Forest Certification Assessment Guide (FCAG)

A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING CREDIBLE FOREST CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS / SCHEMES

Foreword

The WWF/World Bank Alliance for Forest Conservation & Sustainable Use (the Alliance, now known as the Global Forest Alliance) was created in 1997. The partners — WWF and the World Bank — set a target of achieving 200 million hectares of production forests under independently certified sustainable management, and to frame this work produced a set of criteria that certification systems should meet. These were subsequently encapsulated within the revised World Bank Forest Policy in 2004. Both partners have undertaken a variety of work to promote this target — the World Bank through its country and project level lending, and WWF through its work with the corporate sector (including the work of the Global Forest & Trade Network).

Staff within both organizations faced two challenges. First, a variety of forest certification systems exist. A common and systematic framework for WWF and World Bank managers was therefore needed to evaluate the different systems for their adherence to the principles and requirements that both organizations have agreed as important. Second, both organizations individually and together provide technical and financial assistance to the development of certification systems, as well as to the development of national standards processes.

This Forest Certification Assessment Guide (the Guide) was therefore created for both organizations to use through their common and individual work on promoting and developing forest certification. An early version, known by its acronym "the QACC" provided a questionnaire type approach. This went through an intensive consultation process and field test across a number of countries in Europe during 2004 and 2005. An independent review panel provided valuable guidance during this process. Based on the feedback and lessons learned the Alliance partners simplified and comprehensively redesigned the Guide, structuring it around existing frameworks such as ISO, as well as both organizations' criteria for sustainable forest management.

The Alliance partners are committed to mainstream the Guide throughout their respective organizations, and to further develop the Guide based on experience in the field. While the Guide has been designed for WWF and World Bank managers, others may find it to be a useful tool. The Alliance would welcome feedback from third parties based on its use.

Finally, the Alliance would like to thank all those who have contributed to the development of the FCAG over the past years. In particular, we would like to thank: Robert Flies (European Commission), Osamu Hashiramoto (FAO), James Mayers (IIED), Christopher Prins (UNECE), Ilpo Tikkanen (EFI), Markku Simula, Richard Donovan, Peter Kanowski (ANU), Ravi Prabhu (CIFOR), James Griffith (WBCSD), Pierre Hauselmann, Martin Walter, Ruth Nussbaum and the ProForest study team, as well as the Alliance working group for their important contributions.

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Washington, DC

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Guide

As part of its *Guidance Note for Improved Forest Management & Certification Target*[1], the WWF/World Bank Global Forest Alliance (Global Forest Alliance or Alliance) defined as one of its primary goals to "promote improved forest management through the adoption of best practices and the verification of their implementation based upon performance reviews conducted by independent parties." The precautionary principle should guide any forest management decision and its application should be verified through an independent assessment process.

To measure progress against its certification target of having 200 million hectares of forests under credible certification by the year 2005, the Global Forest Alliance developed a series of overall principles that should be part of forest management standards (Global Forest Alliance Requirements for the Content of Forest Management Certification Standards) and should govern the operation of certification systems and schemes (Global Forest Alliance Criteria for the Operation of Certification Systems/Schemes).

The Global Forest Alliance believes that the following elements should be part of any standard for improved forest management[2]:

- Compliance with all relevant laws
- Respect for tenure and use rights
- Respect for indigenous peoples' rights
- Respect for community relations
- Respect for worker rights
- Delivery of multiple benefits from the forest
- Assessment and mitigation of environmental impact
- Maintenance of critical forest areas
- Specific provisions for plantations
- Implementation of a management plan
- Effective monitoring and assessment

[1] WB/WWF Alliance, May 2003: Questionnaire for Assessing the Comprehensiveness of Certification Schemes/Systems (QACC)

[2] Note: Global Forest Alliance requirements are partly derived from World Bank Operational Policy on Forests (The World Bank Operational Manual, Operational Policies OP 4.36 Forests, August 2004, para. 10).

