WWF PRINCIPLES TO ACTIVELY ENDORSE AND RECOGNIZE EFFECTIVE AND CREDIBLE STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION[1] SCHEMES

Introduction

Standards and certification as a conservation strategy

To actively endorse or to recognize credible voluntary standards is one of WWF's main conservation strategies. WWF's work on standards and certification aims to lower the footprint of goods and services by helping to address the challenges in the production and capture of natural resources such as seafood, forest products, soft commodities (agriculture and livestock) and hard commodities (extractive industries), as well as promote the production of clean energy and responsible water stewardship.

WWF considers voluntary certification a primary method for improving mainstream production practices. Indeed, along these lines, a core part of WWF's strategy in the standards landscape is to progressively and continuously strengthen the criteria of these standards, and simultaneously showing that better methods are effective at providing benefits for producers while reducing negative environmental and social impacts. It is important to focus both on the development of credible standards and on their effective implementation in terms of impacts and change on the ground or in the water.

WWF further recognizes that the democratic process and exchanges between stakeholders in multi-stakeholder schemes, often lead to important indirect impacts across the sector, independent of and going beyond the certified operations. Changes in discourse, increased understanding and a higher benchmark for 'good mainstream practice' are examples of indirect impacts.[2]

The Principles (as outlined on page 5) are aligned with other materials developed by the WWF Standards and Certification Team, including:

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[1] The term certification is used in this document to describe a specific form of verification involving third-party auditing. Verification and assurance are broader terms that encompass multiple forms of verification, including first-, second- and third-party verification.

[2] http://www.resolv.org/site-assessment/files/2012/06/Toward-Sustainability-Executive-Summary.pdf

• The Certification Assessment Tool (CAT): a formalised methodology to evaluate and compare standards and certification schemes.[3]

• The Communications Framework for external communication of Certification Assessment Tool (CAT) results: which sets out a process for globally agreed key messages and aligned external communication.

Definitions

- Standard refers to the standard documents and their content, i.e. Principles and Criteria (P&C) and associated guidance.

- Certification Scheme refers to the entire standard setting and certification system. I.e. the standard and the rules and procedures that govern how the standard is implemented, assessed, governed, claims, etc.

- To **Actively Endorse** means "a more formal relationship with a standard or certification scheme, to advocate in favor of, to be actively engaging actors to commit to the standard or certification scheme, to be involved in the governance bodies, to use WWF name or logo in communication involving the standard or certification scheme, to fund the certification scheme, or any other activity that could be interpreted as formal proactive relationship to the standard or certification scheme." Other interactions with standard or certification schemes such as contributing to the P&C consultation should not be considered as active endorsement. In order for WWF to actively endorse a standard or certification scheme, this must comply with all 16 principles (please check exception section).

- To **Recognize** a standard or a certification scheme means that these can bring positive results for WWF conservation goals at global or regional level. It does not necessarily mean that WWF is actively involved with the Standards or Certification Scheme through a deeper or formal relationship and nor that WWF actively promotes the standard or certification scheme**.** In order for WWF to recognize a standard or certification scheme this must comply with all 16 principles.

Note: All standards or certification schemes which **WWF actively endorses should also be recognized**, but not all standards or certification schemes that WWF recognizes need to be actively endorsed.

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[3]All information and tools relating to the CAT, including the Communications Framework available here: https://sites.google.com/a/wwf.panda.org/market-transformation/news-events/standards-certification/certification-assessment-tool

Rationale and WWF use of the Principles

Standards and certification schemes need to satisfy a list of principles in order to be effective and credible and therefore be eligible for WWF active endorsement or recognition. **In essence, these are WWF minimum content requirements for effective and credible standard and certification schemes.**

In order for WWF to actively endorse a standard or certification scheme, it must comply with all 16 principles (please check one exception at the exception section).

In order for WWF to recognize a standard or certification scheme it must comply with all 16 principles.

WWF should not actively endorse new standards and certification schemes that may undermine standards or certification schemes in which WWF already actively endorses. This does not mean that WWF cannot recognize other effective and credible competing standards or certification schemes. It may be possible to actively endorse competing standards or certification schemes if there is a network agreement on this. The potential conflicts and decisions on this should always be dealt within the SCT.

