustainable development, where financial and non-financial disclosures converge to provide a comprehensive view of organizational value creation.

However, the transition from global standard-setting to local implementation presents formidable challenges, particularly in emerging economies characterized by institutional voids and resource constraints (KPMG, 2023; Ng et al., 2023). A substantial implementation gap frequently emerges between advanced regulatory frameworks and actual corporate practices in these contexts (Sitorus and Febrianto, 2024). This gap manifests as persistently low adoption rates despite formal regulatory support, creating a critical disconnect between policy objectives and operational reality that undermines the potential benefits of standardized sustainability reporting (Adams, C.A., 2017). Understanding the determinants of this implementation gap is crucial for developing contextually appropriate strategies to bridge the divide between sustainability accounting standards and practice.

From a theoretical perspective, the challenges associated with the implementation of sustainability reporting standards in emerging economies can be interpreted through the lens of Institutional Theory. Organizations often adopt new practices due to coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures from regulators, professional bodies, and market expectations. However, in contexts where regulatory enforcement is still evolving, these pressures may not necessarily lead to effective implementation, generating a gap between awareness and actual adoption of sustainability reporting standards.

Colombia serves as an ideal case study for examining this implementation paradox. The country has developed one of Latin America's most advanced regulatory frameworks for

sustainability reporting, including Law 1901 of 2018 on Benefit and Collective Interest Corporations (BIC), Financial Superintendency External Circular 031 of 2021 mandating ESG disclosures for issuers, and Superintendency of Companies External Circular 100-000010 of 2023 establishing comprehensive sustainability reporting guidelines (Superintendencia Financiera de Colombia, 2021); (Superintendencia de Sociedades, 2023). This progressive regulatory environment stands in stark contrast to the operational reality faced by many Colombian enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that confront significant technical, financial, and cultural barriers to implementation (Cervera, 2022). This tension between advanced regulation and limited practical adoption makes Colombia a compelling case for understanding ISSB implementation challenges in emerging economies.

The existing literature on sustainability reporting implementation has predominantly focused on developed markets or examined single-stakeholder perspectives (Hahn and Kühnen, 2013; Millar and Slack, 2024). Few studies have employed mixed-methods approaches that simultaneously capture corporate and accounting professional perspectives, particularly in Latin American contexts (Hoyos Giraldo et al., 2024). This research addresses this gap by investigating ISSB standards adoption in Colombia through triangulated data from business managers and accounting professionals. The study addresses three research questions: (1) What is the current state of ISSB standards adoption among Colombian firms? (2) What factors explain the implementation gap between regulatory frameworks and corporate practice? (3) How do perceptions about ISSB benefits and challenges differ between firms and accounting professionals?

This study makes several contributions to the sustainability accounting literature. First, it provides novel empirical evidence on the implementation of ISSB standards in an emerging economy context, addressing calls for research beyond developed markets (Unerman et al., 2018). Second, it employs a unique methodological approach by triangulating perspectives from both reporting entities (firms) and reporting professionals (accountants), offering a more comprehensive understanding of implementation dynamics. Third, it identifies the perception-action disconnect as a critical barrier to adoption, extending institutional theory by demonstrating how cognitive factors mediate the relationship between regulatory pressure and organizational response. Finally, the study offers practical insights for policymakers, standard-setters, and professional bodies seeking to enhance sustainability reporting adoption in emerging economies.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we review the literature on sustainability standards implementation and develop our theoretical framework. Next, we describe the mixed-methods research design. We then present empirical findings regarding ISSB adoption patterns, barriers, and stakeholder perceptions. The discussion section analyzes these findings through institutional and resource-based theoretical lenses, followed by conclusions that outline theoretical contributions, practical implications, and future research directions.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides empirical evidence on the implementation gap of ISSB standards in an emerging economy. Second, it analyzes the perceptions of both corporate managers and accounting professionals, offering a broader perspective on sustainability reporting adoption. Third, it contributes to the understanding of institutional and organizational factors influencing the transition toward globally harmonized sustainability reporting frameworks.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Sustainability Reporting Standards

Sustainability reporting has evolved from voluntary, fragmented initiatives toward globally standardized reporting schemes (Hahn and Kühnen, 2013). The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) emerged as the dominant framework for sustainability reporting with a multi-stakeholder approach, emphasizing organizational impact on economy, environment, and society (Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), 2023). Parallely, the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) developed a framework specifically focused on climate-related risks and opportunities, structured around governance, strategy, risk management, and metrics and objectives (Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), 2017). Complementarily, the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) established sector-specific standards designed to provide financially material information to investors (SASB, 2018).

The creation of the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) in 2021 under the IFRS Foundation marked a turning point toward global consolidation and harmonization (IFRS Foundation, 2023). The ISSB built upon the work of these initiatives, particularly incorporating TCFD recommendations and SASB standards. The IFRS S1 and S2 Standards, issued in 2023, represent the most comprehensive attempt to date to create a global baseline for sustainability-related financial disclosures, with a primary focus on meeting capital market participants' information needs (ISSB, 2023b, 2023a). This evolution reflects what (Bebbington et al., 2019) describe as the financialization of sustainability reporting, where environmental and social information becomes increasingly integrated into mainstream financial reporting channels.

2.2 The Colombian Regulatory Context: An Advanced Framework in an Emerging Economy

Colombia has progressively developed one of Latin America's most advanced regulatory frameworks for sustainability reporting (Hoyos Giraldo et al., 2024). Law 1901 of 2018 established Benefit and Collective Interest Corporations (BIC), creating for the first time a corporate type that formally integrates social and environmental purpose into its corporate

objective, requiring impact assessment across five dimensions: business model, corporate governance, labor practices, environmental practices, and community engagement.