In addition, certification systems or schemes for independent verification of improved forest management should be based on the following criteria:

- Compatibility with international frameworks for certification accreditation and standard setting

- Compatibility with globally applicable principles that balance economic, ecological, and equity dimensions of forest management and meet Global Forest Alliance requirements

- The meaningful and equitable participation of all major stakeholder groups in governance and standard setting

- Avoidance of unnecessary obstacles to trade

- Objective and measurable performance standards that are adapted to local conditions

- Certification decisions free of conflicts of interest from parties with vested interests

- Transparency in decision making and public reporting

- Reliable and independent assessment of forest management performance and chain of custody

- Delivery of continual improvement in forest management

- Accessibility to and cost-effectiveness for all parties

- Voluntary participation

The elements of certification systems or schemes outlined in this document have been included to give the Global Forest Alliance a consistent framework for assessing certification systems and schemes against these overall principles and to provide the basis for monitoring progress toward the Alliance's certification targets.

Although this guidance note has been designed for Alliance use, other possible applications of the Guide could include

- Helping WWF and the World Bank provide guidance for the development of national standards and advice to governments and companies,

- Providing a framework for the transparent, periodic review of certification schemes,

- Serving as a diagnostic tool for WWF and the World Bank to identify and target capacity-building efforts to strengthen certification systems and schemes,

- Assisting the World Bank in the assessment of forestry harvesting operations that receive Bank investment support under their forest policies, and

- Helping WWF/GFTN provide guidance to GFTN members and other stakeholders on credible certification schemes.

Development

The first version of the guidance note was developed on the basis of a workshop held in 1999 and was first conceived as a questionnaire. The Questionnaire for the Assessment of the Comprehensiveness of Certification Schemes/Systems (QACC) was revised at various times as a result of intensive consultation with outside stakeholders and following a peer review that provided advice from a range of experts in the field. A field test in early 2005 applied a first version of the Guide to schemes and systems operating in 12 European countries. A review panel of specialists on certification and assessment then scrutinized the methodology and results of the field test. The panel's findings provided both preliminary information about assessment systems' key differences and similarities and made valuable recommendations for further development of this Guide.

After considering the proposals, the following steps were taken to come to the present version of the guidance note:

- Increased the clarity and consistency of the Global Forest Alliance Requirements for the Content of Forest Management Certification Standards and the Global Forest Alliance Criteria for the Operation of Certification Systems/Schemes.

- Grouped identified elements in sets under each Alliance criteria in order to make the links clearly visible.

- Reduced the complexity of the Guide by taking into account the results of existing international frameworks for assessment of certification systems and schemes (see annex 1).

- Removed questions that were repetitive or could not be clearly linked to the revised Alliance Criteria.

Along with these revisions, the Guide has been renamed **Forest Certification Assessment Guide (the Guide)**.

How to use the Guide

Evaluating certification schemes is a complex task. Basic requirements for any team working with this Guide include practical knowledge and experience with forest certification, preferably including formal auditor training, plus in-depth knowledge of international systems for conformity assessment and certification. In addition, the task demands that teams exercise considerable professional judgment in applying this tool.

The Guide essentially defines what an ideal certification system would include. Although no system for forest management certification is likely to fully meet all criteria, by using the certification target framework described in this document

management teams can structure and analyze information on certification systems and schemes to reach a substantiated qualitative judgment about a given system.

The approach for assessing a certification system or scheme is very similar to that used in forest certification, wherein auditors complete a checklist of indicators to assess whether the forest management system meets certain criteria.

The elements within this Guide apply to one or more of the following components of certification:

- **Scheme governance**—the mechanisms by which the requirements for elements of the scheme are set.

- **Standardization**—the standard agreed upon to assess forest management and the process of developing this standard.

- **Accreditation**—the procedure by which an authoritative body formally recognizes that a body or person is competent to carry out specific tasks.

- **Certification**—assessment of forest management against the standards, and issuance of a certificate.

The Guide takes into account existing standards for conformity assessment, certification, accreditation, and standard setting developed by international organizations such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) or the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance (see annex 1 for additional details). The elements for credible certification in this document are built on these international norms and standards. However, the complex situation of forest management certification is not addressed by international frameworks, and the Alliance introduces additional elements to assess systems' compliance with all Global Forest Alliance requirements and criteria. To the extent possible, the Alliance also relies on existing monitoring frameworks that oversee implementation of these standards for its assessment of certification systems or schemes.

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The Guide consists of three parts. The first part evaluates systems and schemes against basic requirements as defined in international norms and standards. In the second part, information on additional aspects of the standards' content and of procedures for standard development is provided. The focus of the third part is on the operational features of certification schemes and includes specific elements that were identified by the Global Forest Alliance as essential for credible forest management certification.

