

Innovative Certification Systems creating space for local communities

Why Certification?


There is a growing demand for agricultural products that are produced in a sustainable way: and to distinguish them from products that utilise high levels of external inputs (chemical fertilisers, pesticides etc.) and are produced under poor social and labour conditions. Consumers increasingly want to know the origins of the produce they buy and that they were produced under acceptable environmental, social and labour conditions. Sustainability standards set minimum standards for production, processing and trade for producers and processors. The producers or processors follow these standards and their compliance is verified by peers or by third parties. Certification gives sustainable farming a distinct identity and credibility and improves market access. It also increases farmers' confidence and consumers' trust in the production system and the products.

Third party certification

Third party certification is the most common way of verifying compliance with such standards. Normally such audits are done by an outside inspector who only visits the farm for a short period, takes a snapshot of the situation and sends the results to a certification organisation. Yet this approach is problematic for producers in many rural areas in developing countries, because of widespread poverty, low literacy levels, small farm size and remoteness. Such small-scale producers find it very difficult to embrace third party certification due to lack of access to information, difficulties in maintaining the required records (the paper work) and the high costs of certification. Certification has become a big business and the systems are often bureaucratic and inappropriate to many local contexts.

New paradigms: local ownership, inclusive and participatory

In response to these problems many farmers' associations and CSOs have sought ways to control the certification



process themselves. They have initiated their own standard setting, verification processes and/or auditing based on local conditions and needs. Often these systems are built upon social cohesion between producers and on trust between producers and consumers (especially in local markets). Other approaches adapt international standards and verification processes. Some groups train their own inspectors and auditors who also understand local values and practices, while others create their own brand labels and marketing strategies. There are many different strategies for distinguishing sustainably produce; the common feature is that local communities and CSOs take the lead in making this distinction.

The Benefits of new forms of Certification

Both ENDS supports several different types of certification initiatives that are participatory and inclusive and recognises that different kinds of agricultural supply chains have different requirements. A common and essential element is that these initiatives incorporate inclusive and participatory structures, so that local communities and small-scale producers and labourers are involved and have a sense of ownership in and loyalty to the project.

Participatory Guarantee Systems: locally rooted, low cost and trust-based

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are locally based quality assurance systems for organic (and other sustainable) produce. They require the active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange. Participating small-scale producers in a village or area provide a joint assurance that the food they produce is organic or sustainable. They often sell directly to consumers in local bazaars, so there is also a direct or close link between producers and consumers that involves trust.

A PGS is built through farmers' social networks: it involves producers pledging to uphold and maintain the shared principles of the group. Social control is maintained through the producers' group, with peer inspections of each other's farms. This model is informal but maintains

accountability and credibility in a locally appropriate way. PGS are a low cost alternative to third party certification and are especially useful for local markets and short supply chains.

Forest Garden Products Certification: a Southern model that includes biodiversity

The Forest Garden Products (FGP) certification system is more than organic, and addresses a wider range of environmental and social concerns. The standards have been developed by the International Analog Forestry Network, a group of CSOs who practice forest restoration. Their approach restores biodiversity and improves the livelihoods of the involved rural communities. The small company which does the inspection is FGP Inspection & Certification, based in Sri Lanka. It has an international body of trained inspectors in Sri Lanka, India, the Philippines, Costa Rica and Ecuador. One aspect of the inspectors' training covers organic production methods and regulations, administration, labeling requirements etc. Other aspects go beyond this and involve identifying soils and soil types, social conditions, carbon budgets and landscape and species indicators for biodiversity. FGP certification allows farmers and processors to gain access to specialised organic markets in their own countries and abroad.

Fair Flowers Fair Plants: involving local NGOs and trade unions in an international commodity chain

Fair Flowers Fair Plants (FFP) is an initiative of producers' and traders' organisations, NGOs and trade unions that aims to stimulate the production and trade of sustainably cultivated flowers and plants: respecting people and the environment. NGOs and trade unions play an important role in setting the basic working and environmental standards and during the verification processes and audits. Flower producers that meet these standards can apply for certification and use the FFP label on their produce and sell them as sustainably produced flowers or plants.

Round Table for Sustainable Palm Oil: a certification includes land dispute settlements

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is a joint platform of the palm oil industry and NGOs which addresses the sustainability issues associated with palm oil production, including pesticide use, labour conditions and land disputes. RSPO is a not-for-profit association that unites stakeholders of the palm oil industry - producers, processors or traders, manufacturers of consumer goods, retailers, banks and investors and environmental NGOs - to develop and implement global standards for sustainable palm oil. RSPO Certification Systems will not grant certification of production if there are any on-going land disputes. A Dispute Settlement Facility has been set up for this purpose.

What Both ENDS can offer

Both ENDS can facilitate and exchange by:

- making connections with our partners with experience in low cost certification and standard setting
- fund raising for projects and exchange visits
- facilitate setting up workshops on participatory and innovative guarantee systems

For more information on innovative certification

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Forest Garden Products Certification:
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Fair Flowers Fair Plants:
<http://www.fairflowersfairplants.com>

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil: www.rsपो.org