A significant advancement came with Financial Superintendency External Circular 031 of 2021, which mandated that securities issuers disclose information on social, environmental, and climate matters, explicitly adopting TCFD and SASB frameworks (Superintendencia Financiera de Colombia, 2021). This circular represented a fundamental shift by establishing the financial materiality of ESG factors in local capital markets and aligning Colombian corporate reporting with prevailing international standards.

Subsequently, Superintendency of Companies External Circular 100-000010 of 2023 extended these requirements to a broader universe of supervised companies, requiring submission of structured sustainability reports and designating responsible officers (Superintendencia de Sociedades, 2023). This progressive regulatory evolution creates an ideal scenario for studying ISSB implementation, as IFRS S1 and S2 find theoretically prepared ground, making research on practical obstacles that persist despite this advanced regulatory framework particularly relevant.

2.3 Implementation Challenges in Emerging Economies: Empirical Evidence

Specialized literature identifies multiple persistent barriers to effective adoption of sustainability standards in emerging economies (Amran and Keat Ooi, 2014). Technical capacity limitations appear as the most significant obstacle, particularly the scarcity of professionals trained in ESG measurement and reporting methodologies (Sitorus and Febrianto, 2024). Implementation costs represent another critical barrier, especially for small and medium enterprises operating with reduced margins and limited resources (KPMG, 2023).

The technical complexity of standards and lack of accessible tools for non-specialized companies hinder widespread adoption (Cervera, 2022). Additionally, challenges related to data quality and availability persist, particularly for metrics such as Scope 3 emissions and other indirect impacts throughout the value chain (Hoyos Giraldo et al., 2024). Research also identifies cultural and organizational disconnects, where sustainability continues to be perceived as a separate function rather than integrated into business core and decision-making (López-Santamaría et al., 2021). These challenges reflect what (Ng et al., 2023) term the compliance-implementation gap in emerging economy sustainability reporting.

2.4. The Critical Role of Accounting Professionals in the Transition

Successful implementation of ISSB standards critically depends on public accountants' participation (Millar and Slack, 2024). Literature recognizes their fundamental role in multiple dimensions: integrating financial and non-financial information, developing internal control

systems for ESG data, applying professional judgment to determine materiality, and ensuring report credibility through assurance processes (Hoyos Giraldo et al., 2024).

However, recent research identifies significant gaps in the accounting profession's preparation to assume this expanded role (Unerman et al., 2018). Deficiencies persist in specialized ESG training, limitations in understanding sustainability frameworks, and resistance to expanding the traditional accountant's role beyond purely financial information (Cervera, 2022). Overcoming these barriers is essential to enabling effective ISSB standards implementation in the Colombian context.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two complementary theoretical perspectives that provide analytical lenses for understanding implementation barriers:

Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) Examines how isomorphic pressures influence organizational practice adoption. Coercive pressures (regulations such as Circulars 031 and 100-000010) establish formal mandates. Normative pressures (professional standards, accounting education) create compliance expectations. Mimetic pressures (imitation of sector leaders) generate followership dynamics. In the Colombian context, we analyze how the interaction of these pressures explains divergences between the advanced regulatory framework and limited implementation.

Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) Considers ISSB standards implementation as an organizational capability requiring valuable, scarce, and difficult-to-imitate resources. Differences in financial resources (investment capacity), human capital (ESG technical knowledge), technological resources (information systems), and organizational capabilities (processes, structures) explain adoption capacity variations among firms, particularly between large corporations and SMEs.

2.6 Identified Literature Gaps and Study Contribution

The literature review evidences significant voids in existing research. First, empirical studies simultaneously capturing firm and accounting professional perspectives in the specific context of ISSB implementation are scarce. Second, limited evidence explains why an advanced regulatory framework's existence doesn't automatically translate into high adoption, particularly in emerging economies with specific institutional characteristics. Third, greater research is required on differentiated adoption dynamics between large firms and SMEs, and specific factors enabling or inhibiting implementation in each segment.

The adoption of sustainability reporting standards is also closely related to the search for organizational legitimacy. According to Legitimacy Theory, companies disclose environmental and social information to demonstrate that their activities are aligned with

societal expectations. In this sense, the implementation of sustainability standards such as those promoted by the International Sustainability Standards Board may serve not only as a compliance mechanism but also as a strategy to strengthen corporate credibility and stakeholder trust.

Additionally, Stakeholder Theory suggests that organizations respond to the expectations of multiple interest groups, including investors, regulators, and society. The growing demand for transparent sustainability information has therefore increased pressure on firms to adopt standardized reporting frameworks.

This study seeks to contribute to closing these gaps by: (1) providing triangulated empirical evidence from Colombia capturing both corporate and accounting professional perspectives; (2) analyzing determining factors of implementation barriers in an advanced regulatory framework context; and (3) identifying differentiated strategies to facilitate transition toward ISSB-aligned reporting across different organization types.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (QUAN → QUAL) following established methodological frameworks (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The initial quantitative phase collected and analyzed survey data from firms and accountants to establish the general state of ISSB adoption. The subsequent qualitative phase, based on documentary analysis of regulations and literature, provided depth and context to quantitative findings. This approach enables comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon, combining quantitative data generalizability with qualitative depth and context (Molina-Azorin, 2016)

The research strategy is non-experimental and cross-sectional, observing and analyzing variables without manipulation at a specific point in time. This design is particularly appropriate for investigating complex organizational phenomena where quantitative patterns require qualitative contextualization (Harrison et al., 2020)

3.2 Population and Sampling

The study employed a non-probabilistic sampling strategy combining convenience and snowball techniques to access two target populations: (1) formally constituted Colombian companies, with emphasis on the Santander region, and (2) legally authorized public accountants practicing in Colombia.