This guidance note verifies the comprehensiveness of a system or scheme through a series of sets of required elements with each set relating to one Global Forest Alliance criterion. However, for some criteria, various sets of elements have been developed in order to address all relevant issues. Some criteria do not have additional elements because these criteria are deemed fulfilled when the system or scheme proves to be in compliance with international frameworks for certification, accreditation, and standard setting (see criterion 1; also see annex 1). The section introducing each set of questions gives background information and provides the underlying rationale of the criterion. The introduction also outlines which aspects of the criterion are covered by international norms and standards and are deemed sufficiently evaluated by related surveillance mechanisms.

The Guide is designed to evaluate either stand-alone schemes or full systems. Some systems and frameworks endorse, recognize, and/or accredit individual schemes, such as the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC) or the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Stand-alone schemes do not participate in these broader schemes, although many individual schemes currently tend to adhere to the requirements and mechanisms applied in the framework of broader international umbrella systems. For practical reasons, if a scheme belongs to a system, the latter should be assessed first, because if a system fulfills the Global Forest Alliance requirements and criteria, all schemes under its umbrella would also be acceptable. However, even if a system does not fulfill the Alliance's requirements, individual schemes within the system may have stronger requirements than their umbrella system and thus meet the Alliance's requirements. Therefore, the Guide can be applied to individual schemes even if the system has failed the preliminary assessment. Stand-alone schemes should be evaluated according to their own scope, that is, their geographic area of operation.

PART 1
Compliance With International Norms and Standards

Criterion 1—Compliance with international frameworks for certification, accreditation, and standard setting

1.1 Certification and accreditation

Background and rationale: The processes for certification and accreditation, including the assessment of conformity, are guided by international norms which were developed under the umbrella of the ISO. To monitor compliance with these standards, accreditation bodies oversee the work of certification bodies. In addition, international umbrella organizations like the International Accreditation Forum and the ISEAL Alliance specify and implement monitoring procedures of accreditation bodies according to these international rules.

The Global Forest Alliance partners assume that international norms and related monitoring through international umbrella organizations cover essential principles of independent and reliable assessment. This guidance note conforms to widely accepted standards, guidelines, and related monitoring mechanisms; however, the Alliance partners acknowledge the need for additional elements to address the specific economic, ecological, and social dimensions of forest management certification.

1.2 Standard-setting procedures

Background and rationale: ISO Guide 59 [3] and, more importantly, the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) [4], include rules governing internationally acceptable procedures for developing standards. These documents focus on the impacts of standards on trade and appropriate means to minimize potential barriers to trade that may be triggered by standardization. The International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance incorporated the WTO and ISO rules into its Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, which provides further guidance on applying these rules in the field of environmental and social standard setting. The following issues that are important to the Global Forest Alliance are covered when standard-setting bodies follow the rules set in the ISEAL code:

- Harmonization with the work of other standard-setting bodies
- Use of international principles and criteria as the basis for national standards
- Procedures for consultation and publication

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[3] ISO/IEC (1994): ISO Guide 59, Code of Good Practice for Standardization, Geneva.
[4] WTO: Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, Annex 3, Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards.

To provide a reliable basis for a positive judgment, the Global Forest Alliance partners emphasize the use of existing surveillance mechanisms for control of the activities related to the forest management scheme that is being assessed. The Alliance partners do not consider accreditation or mutual recognition as sufficient for scopes other than forest management and for the standards of the scheme under assessment to be sufficient. The questions in this section therefore focus on the scope of accreditation and the membership of the accreditation and standard-setting bodies in appropriate surveillance and monitoring organizations. In the absence of the above-mentioned monitoring and surveillance mechanisms the scheme can provide evidence of compliance with ISO and ISEAL standards through other means.

Requirements	
	b. The accreditation body is affiliated with an international accreditation organization (alliance/forum) such as the International Accreditation Forum (IAF; iaf.org) or the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance (ISEAL; isealalliance.org).
	c. Monitoring and surveillance carried out by the organizations under point a cover the activities of accreditation in the field of forest management.
	d. All certification bodies are accredited for their activities carried out for the forest management certification scheme under assessment.
	e. Accreditation requires compliance with ISO Guide 62,[5] 65,[6] or 66.[7]
	f. Standard-setting bodies are affiliated with the ISEAL Alliance.

