

## Webinar: Understanding smallholder farmers access to VSS-Compliant Markets

10<sup>th</sup> May, 14h-15h30 CET

### Opening Remarks by Santiago Fernandez de Cordoba, Senior Economist at UNCTAD and UNFSS Coordinator

Good morning, afternoon, evening to all of you from all over the world.

It is great to see so many of you joining this dialogue aimed to help understand smallholder farmers' access to Voluntary Sustainability Standards' compliant markets.

According to the United Nations Statistics Division about 9.3% of the world population today lives in extreme poverty, that is about 690 million people.<sup>1</sup> In this context, trade and agricultural development are strong forces in reducing poverty in developing countries and powerful tools to boost shared prosperity and feed a projected world population of 10 billion people by 2050<sup>2</sup>.

Extreme poverty and hunger are predominantly rural in developing countries, with smallholder farmers and their families making up a very significant proportion of the poor and hungry. Thus, eradicating poverty and hunger are linked to boosting food production, agricultural productivity and its trade in international markets.<sup>3</sup>

But the question lies with the ways these activities are implemented. This includes their contribution to climate change, greenhouse gas, and sometimes social issues that make small scale farmers more vulnerable. Furthermore, trade highlights access to lucrative markets as well as new opportunities for employment and income generation. However, trade benefits will accrue only if due attention is directed to the interests of small-scale, subsistence-oriented farmers. Even today these group suffers from marginalization.

Against this background, we can note that Voluntary Sustainability Standards are instruments that can influence how trade operates, potentially strengthen farmer's access to markets, while working towards the alignment with the SDGs.

Today, there are more than 500 sustainability standards being used along supply chains covering a wide range of products and commodities. VSS have become a de-facto market-entry condition for exports from developing countries.

But we should ask ourselves some questions:

1. First, in what ways can VSS help reduce poverty for small scale farmers?
2. Second, how can we determine accessibility for them in VSS compliant markets?
3. and third, what are the public policies to support sustainable development impacts for these farmers through VSS?

Along with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) we conducted field research in six developing countries to shed light on the factors that influence smallholder farmer participation in VSS-compliant markets. In the next agenda item, my colleague, Dr. Niematallah Elamin will present the findings from this study.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development promises to leave no one behind. Meeting this ambitious development agenda requires visionary policies for sustainable, inclusive, and equitable economic growth. On behalf of UNCTAD, I would like to highlight the importance for us to contribute towards eradicating poverty through the role of VSS in international trade.

Let me end by thanking all the speakers today for taking the time of joining us today. Also thank you to the International Institute for Sustainable Development for this research collaboration.

<sup>1</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/goal-01/#:~:text=Before%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic,741%20million%20to%20689%20million>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/overview#1>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/foodagriculture>