According to official registries (Cámara de Comercio de Bucaramanga, 2023; Junta Central de Accountants, 2025), the theoretical populations comprised approximately 98,081 active enterprises in Santander and 334,685 accountants nationwide. The final sample included 22 firms and 50 accounting professionals who met the inclusion criteria of active operations and relevant professional experience.

Table 1. Sample Characterization firms

Firms	Frequency	Percentage
<i>By size</i>		
Micro-enterprise	16	73%
SME	6	27%
<i>By location</i>		
Santander	18	82%
Other regions	4	18%

Source: Author's own work

Table 2. Sample Characterization accountants

	Accountants	Frequency	Percentage
By sector of advice	Services and Commerce	34	68%
	Public Sector	9	18%
	Industrial	5	10%
	Financial/Other	2	4%
By experience	Less than 5 Years	11	22%
	5-10 Years	10	20%
	11-20 Years	16	32%
	More than 20 Years	13	26%

Source: Author's own work

We acknowledge the non-probabilistic nature of the sampling as a limitation for statistical generalization. However, the strategy was appropriate for this exploratory mixed-methods study seeking in-depth understanding of an emerging phenomenon in sustainability accounting (Molina-Azorin, 2016). The sample composition reflects the Colombian business ecosystem's structure, with predominance of micro-enterprises and broad sectoral representation among accounting professionals.

3.3. Sample considerations

Although the sample size may appear relatively limited, it reflects the exploratory nature of this study and the emerging stage of sustainability reporting implementation in the national context. Given that the adoption of standards promoted by the International Sustainability Standards Board is still recent, access to professionals with direct knowledge of these processes remains limited. Therefore, the sample focuses on respondents with relevant experience in financial and reporting practices.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data collection employed two principal instruments:

Survey for firm managers/representatives: We utilized a structured 20-question questionnaire including closed multiple-choice questions and Likert scales to assess adoption status, motivations, challenges, perceived impacts, and preparedness level regarding ISSB standards.

Survey for public accountants: We applied an 18-question questionnaire investigating knowledge of IFRS S1 and S2, adoption status in advised organizations, implementation difficulties, perceptions about impact and benefits, and professional role.

Both questionnaires design was grounded in constructs identified in literature review, particularly ISSB standards dimensions of governance, strategy, risk management, and metrics & objectives, as well as implementation barriers documented for emerging economies. Questionnaire development followed established scale development procedures (Hinkin, 1998) ensuring content validity through expert review and pilot testing.

Both instruments were validated through expert judgment and pilot testing to ensure question clarity and relevance. Expert validation involved three accounting professors and two sustainability reporting practitioners, while pilot testing included five firms and ten accountants not included in the final sample.

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

For quantitative data analysis, we employed univariate descriptive statistics, calculating frequencies, percentages, and central tendency measures to characterize each study variable independently. Quantitative data processing utilized Microsoft Excel, while qualitative analysis employed thematic content analysis of relevant regulations and academic literature.

Results were graphically represented through contingency tables and bar charts, facilitating visualization of principal distributions and patterns. Analysis was complemented with descriptive cross-comparison between the two study groups (firms and accountants), identifying convergence points, divergences, and tensions in their perceptions about ISSB standards adoption.

Qualitative data, derived from documentary review of national and international regulations and academic literature, were analyzed through thematic content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) This process involved systematic coding and categorization of information into predefined themes including: regulatory framework, implementation barriers, and professional role, enabling contextualization and enrichment of quantitative findings interpretation.

Finally, we applied methodological triangulation integrating findings from three data sources: firm surveys, accountant surveys, and documentary analysis. This strategy enabled contrasting and validating results consistency, strengthening interpretations, and providing comprehensive, nuanced understanding of the study phenomenon, thus ensuring research validity and reliability (Flick, 2018)

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles for social science research. All participants provided informed consent, were informed about research objectives, and were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Data were collected and stored following General Data Protection Regulation principles, with participants retaining right to withdraw at any stage.

Results .4

4.1 State of ISSB Standards Adoption

The analysis of adoption status reveals a critical implementation gap between Colombia's advanced regulatory framework and the operational reality of firms and accounting professionals. Results, synthesized in Table 3, quantify this gap while exposing underlying dynamics regarding corporate sustainability prioritization in the Colombian context.

Table 3. *State of ISSB Standards Adoption (IFRS S1 and S2)*

Group	Not Started	Under Evaluation	In Implementation	Completed
Firms (n=22)	82% (18)	5% (1)	9% (2)	5% (1)
Accountants (n=50)	58% (29)	16% (8)	12% (6)	4% (2)

Source: Author's own work

The most compelling finding is the predominance of "Not Started" status across both groups, though with a revealing disparity: while 82% of firms report total inactivity, this percentage decreases to 58% among accountants. This 24-percentage-point difference suggests accounting professionals possess greater visibility or anticipation regarding adoption processes in organizations they advise. The overwhelming corporate inactivity (82%) appears paradoxical considering Colombia's advanced regulatory framework, indicating that mere regulatory existence is insufficient to drive implementation.