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[5] ISO/IEC Guide 62 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Assessment and Certification/Registration of Quality Systems, Geneva.

[6] ISO/IEC Guide 65 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Product Certification Systems, Geneva.

[7] ISO/IEC Guide 66 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Assessment and Certification/Registration of Environmental Management Systems, Geneva.

Guidance	Point a—Affiliation with IAF or ISEAL should be as an accreditation or standard-setting body, respectively. Other forms of membership exist with these bodies but do not require compliance with relevant requirements (ISO 17011 [8], ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards [9])
	Point b—International bodies for mutual recognition of accreditation often limit their services to specific scopes, such as for quality management certification or environmental management certification. Monitoring and surveillance should therefore be evaluated if the activities of accreditation bodies in the field of forest management certification are in fact covered by international umbrella organizations.
	Point c—It is important to assess that certification bodies are accredited for their activities in the field of forest management and carried out for the specific certification scheme. Accreditation for ISO 14001 or ISO 9000 is not sufficient.
	Point d—Alternatively, a certification system can provide evidence of compliance with the above-referenced documents (ISO 17011; ISO Guide 62, 65, and 66; and ISEAL Code of Good Practice) through other means. In this case the elements of the certification system have to be assessed against the requirements specified therein.
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification, standardization

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[8] ISO/IEC 17011:2004, Conformity Assessment — General Requirements for Accreditation Bodies Accrediting Conformity Assessment Bodies, Geneva.

[9] ISEAL (2004): ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, Bonn.

PART 2
Standards and the Standard-Setting Process

Criterion 2—Compatible with globally applicable principles that balance economic, ecological, and equity dimensions of forest management and meet Global Forest Alliance requirements

Background and rationale: The goal of the Global Forest Alliance is to promote improved forest management through the adoption of internationally recognized best practices. The partners of the Alliance therefore believe that the common set of principles outlined below should be part of any standard for forest management.

Although controversies persist regarding the details for assessing forest management, there is broad agreement on essential elements for distinguishing between forest management operations' level of performance. As a result of a multiyear consultative process in the context of its

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policy review, the World Bank elaborated on the framework for forest management standards, taking into account the international debate on sustainable forest management [10]. The points listed are derived from this process but provide some additional details to come to a more coherent interpretation and to more closely link the assessment of schemes to the Alliance's principles for sustainable forest management.

Requirements	
	a. Compliance with all relevant laws. The scheme/system requires that forest management respect all applicable laws in the country in which operations occur and international treaties and agreements to which the country is signatory.
	b. Respect for tenure and use rights. The scheme/ system requires respect for any legally documented or customary land tenure and use rights.
	c. Respect for indigenous peoples' rights. The scheme/system explicitly requires respect for the legal and customary rights of indigenous people to own, use, and/or manage their lands, territories, and resources.

[10] The World Bank Operational Manual, Operational Policies OP 4.36 Forests, November 2002, para 10.

d. Respect for community relations. The scheme/system explicitly requires recognition and respect for the rights of communities as well as the maintenance and enhancement of the long-term social and economic well-being of forest communities.

e. Respect for workers' rights. The scheme/system explicitly requires recognition and respect for the rights of workers.

f. Delivery of multiple benefits from the forest. The scheme/system explicitly requires management systems that encourage the efficient use of the multiple products and services of the forest to enhance economic viability and foster a wide range of environmental and social services

g. Assessment and mitigation of environmental impacts. The scheme/system explicitly requires that management systems assess and manage environmental impacts (including issues addressed in either World Bank or WWF policies [11]) to conserve biological diversity and its associated values, water resources, soils, and unique and fragile ecosystems and landscapes.

h. Maintenance of critical forest areas and related natural critical habitats [12]. The scheme/system explicitly requires that forest operations maintain critical forest areas and other critical natural habitats affected by the operation.

i. Specific provisions for plantations. The scheme/system has adequate and explicit requirements to ensure that the establishment of plantations does not lead to the conversion of critical natural habitats [13].

j. Implementation of management plan. The scheme/system requires effective forest management planning through the maintenance of a comprehensive and up-to-date management plan appropriate to the scale and intensity of the operation concerned. The scheme/system explicitly requires these management

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[11] The World Bank Operational Manual, Operational Policies OP 4.09, Pest Management, January 1998; OP 4.10, Indigenous Peoples, January 2005; OP 4.04, Natural Habitats, June 2005.