Exceptions

Exceptions are always dealt with through the SCT, who will analyze the cases and if necessary appoint a working group to further study the issue and report back to SCT. Two exceptions have already been identified.

a) **In order for WWF to actively endorse a standard or certification scheme it must comply with all principles** with one exception, as follows: WWF may actively endorse a standard or certification scheme that only complies with principles 1 and 2 exceptionally when these have not yet developed its Standard(s) (e.g., the Standard's Principles, Criteria and Indicators) and full certification scheme. If the standard or certification scheme has already developed its Standards (P&C) and Scheme, WWF's decision to actively endorse it will have to be based on the evaluation of all principles.

b) Specific cases of non-compliance with the Principles could be treated as an exception and dealt within a working group led by SCT if enough evidence that this standard or certification scheme is important for conservation is identified. It is likely that some standards or certification schemes, such as national and regional schemes, niche schemes, etc, might fall into this category.

The WWF Principles for actively endorsing or recognizing standards and certification schemes (the Principles)

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO ACTIVELY ENDORSE OR RECOGNIZE EFFECTIVE AND CREDIBLE STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

Standards and certification schemes need to satisfy the following principles to be considered effective and credible and therefore be eligible for WWF active endorsement or recognition. In essence, these can be viewed as WWF minimum content requirements for effective and credible standards and certification schemes. Standards and certification schemes must:

1. Be consistent with, and support, the WWF Global Program Framework. The participation in the standard and certification scheme should support WWF's efforts in achieving its vision and mission, considering global, regional and national interests and goals. The standards and certification scheme's contribution to WWF´s vision and mission should be clear and effective.

2. Require compliance with relevant national and international laws and conventions. At a minimum, the standard and certification scheme should require the operators to comply with relevant national, regional and international laws and conventions. Indigenous frame rules should also be respected by operators.

3. Be developed in compliance with ISEAL's Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards.[4] Partial compliance for standards that operate exclusively at national level may be treated as an exception. Compliance does not require ISEAL membership, but means that the standards must be able to show that it was developed according to what ISEAL code requires.

4. Focus on minimizing or eliminating important environmental and/or social negative impacts, as well as creating environmental, economic and social positive impacts, through the use and processing of the commodity/product/service. With respect to environmental impacts, the standard will include, where applicable, minimum environmental performance requirements for:
- High Conservation Values[5] and priority areas for conservation[6], including both conservation and restoration of those areas, as well as the reduction of biodiversity loss.
- Reduction of pollution, including GHG emissions, reduction of soil erosion, soil contamination, pesticide and agrochemical use.
- Reduction of impacts of water consumption and/or withdrawals on water scarcity, as well as reduction of impacts of water quality on areas experiencing impaired water quality stress.

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[4]http://www.isealalliance.org/our-work/codes-of-good-practice/standard-setting-code

[5]High Conservation Values 1-6. See http://www.hcvnetwork.org/

[6]Priority areas for conservation include marine protected areas, ecosystems with high biodiversity or high sensitivity to impacts, freshwater resources, areas of rare, threatened or endangered species, and other areas that are considered to be of local, regional or global importance for conservation activities.

For social impacts, the standard will require, where applicable, the respect for internationally proclaimed human rights, land use and tenure rights, property rights, indigenous people and minorities' rights, gender equity, workers' rights and community benefits, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). WWF´s own Social Policies should be consulted at https://sites.google.com/a/wwf.panda.org/social-development/home/policies/policies.

The standards should also be aligned with WWF Land Use Principles and Agriculture Guidelines.

5. Be Science-based. The standard and certification schemes development and revision procedures should include input from scientists and on an ongoing basis, should reflect the newest scientific findings related to the issues the standards address, as well as evolving legislation and human rights.

6. Require minimum measurable performance requirements and be in compliance with ISEAL's Impacts Code[7]. The standard should provide minimum requirements, which are clearly linked with environmental and/or social performance. The standard or certification scheme should require when feasible, defining a baseline, identifying performance and process indicators and putting in place a process to monitor, and report, upon achieved impacts and/or performance and compliance with indicators. Compliance does not require ISEAL membership, but means that the standards must be able to show that it follows ISEAL code procedures.