The "Under Evaluation" phase shows the most significant divergence beyond inactivity: only 5% of firms are evaluating the standards, compared to 16% of accountants. This 11-percentage-point gap indicates accountants are proactively driving evaluation of these standards, possibly responding to regulatory or market signals, even before firms formalize their commitment. This finding highlights accountants' role as change catalysts in the transition toward sustainability reporting.

Active implementation phases confirm the incipient state of adoption. Nine percent of firms and 12% of accountants report being in implementation process, while only 5% of firms and 4% of accountants indicate having completed implementation. These marginal percentages suggest Colombian organizations are in the earliest stages of the innovation adoption cycle (Rogers et al., 2019), with a minimal group of "early adopters."

Disaggregated analysis by size reveals a concerning pattern non-adoption reaches its maximum in micro-enterprises (94% not started), while SMEs show relative advancement (67% not started). This inversely proportional gradient between size and adoption capacity reflects structural inequalities in Colombia's business ecosystem. Micro-enterprises face a double burden fewer financial and technical resources, coupled with less immediate regulatory pressure, creating exclusion risk from sustainable capital markets.

Among accountants, those advising the financial sector report greatest implementation advances, while those in services/commerce present lowest rates. This sectoral divergence reflects differentiated stakeholder pressure: the financial sector faces greater scrutiny from international investors and stricter compliance requirements, accelerating its transition toward global standards.

4.2. Principal Barriers and Facilitators

ISSB standards implementation in Colombia faces multifaceted challenges, characterized by notable asymmetry in barrier perception between firms and accountants, suggesting fragmented problem diagnosis.

Table 4. Principal Barriers for ISSB Standards Implementation

Barrier	Firms	Accountants
Lack of technical knowledge	7%	86%
Budgetary limitations	7%	30%
Regulatory/technical complexity	7%	48%
Cultural resistance to change	7%	38%
Lack of technological tools	0%	18%
Absence of clear regulation	0%	48%
Not implemented	67%	-

Source: Author's own work

The most significant divergence emerges in identifying lack of technical knowledge as the principal barrier. While 86% of accountants identify this as the fundamental obstacle, only 7% of firms recognize it. This 79-percentage-point discrepancy reveals a structural disconnection in understanding implementation requirements: firms appear to underestimate ISSB standards' technical complexity, possibly perceiving them as natural extensions of

existing sustainability reports, while accountants, with greater exposure to technical details, recognize required specialized competencies.

- Capacity barrier (86%): Lack of technical knowledge emerges as the primary bottleneck, evidencing critical specialized capacity deficits.
- Regulatory barriers (48%): Absence of clear regulation and technical complexity constitute a second critical tier.
- Cultural barriers (38%): Organizational change resistance represents a significant but secondary challenge.
- Economic barriers (30%): Budgetary limitations, while important, are not perceived as the principal impediment.

This hierarchy suggests that, even with sufficient financial resources, implementation would be hindered by capacity gaps and regulatory clarity issues. Additionally, 67% of firms reporting "Not implemented" as primary response, rather than identifying specific barriers, indicates a pre-contemplation or reflective inactivity state. This contrasts markedly with accountants' ability to diagnose specific obstacles, suggesting firms might not have advanced sufficiently in the process to concretely encounter and recognize these barriers..

Accountants identify specific, hierarchized solutions:

- Specialized training (94%): Nearly all professionals recognize the need for specific technical training.
- Economic incentives (46%): Nearly half of accountants consider fiscal or financial stimuli crucial.
- Regulatory clarity (44%): Issuance of clear technical guidelines by regulatory entities is perceived as a key facilitator.

Among firms that have initiated adoption, motivations distribute more evenly among corporate reputation (28%), social responsibility (28%), market demand (22%), and internal conviction (22%), suggesting no single predominant driver exists, but rather a combination of factors acting collectively.

Readiness self-assessment reveals a dual capacity gap both firms and accountants predominantly perceive themselves as unprepared (90% and 72% respectively in low or very low levels). This congruence in self-perceived technical insufficiency, despite divergence in barrier identification, reinforces the premise that capacity development constitutes the central challenge for transition toward ISSB-aligned reporting in Colombia.

4.3. Perception Gaps Between Firms and Accountants

Comparative analysis reveals significant discrepancies in impact and benefit perceptions between firms and accountants, suggesting different understanding levels and expectations regarding ISSB standards adoption.

Table 5. Perceived Impact of ISSB Adoption on Information Transparency

Group	No Impact/Not Applicable	Moderate Impact	High Impact
Firms	82%	14%	5%
Accountants	6%	32%	62%

Source: Author's own work

The most notable discrepancy emerges in perceiving impact on information transparency. While 82% of firms perceive no impact (consistent with their non-implementation), only 6% of accountants share this view. Conversely, 94% of accountants anticipate moderate or high impacts (32% + 62%), compared to only 19% of firms (14% + 5%). This 75-percentage-point gap indicates accountants possess more sophisticated understanding of ISSB standards' transformative potential, while firms systematically underestimate their strategic value.

The fact that 62% of accountants expect high impacts (versus only 5% of firms) suggests professionals visualize ISSB as fundamental tools for market trust generation, while firms possibly perceive them as bureaucratic requirements.

The pattern repeats in stakeholder accountability, where again 82% of firms report no impact, versus 28% of accountants. Most accountants (72%) foresee improvements in accountability, suggesting they visualize ISSB as tools for strengthening stakeholder relationships, while firms possibly perceive them as additional bureaucratic requirements.