WWF-FFL Policy on High Conservation Value Forests, March 2002; WWF-FFL Policy on Forest Management Outside Protected Areas, July 2002; WWF-FFL Policy on Forest (Landscape) Restoration, January 2005; WWF-FFL Policy on Forest Conversion, February 2002.

[12] The concept of "critical forest areas" is described in the World Bank policy OP 4.36, Forests. Its definition is derived from the term "critical natural habitats," as explained in the World Bank policy OP 4.04, Natural Habitats. The relationship to the more widely used concept of "high conservation value forests" is currently being investigated. A document elucidating this theme will be prepared in connection with the forthcoming World Bank Sourcebook on Forests.

[13] The World Bank Operational Manual, Operational Policies OP 4.04, Natural Habitats, Annex A, Definitions, June 2001.

	plans to have clearly articulated goals for continual improvement and descriptions of the means for achieving these goals.
	k. Effective monitoring and assessment. The scheme/ system explicitly requires the use of monitoring systems appropriate to the scale and intensity of the operation to assess the condition of the forest, yields of forest products, chain of custody (where relevant), management activities, and social and environmental impacts.
Guidance	Points c and d—Standards should require the protection of the rights of indigenous people and local communities where use is made of their cultural knowledge or of the biological diversity on which they traditionally depend. [14] Reference should be made in the standard to the rights of indigenous people and local communities with respect to tenure, customary use, and sites of cultural or religious significance.

Point e—Standards should, at a minimum, meet the core International Labour Organization (ILO) requirements outlined in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. [15]

Point k—Standards should include the requirement that results of monitoring be taken into account during review of plans. |
| Scope of assessment | Standardization |

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[14] The requirements of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work that relate to indigenous people and local communities are as follows:

- The protection and encouragement of customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices (Article 10, c)
- The use of biological resources and indigenous traditional knowledge on the basis of prior informed consent from the contracting parties (Article 15 (5))
- The equitable sharing of benefits from the use of natural biological resources (Article 15 (7))
- The repatriation of information gained from the use of indigenous and traditional knowledge (Article 17 (2)

[15] The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work was adopted in 1998. All members of the ILO have an obligation to respect certain basic principles, even if they have not ratified the individual conventions concerned. These principles are as follows:

- Freedom of association and the rights to organise and bargain collectively (C 87 and 98)
- The elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour (C 29 and 105)
- The effective abolition of child labour (C 138 and 182)
- The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (C 100 and 111)

Criterion 3 — Meaningful and equitable participation of all major stakeholder groups in governance and standard setting

Background and rationale: It is widely recognized that sustainable development should be supported by consensus-based decision-making processes that take into account a wide range of interests relevant to the subject matter. Furthermore, balanced participation in decision making is seen by the international community as an appropriate tool to prevent the development of unnecessary and unwanted barriers in international trade as a result of standardization. All internationally applicable guidance documents therefore specify rules that underscore this principle.

The Global Forest Alliance partners draw on these rules by specifying some of the mechanisms that should govern the standard-setting processes for forest management certification, including guidance that emphasizes the importance of stakeholder groups in the process. The general policies of both partner organizations deem the provisions outlined below as important prerequisites for standard-setting procedures for stakeholder participation, both at the national level and in the governance of the system.

Requirement	*Effective stakeholder involvement*
	a. Relevant stakeholder groups (see annex 2 checklist) have been officially invited to participate.
	b. Relevant stakeholder groups (see annex 2 checklist) participated meaningfully.
	c. A procedure is in place to involve stakeholders in case of failure to achieve meaningful participation of relevant major stakeholder groups.
	d. Written documents are available on what efforts have been taken to include stakeholders as well as on how issues raised by stakeholders have been addressed.
	Balanced decision-making procedures
	e. The decision-making process is striving for consensus among relevant stakeholder groups.
	f. Procedures are in place to achieve balanced decision making in the absence of consensus. These procedures do the following:
	▪ Ensure that no major interest group can dominate nor be dominated in the decision-making process.
	▪ Specify a voting system that prevents major environmental, social, or economic interests from being overruled.

