

Initiating a National Working Group - Checklist

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a series of instruments to support and empower multistakeholder working groups in developing forest certification standards

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Consensus Building/Conflict Resolution toolkit

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Initiating a national Working Group

1. Introduction

The checklist below applies mostly to the stage where an individual or a group envisage the establishment of a national Working Group in a given country. It is intended to help by giving some indication of the steps involved. Other more specific tools will be needed as work progress. One aspect that should not be neglected is the need to involve people who already have experience on the issue. These can be consultants, certification bodies, members of other working groups, or others.

The box below presents a simple framework for evaluating the presence (or gaps in the presence) of certification in a given context. While simple, this can be a useful tool for the identification of priorities.

2. Checklist

2.1 Check the existence of incentives and/or the potentiality to create some

The usual incentive is selling timber either at a better price, or in new markets. In some circumstances, however, this may not be the most appropriate incentive. Market access for non-timber forest products (NTFPs), may be another one. Non-market related incentives may be explored too, particularly for situations where community forestry is important. These may be easier access to funding (e.g. ODA projects), or better security on the resource (e.g. facilitated concession grants).

- Build on this to involve stakeholders (the greater the incentive, the more likely they will participate and more likely consensus can be reached)

2.2 Encourage stakeholders to participate in the establishment of a WG. (linked to 1. above).

- Give some incentives to do so (e.g. policy learning and setting, acting to improve the nation's forests)
- Note: a WG need not be a formalised body from the start, however formalisation should be envisaged from the beginning. Experience has shown that there is a better sense of responsibility towards delivering results amongst more formalised National Working Group (NWG). In addition, it may ease access to donors support.

3. Identify actors who have concerns with certification and try to understand their argument.

- Evaluate as objectively as possible the validity of these arguments and demonstrate how certification (and the establishment of a NWG) could address these concerns
- Try to make sure that certification is not controversial among key NGOs. An important incentive for forest owners/managers to get involved in certification is the “peace” they will get from the process. If some NGOs are vocal against certification in your country, this can diminish the incentive.

4. Ensure financial resources for the project and legal status

- Have a clear view on the financial availability (either potential NWG members’ own resources or outside resources). At that stage, draft a preliminary budget, especially if you hope to apply for donors’ funds to support the establishment and operation of the NWG. As a rule of thumb, make your best judgement, both in time and funds, and double it! The work of a NWG is always more complex than thought from the outset.
- Check national and local legal requirements on the establishment of an organisation.

5. Establishing a NWG

- After interest of stakeholders is established, organise a national meeting where a majority can be represented, trying to maintain a balance between interest and cultural groups, gender and geographical origin. Note however, that several regional meetings / workshops may be necessary to develop understanding on certification and reach a maximum number of stakeholders prior to organising a national meeting.
- Identify the number of stakeholder groups. FSC requires a minimum of 3 chambers (social, environmental and economic), but accept WG with 4 chambers. There are several examples of FSC endorsed WG with 4 chambers (3 + 1 governmental/indigenous people). There is no precedent for 5 chambers within the FSC system. Since it is currently the only global system, NWG are advised to follow it to ensure a maximum international compatibility.
- Identify and ensure participation of resource persons (possibly consultants) who can demonstrate the importance of international compatibility, both of a national standard and the process by which it is developed, i.e. the FSC chamber system
- Insist in the same time of the need of flexibility to adapt to local conditions. Show, using resource persons, how the FSC system allows this.
- The objective of this meeting should be the election of the WG members.
- Identify the optimum number of members for a national WG.
- Devise a voting system that ensures a balanced voting power between groups and a

balanced result. A system based on an Excel spreadsheet is provided with this toolkit (see "Voting procedure for the election of a MWG" on the toolkit Web site/CD ROM)

- Not all stakeholders need or can be represented in a WG. Look for progressive members inside an interest group. Individuals should be committed to the success of the NWG and be able to devote enough time to this task (often more demanding than what is first envisaged).

6. WG ToRs

- A key role of a WG is the development of a national standard
- A national standard must be compatible with international and regional frameworks (e.g. FSC and Pan European C&I, FSC and ATO C&I.)

Note 1: FSC is the only international framework and compatibility with FSC is strongly advised. Experience shows that NWGs who started outside the FSC framework had a more difficult task and most ended up by joining it at a later stage. Compatibility cannot be declared by the WG itself, but must be evaluated by the organisation with which compatibility is looked for.

Note 2: The result of certification depends as much on the standard as on the process by which the standard is used (e.g. field visits or desk study only, consultation of local stakeholders or not, etc.). Thus, a standard cannot be envisaged outside the process by which it will be used. Ownership of the standard should be clear for all members from the start, as well as the system under which it will be used.

- Consultation of the different drafts with all stakeholders will be essential. WG members should keep in contact with the group they represent and develop strategies to carry on this consultation. This is often more time and resource demanding than expected.
- The whole working group need not do all activities. Sub-groups can be established to deal with specific matters, e.g. chain of custody monitoring or drafting the standard itself. Work can be delegated to consultants. The establishment of a secretariat to handle day by day activities is advised. However, the NWG will have to take the responsibility to approve the standard.
- Day to day activities can be quite important! This should include a careful documentation of all activities, including the work done by the WG to include stakeholders in the process.
- Design decision-making procedures. While consensus should be the aim of all decisions, it is possible that some issue will need to be voted upon, so that the process is not blocked indefinitely. These procedures should not allow one group to neither dominate the others, nor allow one group to be imposed a view that it does not support.
- The NWG will have to advocate certification and organise forums on certification. This takes time and financial resources and should not be neglected when establishing the budget.

Framework for evaluating the presence of certification in a given country

This framework is not intended to be hierarchical. Its purpose is to help evaluate the status of certification in a given country, to allow an easier determination of actions needed and their priority in a given circumstance.

1. Existence of a national WG

- Representative of all relevant stakeholders in the country e.g. (NGOs, forest owners etc)
- Level of acceptance by stakeholders in the country (A few individuals? Major players? etc.)
- Existence of a draft national standard compatibility with international standards

2. Involvement of forest owners/managers towards certification

- Contacts with the NWG / certification bodies
- Commitment to undergo certification
- Contract signed with certification body
- Certified area

3. Existence of incentives for certification

- Tax reduction
- Donor support
- Market access
- Forest management improvement
- Policy learning
- Social license to operate
- Others

Few of these elements will appear in isolation. For example, it is clear that, without the involvement of any forest owner/manager, not one single ha will be certified. However, forest owners/managers will not get involved without the presence of incentives, such as potential of improved market access. Similarly, a multi-stakeholder national working group will not unite major stakeholders if there is no incentive for their participation. Empowerment of local communities may be an incentive for social NGOs to participate, while environmental improvement will be probably be a motivation for ENGOS.