Table 6. Perceived Impact on Stakeholder Accountability

Group	No Change/Not Applicable	Minimal Change	Moderate Change	Significant Change
Firms	82%	5%	9%	5%
Accountants	8%	20%	48%	24%

Source: Author's own work

In accountability, the misalignment pattern persists: 82% of firms report no change, versus 8% of accountants. Most accountants (72%) foresee moderate or significant improvements, suggesting they visualize ISSB as tools for strengthening stakeholder relationships and managing expectations, while firms fail to recognize this potential.

Table 7. Perceived Impact on Corporate Reputation

Group	No Effect/Not Applicable	Slight Improvement	Moderate Improvement	Significant Improvement
Firms	86%	5%	5%	5%
Accountants	10%	24%	44%	22%

Source: Author's own work

Perception regarding reputational impact reveals the most dramatic gap: 86% of firms anticipate no improvements, while 90% of accountants foresee slight to significant improvements. This divergence suggests accountants better understand how ESG transparency translates into reputational capital in globalized markets, while firms underestimate the link between standardized reporting and competitive advantage.

These gaps are not mere statistical differences but symptoms of a critical ESG maturity disconnect:

- Awareness barrier: Firms fail to visualize ISSB standards' strategic value, perceiving them as costs rather than investments.
- Accountant's role as change agent: Accountants emerge as potential catalysts for closing this gap, given their superior understanding of benefits.
- Competitive disadvantage risk: Corporate underestimation could generate adoption delays, affecting international competitiveness.

The marked divergence in perceptions (62% versus 5% in high transparency impact) represents not only an informational barrier but a threat to effective ISSB standards implementation in Colombia, requiring specific interventions to align expectations and demonstrate these standards' tangible value.

4.4. Perceived Impact on Transparency and Competitiveness

International sustainability standards adoption represents a strategic inflection point for business competitiveness in emerging economies. However, results reveal a critical disconnect between ISSB standards' transformative potential and predominant perception in Colombia's business sector. This section analyzes how firms and accountants perceive ISSB impact on organizational performance dimensions, evidencing gaps that could affect Colombia's competitive position in global markets.

Analysis focuses on two interrelated dimensions external competitiveness (market and financing access) and internal capabilities (risk management and processes), where divergent perceptions between firms and accountants suggest different preparedness levels for transitioning toward standardized sustainability reporting.

Table 8. Perceived Impact on Competitiveness and Market Access

Variable	Group	No Influence/Not Applicable	Slight Influence	Moderate Influence	High Influence
Financing and market access	Firms	82%	9%	5%	5%
	Accountants	18%	30%	36%	16%
Competitive advantage	Firms	86%	5%	5%	5%
	Accountants	18%	42%	32%	8%

Source: Author's own work

Perception regarding international financing and market access shows one of the most critical gaps: while 82% of firms visualize no influence, only 18% of accountants share this vision. Conversely, 52% of accountants (36% + 16%) anticipate moderate or high influence on market access, versus a marginal 10% of firms.

This 42-percentage-point divergence indicates accountants understand ISSB's role as access credentials to sustainable capital and global markets, while firms remain disconnected from this strategic reality. The fact that only 5% of firms expect high influence suggests widespread underestimation of standards' value as entry keys to international value chains.

In competitive advantage, the gap persists: 86% of firms identify no competitive value, versus 18% of accountants. Most accountants (74%) consider ISSB represent partial or significant competitive advantage, reflecting their understanding of how ESG transparency translates into market differentiation.

However, it is revealing that only 8% of accountants visualize significant advantage, suggesting even the most optimistic professionals recognize limitations in Colombia's current context, possibly related to market immaturity or absence of specific stakeholder demands.

Table 9. *Expected Strategic Benefits with ISSB Adoption*

Benefit	Firms	Accountants
Greater sustainable investment access	30%	44%
Corporate reputation strengthening	27%	Not applicable
Climate risk management improvement	13%	68%
Internal process optimization	13%	Not applicable
Anticipated regulatory compliance	9%	Not applicable
Strategic decision-making improvement	9%	Not applicable

Source: Author's own work

Expected benefits analysis reveals distinct temporal approaches firms prioritize more immediate, tangible benefits (investment access 30%, reputation 27%), while accountants emphasize structural, long-term benefits (risk management 68%, internal processes 68%).

This difference suggests firms operate with transactional mentality (what do I get in return?), while accountants adopt transformational perspective (how do I improve my organization?).

These findings convergence paints concerning panorama for Colombian firms' international competitiveness:

1. Exclusion risk: ISSB value underestimation could marginalize Colombian firms from global supply chains and sustainable financing sources.
2. Opportunity loss: While regional competitors (like Brazil) advance in mandatory adoption, Colombian inaction could translate into comparative advantage loss.
3. Internal competitive gap: Early-adopting firms (current 14%) could consolidate dominant positions in their sectors, widening business ecosystem inequalities.

The marked divergence in competitive impact perception reflects not simply different information levels but distinct strategic mentalities regarding sustainability's role in value creation. Unless this cognitive gap closes, regulatory and technical efforts to drive ISSB adoption will encounter fundamental resistances in Colombia's business culture.