	▪ Contain a mechanism that prevents decision making in the absence of any representative of one of the major interest groups.
Guidance	Point a—Definition of the two terms *relevant stakeholder groups* and *major interest groups*: The following relevant stakeholder groups should be represented in the standard-setting process and in the governance of the scheme/system: ▪ Forest owners, including governments, [16] and/or representatives of their associations ▪ Product manufacturers, distributors, retailers ▪ Scientists/scientific bodies ▪ Environmental NGOs Social NGOs/organizations (e.g., worker unions and consumer associations) ▪ Representatives of indigenous peoples ▪ Major interest groups are divided into economic, social, and ecological interests and are relevant for decision making in the absence of consensus. Point b—NGOs participating in standard setting and governance should ▪ Legitimately represent the respective interests ▪ Ensure that representatives are accountable to their constituencies ▪ Have a proven record in the subject matter ▪ Be interested and affected by the certification system ▪ Have a broad membership base
Scope of assessment	Governance, standard setting

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[16] It is normally not the role of governments to participate in voluntary standard setting, as this may conflict with their duties in law-making processes. However, governments often are important forest owners and may participate in this function in such processes.

Criterion 4 — Avoidance of unnecessary obstacles to trade

The Global Forest Alliance partners regard the provisions set in the ISEAL code as an appropriate basis to avoid obstacles to trade (see also criterion 1), including the requirement to base national standards on international principles and criteria.

Criterion 5 — Based on objective and measurable performance standards that are adapted to local conditions

Background and rationale: The Global Forest Alliance partners consider certification as a means to ensure that forest management achieves the level of performance required by the standard. This level has to be measured with clear indicators that allow a repeatable outcome and strive to reduce subjectivity of decision making.

Although compliance with the standards requires certified operations to apply appropriate management systems, the Global Forest Alliance refers to performance standards only as a basis for comparable and reliable conformity assessment.

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Given the widely differing conditions of forest management in terms of economic, social, and ecological circumstances, standards in this field have to be developed with a view to adapt the requirements to the local conditions prevailing in the country or regions where they are applied. To comply with relevant WTO requirements for avoiding trade distortions caused by standardization, standard-setting bodies must base the national or subnational standards on international principles and criteria for forest management. Appropriate rules are laid down in the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, and no further guidance is required for an acceptable adaptation process.

Over recent years, different sets of international principles and criteria have been elaborated. Partly, development of these guidelines was initiated and carried out by certification systems and for the purpose of certification. The Global Forest Alliance partners acknowledge these international sets of principles and criteria as one way to allow access to the services of a certification scheme at a global scale and thus prevent negative trade impacts through exclusion of certain countries or regions.

Requirement	a. The standard contains explicit performance requirements, including chain of custody, if relevant.
	b. The standard is written in measurable terms, with guidance on interpretation if flexibility is required.
	c. International principles and criteria used as the basis for development of national standards include provisions for the operational level (forest management unit).
	In case of internationally operating systems:
	d. Mechanisms and processes are in place to facilitate the harmonization/equivalence of national standards or national schemes within the international system.
	e. Processes exist by which consistency between national standards can be sought
	f. National standards are endorsed by the international system.
Guidance	Although the national standard may include requirements for the management systems in place, the Global Forest Alliance requirements should be translated into performance indicators that are applicable at the national or subnational level. Wording of the indicators should prevent ambiguities and potentially inconsistent interpretation by avoiding terms such as "where applicable" or "where appropriate" without explanations for interpretation.
Scope of assessment	Governance, standard setting

PART 3
Conformity Assessment, Certification, and Accreditation

Criterion 6 — Certification decisions free of conflicts of interest from parties with vested interests

Given the detailed provisions for these elements in the relevant ISO documents, the Global Forest Alliance partners recognize that evidence of a scheme's compliance with ISO rules (i.e., monitoring mechanisms are in place) ensures the independence of the assessment and the absence of conflicts of interest in a scheme's certification decision-making process. Therefore no additional guidance is needed for evaluating compliance of a scheme with criterion 6.

Criterion 7 — Transparency in decision making and public reporting

7.1 Public availability of scheme requirements

Background and rationale: Scheme requirements specify which standards and performance levels have to be achieved by all elements (certification, accreditation, and standard setting) and all certificate holders participating in the scheme. The Global Forest Alliance partners consider the public availability of all documents governing the scheme as important information for the interested public because it allows the outcomes to be assessed against the envisaged performance levels by any interested party.