7. Be adaptable to national/regional conditions and needs. Generic, global principles and criteria of the standard may need to be further specified and adapted to national/regional circumstances in order to reflect the diverse legal, social and geographical conditions and also to be socially acceptable (i.e., fulfilling the norms, culture and religion of any society).

8. Not allow GMOs, or, contain a non-GM option. Standards and certification schemes that include commodities that could include the use of Genetically Modified (GM) Organisms, must offer a non-GM option.

9. Comply with international frameworks for certification and accreditation. The structure and governance of the certification scheme, including standard setting, certification, accreditation, verification and grievance processes and procedures, should comply with internationally accepted norms, such as those developed by ISO and the ISEAL Alliance.[8]

10. Require meaningful and equitable stakeholder participation considering economic, social and environmental interest groups and provide means to have smaller producers and vulnerable groups engaged in the process. Governance and decision-making

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[7] http://www.isealalliance.org/our-work/codes-of-good-practice/impacts-code.
[8] http://www.isealalliance.org/our-work/codes-of-good-practice/assurance-code.

procedures should take into account the range of interests relevant to the subject matter either through consensus[9] or by achieving balanced decision-making.[10]

11. Provide transparency in decision-making and public reporting on its certification. A credible certification scheme must have clearly defined and transparent structures to guide all aspects of its operations. The scheme's requirements and procedures as well as the results of certification and accreditation reports, should be made available in the public domain.

12. Set high-levels for scheme rigour. The certification scheme should include surveillance, monitoring, and consultation standards for certification holders and certification bodies with clear deadlines for evaluating the conformity assessment processes. The scheme needs to include effective measures when non-conformity of certification holders and certification bodies is identified.

13. Require third-party independent certification and accreditation.[11] Compliance with standard requirements must be independently verified by a certification body accredited to the certification scheme. The use of third-parties for certification and accreditation offers the highest levels of checks and balances. The certification scheme must have several certification bodies accredited to avoid perceived or real conflict of interest. At the discretion of the SCT, certification schemes which operate with other forms of verification may be treated as exceptions.

14. Require truthful claims, and where applicable, traceability. To minimize the risk of 'green washing', claims should reflect the product's or production characteristics and should be able to be verified. If the certification scheme uses a credit, or mass-balance system, the claim should refer to "support for better production," present the different percentages coming from certified and non-certified or similar. Until the market share of credibly certified commodities is enough to support the segregation of products without prohibitive

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[9]The International Standard Organization's definition for consensus is 'General agreement, characterized by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by any important part of the concerned interests and by a process seeking to take into account the views of interested parties, particularly those directly affected, and to reconcile any conflicting arguments. Consensus need not imply unanimity.' It is not necessary to reach consensus prior to the period when draft standards are posted for public comment. In cases where decisions are taken by a voting procedure, the latter should prevent major economic, social and environmental interests from being overruled.

[10] The standard scheme should balance economic, social and environmental considerations equitably in order to have a balanced of interest from stakeholders. The process for developing standards usually involves convening stakeholders in both formal and informal manners, and creating a steering committee(s), technical working group(s), and advisory group(s) that provide recommendations for a larger set of stakeholders to consider.

[11]Accreditation is when an organization that provides certification has third party to test and inspect services against internationally recognized standards. It demonstrates the organization's competence, impartiality and performance capability and is the key to reducing risk and ensuring that consumers, suppliers and purchasers can have confidence in the services provided. Source: http://www.accreditation-services.com/about/accreditation

additional costs and consequent negative impacts on market share, mass-balance and credit schemes (e.g., book and claim) will be considered equivalent to segregation as long as the claim on the product is appropriately adjusted to reflect the chain of custody.

15. Include accessible complaint and appeal mechanisms. A credible certification scheme, accountable to its stakeholder, needs to include integrated mechanisms for hearing complaints and resolving conflicts at all levels applicable to the scheme, i.e., international, national and local. This allows adaptive learning and will lead to improved procedures and performance.

16. Be committed to continuous improvement. The standard or certification scheme must include a periodic standard and certification scheme review process that allows for the incorporation of lessons learned from monitoring and assessment of impacts, that reflects the newest insights (scientific or other), and that ensures evolving legislation and new discourses are incorporated into the standard and certification scheme requirements. Note that ISEAL Standard Setting Code requires a standard review process to take place at least every five years.