5. Discussion

This study reveals a critical implementation paradox in the Colombian context while the country has developed an advanced regulatory framework for sustainability reporting, ISSB standards adoption remains stalled in incipient stages, with 82% of firms not having initiated the process. This gap between policy and practice represents a fundamental challenge for sustainability accounting in emerging economies that warrants interpretation through theoretical lenses and existing literature.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

The findings strongly support the relevance of our integrated theoretical framework. From an institutional theory perspective (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), the results demonstrate that coercive pressures represented by Colombia's advanced regulatory framework have been insufficient to drive implementation. This suggests that normative pressures particularly those related to professional capacity building and mimetic pressures involving imitation of sector leaders are equally crucial in this context. The significant perception gap between accountants and firms, where 62% of the former anticipate high transparency impact versus only 5% of the latter, reflects different levels of exposure and internalization of these institutional pressures. Accountants, through their professional networks and continuing education, appear more attuned to normative expectations regarding sustainability reporting, while firms remain largely influenced by immediate coercive requirements.

From a resource-based view (Barney, 1991), ISSB implementation emerges as a dynamic capability requiring specific resources where intangible assets particularly technical knowledge constitute the primary implementation bottleneck. The identification of technical capacity limitations as the principal barrier (identified by 86% of accountants) corroborates that in emerging economy contexts like Colombia, human capital deficiencies outweigh financial constraints as implementation inhibitors. This finding extends the resource-based view by demonstrating how capability gaps in sustainability reporting can create competitive disadvantages even when firms possess adequate financial resources.

5.2 Contributions to Sustainability Accounting Literature

This study extends the sustainability reporting implementation literature in several significant dimensions. First, it provides unique empirical evidence on the firm-accountant perception gap, a phenomenon insufficiently documented in existing literature. While accountants visualize ISSB as strategic tools (90% anticipate reputational improvements), firms

predominantly perceive them as compliance burdens (86% visualize no impact). This fundamental divergence suggests that implementation efforts must address not only technical capacities but also cognitive gaps in understanding these standards' strategic value. This finding contributes to recent literature examining cognitive barriers in sustainability accounting adoption (Amran and Keat Ooi, 2014).

Second, the study identifies a size-based adoption pattern where micro-enterprises (with 94% non-adoption) face structural disadvantages that could exacerbate existing inequalities in Colombia's business ecosystem. This finding contributes to emerging literature on differentiated ESG capabilities in emerging economies (Hoyos Giraldo et al., 2024), highlighting how sustainability reporting requirements may inadvertently disadvantage smaller enterprises unless accompanied by targeted support mechanisms.

Third, the research demonstrates that advanced regulatory framework existence constitutes a necessary but insufficient condition for effective adoption, challenging predominant assumptions in regulatory policy literature that often presume a direct relationship between regulation and implementation. This finding aligns with recent studies questioning the "compliance-implementation gap" in emerging economy sustainability governance (Sitorus and Febrianto, 2024).

The findings of this study reveal a notable perception–implementation gap regarding sustainability standards. While accounting professionals recognize the strategic importance of these frameworks, many organizations have not yet incorporated them into their reporting practices. From an institutional perspective, this gap may reflect weak coercive pressures or limited regulatory enforcement in emerging economies. As a result, awareness does not necessarily translate into concrete implementation.

These findings are consistent with prior research suggesting that sustainability reporting adoption often occurs gradually as regulatory, normative, and market pressures intensify.

5.3 Practical Implications for Accounting Professionals

The findings highlight important implications for accounting practice. The study reveals accountants' potential transformative role as bridges between global standards and local practice. Accountants' greater benefit anticipation (52% versus 10% of firms regarding market access) suggests these professionals can act as crucial change agents in transitioning toward standardized reporting. However, their self-assessed low preparedness (72% in low or very low levels) indicates urgent need for continuing professional development in sustainability accounting, particularly regarding ISSB standards' technical aspects.

This professional capacity gap presents both a challenge and opportunity for accounting education and professional bodies. As (Millar and Slack, 2024) note, accounting professionals' evolving role in sustainability reporting requires not only technical knowledge but also

strategic advisory capabilities. Our findings suggest Colombian accountants recognize this expanded role but lack adequate preparation, highlighting the need for curriculum reforms and professional development programs focused on sustainability accounting competencies.

5.4 Policy and Regulatory Implications

The study reveals critical insights for policymakers and regulators. The minimal adoption despite advanced regulation suggests that regulatory pressure alone cannot drive implementation in emerging economy contexts characterized by capacity constraints and competing priorities. This finding supports calls for more nuanced policy approaches that combine regulation with capacity building and economic incentives (Adams, C.A, 2017)

The pronounced sectoral divergence in adoption rates with financial sector showing greatest advancement suggests that stakeholder pressure differentials significantly influence implementation readiness. This implies that policies might need sector-specific approaches, with stricter requirements for sectors facing greater international scrutiny while providing more gradual transition pathways for others.

The size-based implementation gradient indicates that standardized approaches may disadvantage smaller enterprises, suggesting the need for differentiated implementation timelines, simplified reporting requirements for micro-enterprises and SMEs, and targeted support programs. These findings align with recent literature advocating proportional approaches to sustainability reporting regulation (Bebbington et al., 2019).

5.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While providing valuable insights, this study presents limitations suggesting future research directions. The sample size and regional focus limit statistical generalization, opening space for studies with broader, nationally representative samples. Future research could develop longitudinal studies capturing ISSB adoption evolution over time, particularly as Colombia moves toward mandatory implementation.

The identified perception-action disconnect warrants deeper investigation into its underlying causes. Qualitative studies exploring cognitive, cultural, and organizational factors influencing ISSB perception could provide richer understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, comparative studies between Colombia and other Latin American countries with different regulatory approaches could yield insights into effective implementation strategies.

