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## SESSION 1 SUMMARY

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SESSION TITLE: INSIGHTS AND TRENDS: WHAT THE LATEST SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS DATA TELLS US

SESSION DATE: 30 September 2016

### SPEAKERS:

**Bernard Hoekman**, Professor and Director, Global Economics, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute

**Marion Jansen**, Chief Economist, International Trade Centre

**Julia Lernoud**, Data and Information Manager, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL)

**Vivek Voora**, Associate, Economic Law & Policy and Water programs, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

**Eliza Anyangwe**, Writer, editor and moderator, The Guardian/The Nzinga Effect (MODERATOR)

### CONCLUSION:

Data shows that the number of (voluntary, private) sustainability standards (VSS) has been increasing and, by implication, the need for information that relates to such standards is also growing. This development is largely driven by consumers, who request information about the origins of products they buy.

Trust and data confidentiality ultimately play an important role in facilitating progress made towards sustainability, as related to the decisions that are made by businesses or policy-makers.

### NOTES FROM THE PANEL:

**Bernard Hoekman**, European University Institute (EUI):

- *The findings in the latest study developed jointly by EUI and ITC reveal, for instance, that international frameworks matter: being a member of ISEAL Alliance positively affects transparency of a voluntary sustainability standard (VSS); it also correlates with reduced costs borne by producers. Similarly, costs appear to be lower for the VSS that involve both buyers and producers (development, governance, etc.).*
- *The study also put forward questions for future research, such as: do these VSS differ in terms of impact, usefulness, or transparency? Which VSS standards have a large market footprint? How can we link VSS to other mechanisms, and how do we maximize the impact of VSS through connecting to other mechanisms?*

**Marion Jansen**, International Trade Centre:

- *Drawing on the soon-to-be-launched SME Competitiveness Report, a flagship publication of ITC, it appears that access to information about export opportunities and relevant market*

*information on procedures and regulations are some of the largest bottleneck for SMEs in accessing export markets.*

- *ILO conventions are the international conventions most referred to in private/voluntary standards.*
- *The SME Competitiveness Report is aimed at facilitating better decision-making, for both governments and businesses (SMEs); the transfer of relevant information is crucial.*

**Julia Lernoud**, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture:

- *A quick look into the first findings of the 2016 edition of the 'State of Sustainable Markets Report' reveals that all VSS surveyed have been growing in terms of area certified. One of the biggest challenges in this market data collection work is, however, communicating a global figure for a specific commodity.*
- *A lesson learned is that many VSS are willing to share data and are open for discussion.*

**Vivek Voora**, International Institute for Sustainable Development:

- *Referencing a recent report by IISD, 'Standards and the Blue Economy': The number of VSS focusing on wild fish stock is increasing, as the stocks of wild fish are being depleted. However, it appears that social characteristics are missing within aquaculture and wild catch standards (VSS).*
- *In terms of historical developments, 15% of global coffee production was VSS-compliant in 2008, today (2015) the ratio stands at 50%.*
- *One of the key things is to track commitments by the private sector and public sector to meet certain sustainability goals. The pressure comes from different perspectives: e.g. stories on slavery in the fishing sector that are featured in the news.*
- *Capacity-building of producers is an important factor in meeting VSS requirements.*

#### QUOTES FROM THE FLOOR:

- *It shouldn't be small producers who carry all the costs of compliance with the standards.*
- *Creating linkages between buyers of agricultural products in the developed world with suppliers in the developing world is crucial.*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS OR NEW ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- *There have been signs of 'maturing' in the VSS landscape: there has been a growth in the number of new VSS, yet this growth has been slowing down.*
- *Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) has a fund which can be used by producers to invest in compliance with the BCI standard.*
- *There is a need for more unbiased data and information on sustainability and standards which is accessible and can be used by consumers.*