

Report on the Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS) Workshop and Launch Ceremony of Chinese National Platform of VSS

27-28 June 2017, Qingdao, China

Summary:

The Standardization Administration of China (SAC), UNFSS and the German Development Institute (DIE) jointly organized the launch of China National Platform of Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) and the VSS workshop in Qingdao, China from 27-28 June 2017. The launch event was attended by over 100 representatives from governments of China and other emerging economies, international organizations, think tanks, companies and other stakeholders (*the agenda of the launch and workshop and the list of participants are attached to this report). The VSS workshop that took place as the Sub-Forum 1 of the 2017 Qingdao Forum on International Standards (QFS) has invited over 400 distinguished guests from China and abroad. Senior officers from UN, ISO, IEC, ITU and etc. has attended the workshop to conduct in-depth discussions related to international standardization and social, economic and environmental development.

The VSS National Platform was launched by Dr. Tian Shihong (Head of the Standardization Administration of China), Mr. Liu Yuhua (Director of World Trade, Ministry of Commerce), Mr. Ji Zhengkun (Chairman of the China Association of Standardization), and Mr. Bonapas Onguglo (Representative of UNFSS), as well as the representatives of the other 4 UNFSS member organizations. The National Platform was launched for the purpose of providing information and related analysis, sharing experiences, and promoting collaboration in international community on sustainability standards.

The opening ceremony for the VSS workshop was hosted by Mr. Gao Jianzhong (Secretary General of the China Association of Standardization), and the opening speech was delivered by Mr. Guohui (Vice Administrator, Standardization Administration of China), Mr. Liu Yuhua, Mr. Bonapas Onguglo and Mr. Ralf Becker on behalf of the German Embassy in China. In the opening remarks, speakers stressed that with the deepening of globalization and economic integration, the rapid development of VSS has growing impact on international trade, and VSS has become an important topic around the world. However, VSS is a double-edged sword, on one hand it is beneficial in pushing for global sustainable development, it has set sustainability standards for the economy, society, culture, environment and others. On the other hand VSS has also created potential technical barriers to international trade, particular for small and medium-sized (SMEs) in developing countries. Many experts stated that although VSS are voluntary standards, in practice however, they often become mandatory standards. Hence, there is a growing need for governments, research institutes, and exporters to have a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of VSS. This workshop on VSS

was intended for communicating, experience sharing and discussing countermeasures among different stakeholders.

Following the opening remarks, discussions on “how government agencies apply VSS on achieving the SDGs and limiting the technical barriers to trade” has taken place. DIE, IISD and CAS has, respectively, presented topics on 1) Why should government get involved in VSS? (Co-regulation supports transformative change; remarkable momentum for VSS platforms in emerging economies). 2) Key standard and trade governance issues related to VSS. 3) Perspective of National Platform on VSS. Specifically, Mr. Zhang Xiu Chun (Director of Technology Development, CAS) has stressed that the China National Platform on VSS have been under discussion with UNFSS since 2013. The now launched platform has 4 important implications: 1) it is important in raising awareness of sustainability standards in the whole society and promoting realization of SDGs. 2) It is conducive to conduct VSS research and providing policy support to the government. 3) It provides comprehensive information on market access and it is beneficial in supporting SMEs to participate in international competition. 4) It is important in eliminating technical barriers to trade and promoting economic development of a country.

Powerpoint presentations from UNFSS member organizations (FAO, ITC, UNCTAD, UN Environment, UNIDO) had furthered the discussion by addressing the opportunities and challenges of VSS and possible impact of VSS in achieving SDGs. Among others, UNIDO has stressed their support on VSS at policy, institutional and private sector level. UN Environment has introduced their Environment and Trade Hub and its objective in enhancing the uptake of sustainability standards and to facilitate market access for sustainably produced and certified products in order to promote green global consumption and production. ITC discussed the various contributions that its T4SD project can provide to the China National VSS Platform, which include trainings on sustainability standards and good agriculture practices; private sector supply chain solutions for Chinese companies; as well as the possibility of establishing a Standardsmap China.

This session was followed by presentations of government representatives of Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa on their government’s respective role in international standardization. The representatives of Brazil and India has shared their experiences on successful launch of National VSS platform in Brazil (May/June 201) and India (launched March 2016) as well as the relevant implications of VSS to their own economy and domestic companies. Representative from Indonesia and South Africa discussed the possibility of establishing a National Platform of VSS for their own, showing increasingly proactive stance that government and private sector company from these countries take up on the issue.