Research examining technological solutions for facilitating ISSB implementation particularly for resource-constrained SMEs represents another promising direction. Studies exploring how emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and blockchain can reduce implementation costs and complexity could provide practical solutions for emerging economy contexts.

Finally, investigation into effective multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms for coordinating ISSB implementation involving regulators, professional bodies, educational institutions, and business associations could yield valuable insights for policymakers seeking to bridge the normative-practice divide in sustainability reporting.

5.6 Managerial Implications

This study presents several limitations. The sample size is limited to professionals within the Colombian context, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other emerging economies. Future research could expand the analysis to comparative studies across Latin American countries or explore longitudinal data to evaluate how ISSB adoption evolves over time.

Conclusions 6

6.1 Summary of Main Findings

This study provides compelling evidence of a significant implementation gap in ISSB standards adoption within the Colombian context, characterized by three principal findings. First, we document overwhelming corporate inactivity, with 82% of surveyed firms not having initiated ISSB adoption despite Colombia's advanced regulatory framework for sustainability reporting. Second, we identify a critical perception-action disconnect: while 86% of accounting professionals recognize technical capacity limitations as the primary implementation barrier, only 7% of firms acknowledge this challenge, revealing a 79-percentage-point cognitive gap regarding implementation requirements. Third, we observe a size-based adoption gradient where micro-enterprises show 94% non-adoption rates compared to 67% for SMEs, highlighting structural inequalities in sustainability reporting capabilities within Colombia's business ecosystem.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

This research makes several contributions to sustainability accounting theory. First, it extends institutional theory by demonstrating how normative pressures (professional standards and education) and mimetic pressures (industry leader imitation) mediate the relationship between coercive regulatory pressures and organizational adoption behavior in emerging economy contexts. The significant divergence in ISSB perceptions between accounting professionals (exposed to normative pressures through professional networks) and corporate managers (primarily responsive to coercive pressures) illustrates how different stakeholder groups experience and respond to institutional pressures differently.

Second, the study advances resource-based view applications in sustainability accounting by identifying technical knowledge rather than financial resources as the primary implementation bottleneck. This finding challenges conventional assumptions that financial

constraints predominantly hinder sustainability initiatives in emerging economies, instead highlighting the critical role of intangible capabilities in sustainability reporting adoption.

Third, the research contributes to innovation diffusion theory by documenting how Colombia's business sector occupies the earliest stages of (Rogers et al., 2019) adoption curve, with only minimal early adopters (14% combined) having progressed beyond initial evaluation phases.

6.3 Practical Implications

The findings yield important implications for multiple stakeholders:

For regulators and policymakers:

- Develop sector-specific implementation roadmaps with differentiated transition periods based on enterprise size and sector characteristics
- Establish economic incentives for early adopters, particularly targeting SMEs through tax benefits or preferential financing
- Create technical training programs specifically designed for accounting professionals, focusing on ISSB standards' practical application
- Implement simplified reporting frameworks for micro-enterprises to prevent exclusion from sustainable finance markets

For the accounting profession:

- Prioritize development of sustainability accounting competencies through curriculum reform and continuing professional education
- Assume proactive roles in educating corporate clients about ISSB standards' strategic value beyond compliance requirements
- Develop context-appropriate tools and methodologies for ISSB implementation in Colombian business environments
- Strengthen professional networks to facilitate knowledge sharing and best practice dissemination

For business organizations:

- Reconfigure sustainability reporting from compliance exercise to strategic component of value creation and competitive positioning
- Invest in internal capacity building for ESG reporting, particularly technical skills development

- Establish strategic partnerships with accounting professionals to facilitate ISSB implementation
- Leverage sustainability reporting for improved stakeholder engagement and market differentiation

Implications for policy and practice

- The results suggest that policymakers and regulatory bodies may need to strengthen guidance, training, and enforcement mechanisms to facilitate the effective adoption of sustainability reporting standards.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study acknowledges several limitations that suggest fruitful research directions. The non-probabilistic sampling strategy and regional focus restrict statistical generalizability, indicating need for broader nationally representative studies. Future research should develop longitudinal designs capturing ISSB adoption evolution as Colombia progresses toward mandatory implementation, particularly examining how perception gaps evolve with increased regulatory pressure and market maturation.

Comparative studies across Latin American countries with varying regulatory approaches could yield insights into effective implementation strategies. Research examining technological solutions particularly artificial intelligence and blockchain applications for streamlining sustainability data collection and reporting could address identified capacity constraints. Finally, investigation of multi-stakeholder governance models for coordinating ISSB implementation among regulators, professional bodies, educational institutions, and business associations represents another promising direction.

Referencias bibliográficas .6

Adams, C.A. (2017) The Sustainable Development Goals, integrated thinking and the integrated report. ICAS. Available at: <https://www.accountingforsustainability.org/en/knowledge-hub/reports/icas--the-sustainable-development-goals--integrated-thinking-and.html>. (Accessed: 28 November 2025).

Amran, A. and Ooi, S.K. (2014) 'Sustainability reporting: meeting stakeholder demands', *Strategic Direction*, 30(7), pp. 38–41. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SD-03-2014-0035>

Barney, J. (1991) 'Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage', *Journal of Management*, 17(1), pp. 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700108>

Bebbington, J., Österblom, H., Crona, B., Jouffray, J.B., Larrinaga, C., Russell, S. and Scholtens, B. (2019) 'Accounting and accountability in the Anthropocene', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 33(1), pp. 152–177. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-11->

2018-3745

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) ‘Using thematic analysis in psychology’, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Cámara de Comercio de Bucaramanga (2023) Cámara de Comercio de Bucaramanga. Available at: <http://www.camaradirecta.com/>. (Accessed: 17 October 2025).

