

Interactive Online Workshop Concept Note

Trade and biodiversity: Evidence and options for using voluntary sustainability standards to strengthen the post-2020 global biodiversity framework

Date: 22 September 2021

Time: 7:00-9:00 EDT / 12:00-14:00 UK / 13:00-15:00 CET / 16:30-18:30 India / 19:00-21:00 Beijing

Languages: Chinese and English with simultaneous interpretation.

Approach: Interactive online workshop. The first hour will frame the global biodiversity framework state of play and then present the evidence, opportunities and challenges of how voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) contribute to biodiversity conservation, followed by a question-and-answer period. The second hour will provide an opportunity for biodiversity negotiators and related stakeholders to join moderated discussions where they will share feedback about how sustainability standards can contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework currently being negotiated. Workshop suggestions and findings will be compiled in a report.

Organisers:

- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- ISEAL

Partners:

- Convention on Biological Diversity Secretariat
- Evidensia.eco
- United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards

Supporting organisation(s):

- Swiss Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)

Rationale and purpose of this workshop:

Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) are norms and standards that are used to ensure that a product is harvested, produced, processed or transported in accordance with certain sustainability metrics, such as environmental impact, basic human rights, labour standards and gender equality. Today more than 500 VSS exist, which apply to key exports of many countries, such as coffee, tea, bananas, cocoa, palm oil, timber, cotton and organic agri-foods.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development gives international trade a prominent role as “an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction”. With VSS increasingly being referenced in trade agreements to foster sustainable development and good governance, VSS can be an effective tool to provide incentives for governments and companies to adopt practices that are in line with environmental, social and economic objectives.

To this end, VSS can also play a vital role in biodiversity conservation. Biodiversity is aggravating at a record pace, including marine, wetland, grassland and forest ecosystems. It

is among the [global top threats according to the World Economic Forum](#) and the trade of unsustainable production and consumption patterns of [biodiversity based products and services have been identified as one of the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss](#) in a report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Effective tools and mechanisms are therefore essential to shifting the impact of global economic drivers on nature toward sustainably managing and conserving ecosystems.

In recent years there has been evidence that VSS are playing an increasingly important role in biodiversity conservation. For example, the [United Nations State of the World's Forests 2020 report](#) recommends using VSS to trace responsibly managed forest products, improve environmentally friendly agricultural practices, and to support companies in meeting sustainability targets. [Research](#) published in 2020 by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency concluded that within deforestation-free commodity value chain approaches, VSS was the only tool which showed positive impacts in conserving forests. With [Convention of Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#) currently negotiating its new [global biodiversity framework](#), VSS can be used as an effective tool for monitoring and implementation of the new targets and indicators.

Nevertheless, VSS are often not well understood and have not played their full potential within the area of biodiversity conservation. Moreover, the complexity of sustainability standards can be challenging, and can lead to inequalities and vulnerabilities, especially for small producers and developing countries.

Objective of the workshop:

With UNCTAD having a [specific mandate](#) on trade and biodiversity, and ISEAL with two decades of experience working to support and challenge VSS to adopt credible practices and scale sustainability impacts, this workshop will bring together a multitude of issues on the table that are in line with the discussions leading up to the [Fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development \(UNCTAD 15\)](#) and [Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD \(CBD COP15\)](#)

The workshop will bring together leading experts and stakeholders to emphasize and strengthen the importance of sustainable trade for the post-2020 global framework and how VSS can be used as effective tools for achieving biodiversity targets. The workshop aims to show that sustainable and legal trade of biodiversity-based products and services can create effective incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. For this, VSS can be a vital component to strengthen the implementation and monitoring mechanisms within the new framework based on evidence-based studies and academic research.

Benefits for participants:

- Highlight recent work related to voluntary sustainability standards and biodiversity
- Understand and get feedback from experts on opportunities of voluntary sustainability standards for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework implementation
- Understand the latest evidence of biodiversity impacts of sustainability standards

Target audience: Trade experts in environment and biodiversity, negotiators and implementation partners for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, as well as other actors from government, corporate and civil society interested in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

Organiser Descriptions

ISEAL: ISEAL is the global membership organisation for ambitious, collaborative and transparent sustainability systems. ISEAL's mission is to accelerate positive change by improving the impacts of ambitious sustainability systems and their partners. ISEAL is driving collective efforts to tackle the most pressing sustainability issues like biodiversity loss and the climate emergency to create a world where markets are a force for good. As well as sustainability systems, ISEAL works closely with governments, businesses and NGOs to drive improvements and transform places and industries.

UNCTAD: The **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** is the main United Nations body dealing with trade, investment and development issues. Its 195 member States have regularly affirmed that trade in sustainably sourced biodiversity products can play an important role in enhancing development. The BioTrade Initiative's engagement in the process leading to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework builds on its 2016 mandate from UNCTAD XIV, and the recognition that it has received in various international forums and MEAs that focus on biodiversity—including the CBD—with references being made in numerous COP decisions over the years. UNCTAD, jointly with WTO and ITC, is custodian for the trade-related SDGs, and publishes the UNCTAD SDG Pulse, an annual statistical publication reporting on SDG developments.

CBD: The **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** is a multilateral international aimed at (1) The conservation of biological diversity, (2) the sustainable use of its components, and (3) the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity supports the goals of the Convention as well as assist government on its implementation. The CBD is ratified by 196 countries and the Conference of the Parties (COP) is set to every two years to review the progress of the convention, set priorities and commit to work plans. CBD COP15 will take place virtually in October 2021 and in-person in May 2021 in Kunming, China.