Finally, some international organizations, including ISO and ISEAL has shared some best practices of international organizations of VSS based on global value chain. A number of

private sector companies, including Schneider Electric, IKEA, CCCMC and etc. has discussed the responsibility of industries/enterprises in the development of VSS. The following salient point emerged from the discussions:

- Economic and technology basis of sustainability- from a linear to a circular economy.
- Positive sides of VSS (Many VSS support sustainability objectives (economic, social/labour, environment)).
- Negative sides of VSS (Lack of openness/transparency/inclusiveness in their development; Scientific basis is sometimes not secured; Investment needs and multiple certifications increase costs for producers and consumers).
- The increasing adoption of VSS in the production and manufacturing phase of various companies.
- A multi-stakeholder dialogue should be launched including relevant bodies involved in public, international and private standards-setting and standards and trade issues (e.g. UNFSS, WTO, ISO, ITC, Codex Alimentarius, OIE, ISEAL Alliance, National Standards Bodies etc.) and other players from the field of VSS systems.

The workshop concluded with the ceremonial launch of the National Platform and closing remarks by CAS.

An important effort was made by UNFSS, SAC and CAS to publicise the event. There was wide press and social media coverage of the launch of the Chinese VSS National Platform and the 2017 Qingdao Forum on International Standards (QFS):

- UNFSS press release: <https://unfss.org/2017/06/22/launch-of-the-china-voluntary-sustainability-standards-vss-national-platform-qingdao-shandong-province-china-on-june-27-2017/>
- CAS press release: <http://www.china-cas.org/zxdtxhxw/1257.jhtml> (article in Chinese)
- SAC news: http://www.sac.gov.cn/xw/bzhxw/201706/t20170629_248397.htm (article in Chinese)
- Official website of QFS: <http://www.qfscn.org/meeting/plate/2017/0427/87.html>
- China Standardization Journal: http://www.cspress.com.cn/Web/c_0000000700020001/d_8624.htm (article in Chinese)

Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS) Workshop and Launch Ceremony of Chinese National Platform of VSS

2017.06.27

1F Ballroom 1, Shangri-la Hotel, Qingdao

Time	Item	Speaker/Moderator
9:00-9:30	Opening Ceremony (7 mins per person)	Moderator: CAS (GAO Jianzhong) Speaker: SAC (GUO Hui) MOFCOM (LIU Yuhua) UNFSS (Bonapas Onguglo) German Embassy in Beijing (Ralf Becker)
9:30-10:10	Opening Ceremony and presentations on: How government agencies apply VSS on achieving the SDGs and limiting the technical barrier to trade? (10 mins per person, , Q&A 10 mins) Chinese National Platform of Voluntary Sustainability Standard (10 min)	Moderator: CAS (GAO Jianzhong) Speakers: DIE(Thomas Fues) Hoffman Ulrich CAS (ZHANG Xiuchun)
10:10-10:40	Tea/coffee break	
10:40-11:40	Upon global governance, what roles of UNFSS related agencies play in achieving SDGs based on VSS?	Moderator: UNFSS (Bonapas Onguglo) Speakers: FAO (Ahmad Mukhtar)

Time	Item	Speaker/Moderator
	(10 mins per person, Q&A 10 mins)	ITC (Joseph Wozniak) UNCTAD (Santiago Fernandez de Cordoba) UN Environment (Taylor Clayton) UNIDO (WU Cong)
11:40-13:30	Lunch break	
13:30-14:30	VSS and Developing Countries: opportunity or challenge? What kind of effective policies and measures to enhance their gains? (10 mins per person, Q&A 10 mins)	Moderator: UNCTAD (Santiago Fernandez de Cordoba) Speakers: Brazil (Rogerio de Oliveira Corrêa) India (Ravi Prakash Singh) Indonesia (I Nyoman Supriyatna) Mexico (Antonio Muñoz Trejo) South Africa (Thato Chabeli)
14:30-15:30	Best practice of international organizations of VSS based on global chain (10 mins per person, Q&A 10 mins)	Moderator: DIE(Thomas Fues) Speakers: ISO (Reinhard Weissinger) ISEAL (WAN Xusheng) MSC (AN Yan) BCI & Binzhou Nongxi Cotton Farmer Specialized Cooperative (Sherry WU & WANG Jianjun)
15:30-16:00	Tea/coffee break	
16:00-16:40	The responsibility of industry in the development of VSS (10 mins per person, Q&A 10 mins)	Moderator: SAC (GUO Chenguang) Speakers: CCCMC (SUN Lihui) Schneider Electric(Roselyne)

Time	Item	Speaker/Moderator
		Thai) IKEA(Brian Liu)
Launch Ceremony of China National Platform on Voluntary Sustainability Standards Moderator: SAC (GUO Hui)		
16:45-17:00	Launch ceremony of Chinese National Platform on VSS	Participants on the stage: SAC(TIAN Shihong) MOFCOM(LIU Yuhua) CAS(JI Zhengkun) UNFSS(Bonapas Onguglo) FAO (Ahmad Mukhtar) ITC (Joseph Wozniak) UNCTAD (Santiago Fernandez de Cordoba) UN Environment (Taylor Clayton) UNIDO (WU Cong)



For more pictures on the event please go to:

- <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/qt94uquuxt6ly24/AACrXxGjxJ5HtyNe3yGbdJ1ba?dl=0>