

Pre-Event to the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

Sustainable Trade

What role for Voluntary Sustainability Standards?

24 March 2020

United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand

Overview of the Event

Over the past decades, gains from trade-led growth have helped lift millions out of poverty in the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, increases in production and trade have led to overuse of natural resources, increased emissions, and increased inequalities. Developing countries still depend heavily on natural resource-based products for their exports and growth. Thus, greening global trade will be important to achieve sustainable development.

Voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) can play a role in this regard. They are standards that are used to ensure that a product is produced, processed or transported in accordance with certain sustainability metrics, such as its environmental impact, basic human rights, labour standards, and gender equality. In many instances, the targeted metrics overlap with the entry points for transformation required to achieve the SDGs at the scale and speed needed, as identified in the Global Sustainable Development Report: human well-being and capabilities; sustainable and just economies; sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition; energy decarbonization and access; urban and peri-urban development; and global environmental commons.

As a pre-event to the 7th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), to be held on 25-27 March 2020, this workshop will discuss the role of VSS in greening trade, thus advancing the transition towards more sustainable food systems, one of the six priority pathways of the Global Sustainable Development Report, and helping smallholder producers and micro and small businesses in the region make greater and sustainable economic gains from green trade.

Issues addressed in the event

The *green* market, i.e. the market for sustainably produced goods and services, shows the fastest growth in international trade today. Carrying a VSS as a proof of sustainable production can help producers and businesses access the growing and potentially lucrative green market. However, certifying for VSS can be a significant challenge to smallholder producers and micro/small businesses in developing countries. A supportive policy framework is needed to ensure that smallholders and small businesses get a fair access to the green market, in a manner that benefits them economically, socially and environmentally.

The event will discuss opportunities presented by expanding markets for green goods and services, what role voluntary sustainability standards can play in greening trade, and policy actions needed to support SMEs in entering these growing market segments. It will share knowledge, learnings, and good practices of green trade based on the findings from the implementation of the UNCTAD project [Fostering green exports through VSS](#) and ESCAPs Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2019 [Navigating Non-tariff Measures towards Sustainable Development](#), as well as on the activities of the [United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards](#) (UNFSS).

Participation

The meeting is open to all UN Member States, specialized agencies, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations in the general category, as well as academia, research institutions and the private sector. The focus of discussion may be primarily addressed to government experts, businesses and non-governmental organizations from the Asian and Pacific States.

TENTATIVE PROGRAM

08:30-09:00 *Registration*09:00-10:30 *Opening*

- Welcoming Remarks

Session 1: Setting the scene - How does trade help accelerate actions for the Agenda 2030?

- How can trade and trade policy contribute to the achievement of the SDGs?
 - Findings from the Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2019: [Navigating Non-tariff Measures towards sustainable development](#) and 2017: [Channelling Trade and Investment into Sustainable Development](#)
- Why do we look at Green trade through Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS)?
 - Findings from UNCTAD's project [Fostering green exports through VSS in Asia and Pacific](#)

*Discussion*10:30-11:00 *Coffee/tea*11:00-12:30 *Session 2: Getting deeper - What are VSS and how can they contribute to the Agenda 2030?*

- Knowledge test: What are VSS?
- How do VSS influence today's international trade?
- What benefits/challenges do VSS present to different stakeholders?

*Discussion*12:30-13:30 *Lunch*13:30-15:00 *Session 3: Learning from actions – How does a multi-stakeholder approach to VSS work?*

- The approach tested by UNCTAD and three countries
 - Multi-stakeholder process for policy coordination
 - Understanding stakeholder-specific needs (the VSS Assessment Toolkit)
- Country cases – Which product? Which multi-stakeholder framework? How were challenges addressed? Outputs and outcome?
 - Lao PDR/Philippines/Vanuatu
- Approaches by other countries

*Discussion*15:00-15:30 *Coffee/tea*15:30-17:00 *Session 4: Moving forward – Will regional cooperation help?*

- A regional framework to encourage green trade and its contribution to the SDGs?

*Discussion**Closing remarks***Registration**

To attend this meeting on 24 March, please register by filling out [this form](#).¹

Meeting delegates who would also like to attend the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) on 25-27 March 2020 are requested to contact their focal point ministry for ESCAP to seek to be included in the national delegation. Kindly note that delegates to the APFSD are also required to register online by 18 March 2020 at <http://meetings.unescap.org>, and that only duly nominated officials will be included in the list of participants to the APFSD.

Further information and contact details

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¹ <https://forms.gle/gdr2yeQQCndRSUbg7>