

MEETING SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

VOLUNTARY SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS AND THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

**2nd Flagship Report of the United Nations
Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS)**



UNFSS | United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards



A Platform of International Dialogue on Voluntary Sustainability Standards



About the UN Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS)

The United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) is a platform created to analyze voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) and disseminate information about them.

UNFSS is rooted in existing mandates and activities of participating United Nations agencies. Its value lies in pooling resources, synchronizing efforts and assuring policy coherence, coordination and collaboration, in line with the “One UN” concept. UNFSS is coordinated by a steering committee consisting of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Trade Centre (ITC), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). UNFSS works in partnership with VSS experts representing civil society, producer associations, processors and traders, standard-setting organizations and certifiers, trade negotiators, consumers, and researchers.

UNFSS facilitates dialogue and knowledge exchange, providing a forum for intergovernmental actors to communicate with each other and their target groups to address information needs and influence concerned stakeholders.

About the Report

The UNFSS Steering Committee, consisting of the members representing the five UN agencies (FAO, ITC, UNCTAD, UNEP and UNIDO), derived the outline of this report. Chapter I of the report was written for UNFSS by Mai-Lan Ha (Senior Research Associate) and Jason Morrison (Program Director, Corporate Sustainability Program) of the Pacific Institute.* Mai-Lan Ha also helped Chapter II of the report by collecting valuable commentaries from eminent VSS experts: Daniele Giovannucci (Committee on Sustainability Assessment/COSA), Rainforest Alliance, Aimée Hampel-Milagrosa (German Development Institute/DIE), Pieter Glasbergen (Maastricht University International Centre for Integrated assessment and Sustainable development/ICIS), Ulrich Hoffmann (Research Institute on Organic Agriculture/FiBL), Halina Ward, International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and Norma Tregurtha and David D’Hollander (ISEAL Alliance). Miho Shirotori of UNCTAD edited the report on behalf of UNFSS. Susan Graham and Maxim Gubarev of UNCTAD proofread the report, and Jenifer Tacardon-Mercado formatted it for the web-based publication. Rafe Dent helped with uploading the report to the UNFSS website (www.unfss.org). Santiago Fernandez de Cordoba of UNCTAD, with a help from Paul Kuku of UNCTAD, overcame administrative challenges to make this report come true.

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ACRONYM DEFINITION

ANH	National Agency for Hydrocarbons
BCI	Better Cotton Initiative
CmiA	Cotton made in Africa
COSA	Committee on Sustainability Assessment
CSPO	Certified Sustainable Palm Oil
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
EO	Equitable Origins
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FIBL	Research Institute on Organic Agriculture
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross domestic product
IAM	Government's Cotton Institute of Mozambique
ICIS	International Centre for Integrated assessment and Sustainable development
ICREA	International, Commodity-related Environment Agreements
IDH	Sustainable Trade Initiative
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherland
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ISPO	Indonesian Standard for Palm Oil
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITF-HEOA	International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
NPR	Non-product-related
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PEFC	Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification
PPMs	Process and productions methods
PSS	Private sustainability standards
RSPO	Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil
SAN	Sustainable Agriculture Network
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SPS	Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
STDI	Standards and Trade Development Facility
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership

TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VSS	Voluntary sustainability standards
WAIPA	World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wildlife Fund



UN Photo by John Isaac



INTRODUCTION

Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) have emerged in the past 2 decades as standards specifying requirements relating to a wide range of sustainability metrics, including respect for human rights, workers' health and safety, decent income, environmental degradation, and others.

Many VSS schemes are developed in partnership with a range of non-governmental actors such as civil society groups and businesses. The selling point of VSS is that such schemes provide producers with market incentives to opt for more sustainable production processes, thereby bringing greater surety and transparency to the management of sustainable supply chains. VSS schemes can also increase consumer awareness around issues such as ethical production, producer well-being, and corporate social responsibility.

The increased prominence of VSS has also led to the realization that an international forum where such issues can be explored and discussed can be beneficial to both governments and VSS system practitioners. The United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS), formed in 2013, was created to provide information and analysis on VSS. In particular, the Forum has focused on understanding the contribution VSS can have in helping developing countries achieve their sustainable development goals.

In 2013, UNFSS issued the first Flagship Report which presented an array of salient VSS and public policy issues and developed an inventory of some of the leading initiatives working on VSS. One key theme highlighted in the first Flagship Report was the interplay of VSS and public governance (UNFSS 2013). In particular, the report elucidated tensions at the nexus of VSS and public governance. It noted, for example, that participation or direct support by governments in the development of the schemes might undermine existing governmental positions negotiated through intergovernmental processes. It also noted that potential competition between government and private sector-led standardization efforts could lead to interference or duplication between the two processes, in turn producing less effective outcomes.

These issues are brought into sharp focus when new VSS are being developed—one of the major critiques of VSS relates to whether, and how, governments are involved in the creation of emerging systems.

In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) member States adopted a new set of development goals to be achieved over the next 15 years, i.e. the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 goals and 169 targets included in the SDGs are to stimulate action in five areas of critical importance for humanity: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

The 2030 Agenda stipulate that the SDGs “are integrated and inseparable and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental”, and encourage government, businesses, and civil society to promote synergies between their actions. In this regard, VSS, along international standards such as those developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) may be expected to play

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二

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