

Measuring and interpreting the impact of voluntary sustainability standards: Launch of the annual reports of the Committee on Sustainability Assessment and of the State of Sustainability Initiative

Voluntary sustainability standards, also known as private standards, determine production and processing methods of products and services relating to occupational safety, environmental, economic, social or animal welfare issues. They have become a critical factor in international trade, the governance of international supply chains, and the promotion of sustainable development strategies. Against this background, five United Nations bodies – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Trade Centre, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and UNCTAD – have come together to launch the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) in March 2013. The Forum is a platform providing information and analysis and facilitating an international policy dialogue on sustainability standards, with a particular focus on their potential value as tools for developing countries to achieve specific sustainable development goals, while facilitating access to export markets. Forum activities will also address potential trade or development obstacles that these standards may create, with a specific emphasis on their impact on small-scale producers and least developed countries.

UNFSS, in collaboration with the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland, the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research and the International Institute for Sustainable Development, will organize three venues on 30 and 31 January 2014 to mark the launch of the *State of Sustainability Initiatives (SSI) Review 2014* and the first *Global Report of the Committee on Sustainability Assessment (COSA)*. The events will provide an opportunity to discuss current challenges in data collection and potential solutions, and to analyse the processes of voluntary sustainability standards and their impacts. The venues will also enable participants and the authors of the reports to exchange views on market trends, system performance and impact research relating to popular sustainability standards. UNCTAD has the pleasure to invite you to these events.

The event scheduled for the afternoon of 31 January will be a dedicated discussion with policymakers on their needs and tools available to them with regard to impact and market data collection on sustainability standards. It will provide an opportunity to explore broad, systems-based solutions to shared data collection challenges.

The Collaborative Workshop on SSI Data Collection will take place at the Maison Internationale de l'Environnement in Chatelaine, Switzerland, on 30 January 2014, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The launch of the *State of Sustainability Initiatives Review 2014* and the first COSA *Global Report* will take place on 31 January 2014 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, conference room XXVI, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The joint UNFSS-SSI-COSA sustainability standards policy discussion will take place on 31 January 2014 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, in conference room XXVI, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

A draft programme for each event can be found below.

Participants should come from government, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations and academia, and should have experience and an interest in voluntary sustainability standards. Nominations should be communicated to Mr. Arpit Bhutani (e-mail: arpit.bhutani@unctad.org) no later than 24 January 2014.

For further information, please contact Mr. Ulrich Hoffmann (e-mail: ulrich.hoffmann@unctad.org, tel: +41 (0) 22 917 5780) or consult the UNFSS website at www.unfss.org). Additional information on meeting logistics and background documents will be posted on the website well in advance of the date.

Collaborative Workshop on the State of Sustainability Initiatives Data Collection

30 January 2014

**Maison Internationale de l'Environnement
Chatelaine, Switzerland, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

Over the past 12 months, SSI implementing partners have been engaged in a comprehensive data collection process and information exchange with numerous voluntary sustainability initiatives under way in one or more of the 10 commodity sectors that SSI will be covering in its upcoming report. The learning process initiated by the first edition of the *State of Sustainability Initiatives Review* in 2010 has advanced the SSI methodology and database. The 2014 Collaborative Workshop on SSI Data Collection is a continuation of this learning process and a stepping stone to a more streamlined and effective means of data collection and collaboration.

The Workshop is designed as a forum that will enable the SSI team to gather feedback from data contributors on the most recent data collection process, while also sharing experiences among the standard-setting community. Importantly, the Workshop will set the stage for the SSI data collection processes for the ensuing SSI 2015 Review. It is expected that the Workshop will facilitate a continuation of the emerging convergence towards more harmonized data collection processes among standard-setting bodies and other stakeholders. As part of UNCTAD's commitment to standardizing data collection, sufficient time will be devoted to discussing the new market data entry tool of SSI, the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture and ITC, as well as complementary mechanisms that could be used to streamline data collection and sharing.

The following topics will be discussed during the Workshop:

- Current data collection gaps, based on the most recent SSI data collection processes
- Specific strategies for dealing with gaps in key issues such as:
 - Multiple certification
 - Trade data
 - Indicator harmonization
 - Private sector participation
 - Data collecting processes for smallholders
- Identification of partners to support the data collection process
- Streamlining data collection and entry – consultation on the ITC data entry tool

Time	Item
9–9.30 a.m.	Introduction
9.30–10.30 a.m.	Presentation and discussion of <i>SSI Review 2014</i> findings
10.30–11 a.m.	Break
11 a.m.–12.30 p.m.	Presentation and discussion of <i>SSI Review 2014</i> data collection gaps
12.30–1.30 p.m.	Lunch break
1.30–3 p.m.	Low-hanging fruit: Strategies for improving the data package
3–3.15 p.m.	Break
3.15–4.45 p.m.	Streamlining the data collection process: Discussion of the market data entry tool and related data entry tools – Experiences and opportunities for improvement
4.45–5 p.m.	Conclusions

Trends in and impacts of voluntary standards

Global launch of the first *Global Report of the Committee on Sustainability Assessment* and of the *State of Sustainability Initiatives Review 2014*

31 January 2014

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland
Conference room XXVI, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Two of the leading international research initiatives on sustainability standards will come together in a special event to launch two ground-breaking reports: the first *Global Report* of the Committee on Sustainability Assessment (COSA) and the *State of Sustainability Initiatives (SSI) Review 2014*. Together they provide the most comprehensive review of market trends, system performance and impact research on popular sustainability standards to date. The reports represent a critical resource for supply chain decision-makers, such as business executives, policymakers, investment advisers, standard setters and non-governmental organizations seeking to promote sustainable development through supply chain approaches. This event will provide an overview of the most recent COSA and SSI reports, with the latest information on the impacts and market trends related to sustainability standards.

Time	Title
10–10.30 a.m.	Opening remarks
10.30–11 a.m.	SSI 2014 presentation
11–11.30 a.m.	COSA <i>Global Report</i> presentation
11.30–11.45 a.m.	Break
11.45 a.m.–12.45 p.m.	Stakeholder panel
12.45–1 p.m.	Closing remarks

Closing the information gap: Opportunities and challenges for policymakers – building understanding of sustainability standards

31 January 2014

**Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland
Conference room XXVI, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.**

As voluntary sustainability standards are becoming increasingly prevalent as de facto requirements for market access, it is important that policymakers have accurate and timely information related to the impacts and market trends associated with the uptake of such standards. Due to the voluntary nature of such systems, systemic data collection processes and regulations related to data collection on voluntary standards are extremely sparse. This session will provide policymakers with a bird's eye view of the current state of play of data collection systems for voluntary sustainability standards, as well as a window for identifying promising opportunities for them to facilitate and catalyse more effective data collection and reporting. This session is hosted by UNFSS and co-organized by SSI and COSA, with the support of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland, Sida and the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research.

Time	Title	Description
3–3.15 p.m.	Opening remarks	
3.15–4 p.m.	Presentation and discussion on the state of data collection for sustainability standards	What is the state of play for data collection and reporting with regard to sustainability standards?
4–4.45 p.m.	Stakeholder panel and discussion: Data collectors and generators	What are current data collectors and contributors doing to improve access to data? What challenges do they face?
4.45–5 p.m.	Break	
5–5.45 p.m.	Stakeholder panel and discussion; Policymakers	What do policymakers need data on sustainability standards for? What are policymakers doing to help ensure they have the data they need? What is needed to facilitate more systemic data collection?
5.45–6 p.m.	Closing remarks	