Cervera, C. (2022) Normas internacionales de sostenibilidad: panorama para su implementación en Colombia. Available at: <https://actualicese.com/normas-internacionales-de-sostenibilidad-como-esta-el-panorama-para-su-implementacion-en-colombia/>. (Accessed: 17 October 2025).

Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2018) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Deloitte (2022) Sustainability services. Available at: <https://www.deloitte.com/latam/es/services.html>. (Accessed: 17 October 2025).

DiMaggio, P.J. and Powell, W.W. (1983) ‘The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields’, *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), pp. 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>

Flick, U. (2018) *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Global Reporting Initiative (2023) GRI standards. Available at: <https://www.globalreporting.org/standards/>. (Accessed: 17 October 2025).

Hahn, R. and Kühnen, M. (2013) ‘Determinants of sustainability reporting: a review of results, trends, theory, and opportunities in an expanding field of research’, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 59, pp. 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2013.07.005>

Harrison, R.L., Reilly, T.M. and Creswell, J.W. (2020) ‘Methodological rigor in mixed methods: an application in management studies’, *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 14(4), pp. 473–495. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689819900585>

Hinkin, T.R. (1998) ‘A brief tutorial on the development of measures for use in survey questionnaires’, *Organizational Research Methods*, 1(1), pp. 104–121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109442819800100106>

Hoyos Giraldo, F.A., Baeza Muñoz, M.A. and Delgado-Martínez, E. (2024) ‘Assurance practices in Colombia’s non-financial sectors: enhancing sustainability report reliability’, *Sustainability*, 16(23), 10371. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su162310371>

IFRS Foundation (2023) IFRS S1: General requirements for disclosure of sustainability-related financial information. Available at: <https://www.ifrs.org/issued-standards/ifrs-sustainability-standards-navigator/ifrs-s1-general-requirements/> (Accessed: 17 October 2025).

ISSB (2023a) ISSB issues inaugural global sustainability disclosure standards. Available at: <https://www.ifrs.org/news-and-events/news/2023/06/issb-issues-ifrs-s1-ifrs-s2/> (Accessed: 17 October 2025).

ISSB (2023b) IFRS S2 climate-related disclosures. Available at: <https://www.ifrs.org/issued-standards/ifrs-sustainability-standards-navigator/ifrs-s2->

climate-related-disclosures/

(Accessed: 17 October 2025).

Junta Central de Contadores (2025) Registro de contadores públicos. Available at: <https://www.jcc.gov.co/>

(Accessed: 17 October 2025).

KPMG (2023) ISSB: Estándares globales de reporting en sostenibilidad. Available at: <https://kpmg.com/es/es/informes-publicaciones/2023/07/issb-los-estandares-globales-de-reporting-en-sostenibilidad.html>

(Accessed: 17 October 2025).

López-Santamaría, M., Amaya, N., Grueso Hinestroza, M.P. and Cuero, Y.A. (2021) ‘Sustainability disclosure practices as seen through the lens of signaling theory: a study of companies listed on the Colombian stock exchange’, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 317, 128416. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.128416>

Millar, J. and Slack, R. (2024) ‘Global investor responses to the International Sustainability Standards Board draft sustainability and climate-change standards’, *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal*, 15(3), pp. 573–604. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SAMPJ-03-2023-0128>

Molina-Azorín, J.F. (2016) ‘Mixed methods research: an opportunity to improve our studies and our research skills’, *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, 25(2), pp. 37–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.redeen.2016.05.001>

Ng, A.W., Leung, T.C.H., Yu, T.W., Cho, C.H. and Wut, T.M. (2023) ‘Disparities in ESG reporting by emerging Chinese enterprises’, *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal*, 14(2), pp. 343–368. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SAMPJ-08-2021-0323>

Rogers, E., Singhal, A. and Quinlan, M. (2019) ‘Diffusion of innovations’, in *An integrated approach to communication theory and research*. 3rd edn. New York: Routledge, pp. 415–434.

SASB (2018) SASB standards. Available at: <https://sasb.ifrs.org/standards/>

(Accessed: 17 October 2025).

Sitorus, L. and Febrianto, S. (2024) ‘The dynamics of implementing sustainability accounting standards in improving financial transparency and accountability’, *Geoforum*, 3(2), pp. 119–129. <https://doi.org/10.30598/geoforumvol3iss2pp119-129>

Superintendencia de Sociedades (2023) Circular externa 100-000010 de 2023. Available at: <https://incp.org.co/publicaciones/infoincp-publicaciones/2023/11/vigilados-por-supersociedades-deberan-presentar-reportes-de-sostenibilidad/>

(Accessed: 17 October 2025).

Superintendencia Financiera de Colombia (2021) Circular externa 031 de 2021. Available at: <https://www.superfinanciera.gov.co/publicaciones/10082461>

(Accessed: 17 October 2025).

Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (2017) Recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures. Financial Stability Board.

Unerman, J., Bebbington, J. and O'Dwyer, B. (2018) 'Corporate reporting and accounting for externalities', *Accounting and Business Research*, 48(5), pp. 497–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00014788.2018.1470155>