Descriptions of the procedures applied by certification, accreditation, and standard-setting bodies provide important information about schemes' compliance with requirements, but this information is restricted and confidential. With respect to businesses' need for confidentiality, the Global Forest Alliance refers to ISO rules (ISO Guide 65, 4.8.1; ISO standard 17011, 7.1.2), which require certification and accreditation bodies to make the following documents publicly available:

- A statement of the certification or accreditation system. This has to include the procedures for granting, maintaining, extending, suspending, and withdrawing certification/accreditation.

- Information about the evaluation and assessment procedures and the certification or accreditation process.

- Information about financial support and fees charged for certification or accreditation services.

- The procedures for handling appeals, complaints, and disputes.

- A list of the certificate holders or accredited certification bodies, respectively.

For standard-setting bodies the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards specifies the following publication requirements:

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- Complaints resolution mechanism (4.2)

- Annual work program, including a description of the standards under development, their scope, objectives, and rationale (5.3)

- Draft standards (5.4)

- Written synopsis of comments received during public consultation and how these were addressed (5.5)

- Standard-setting procedures (5.7)

Requirement	In addition to the above, the certification scheme/system makes its documents publicly available, specifying all its requirements related to accreditation, standardization, and certification, including chain of custody and control of claims, where applicable.
Guidance	Certification schemes frequently specify regulations for certification and accreditation, normally requiring ISO compliance or exceeding ISO rules. All these scheme-specific rules have to be publicly available
Scope of assessment	Scheme governance

7.2 Public availability of certification and accreditation reports

Background and rationale: Adequacy of certification decisions, correct application of procedures, and standard compliance of the certificate holder can be scrutinized by the interested public only when basic information about the conformity assessment process and its results are available in the public domain. Although the Global Forest Alliance respects legitimate business interests in securing confidentiality, it regards publication of key results of the conformity assessment as an indispensable basis for efficient conformity assessment in the field of forest management.

Requirement	a. Public reports on forest management evaluation and surveillance provide the rationale for the certification decision or the maintenance of certification, respectively. b. Public reports on forest management evaluation justify the certification decision by providing key findings with respect to compliance with the standard. c. Public reports on forest management evaluation and surveillance include the corrective action requests raised in regard to the performance of the operation being evaluated. d. Public reports on accreditation provide the rationale for the accreditation decision. e. Public reports on accreditation provide the corrective action requests raised in regard to the performance of the evaluated certification body. f. Public reports are readily available.
Guidance	Point c—The main strengths of the assessed operation should be summarized in the public report and provide the evidence for standard compliance. Point f—Public reports should be available from the Web sites of certification and accreditation bodies. Otherwise they should be sent to any interested party at no charge and without delay
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification

Criterion 8 — Reliable and independent assessment of forest management performance and chain of custody

8.1 Independence of assessments

The Global Forest Alliance partners consider the independence of the assessment as the basis of any credible certification. This view is widely accepted by all international rules guiding the conformity and certification process, and comprehensive requirements are established in the relevant ISO guides (see criterion 1). Compliance with the ISO rules is therefore deemed sufficient to ensure independence, and no further Global Forest Alliance requirements are necessary to fully assess schemes against this part of criterion 8.

8.2 Field evaluation of forest management and certification body performance

Background and rationale: Intensity and accuracy of evaluations carried out by certification and accreditation bodies are two basic attributes reflecting the overall quality of the conformity assessment and certification process. Particularly for forest management certification, assessment of the ecological situation in the forest and the economic and social impacts in the area affected by the forest management unit is crucial to ensuring continual compliance with certification and accreditation requirements. Field evaluation of forest management units is therefore regarded as an indispensable element of any reliable accreditation or certification process.

The Global Forest Alliance partners recognize that comprehensive studies would be required to assess the adequacy of evaluation and the intensity of monitoring (surveillance) applied in different schemes; thus, they rely on the professional judgment and ethics of certification bodies and their respective accreditation bodies for specifying appropriate levels of evaluation and surveillance intensity in more detail (see criterion 1).

Requirement		
	a.	Accreditation procedures for the initial evaluation and surveillance of certification bodies foresee field visits to certified forest management units.
	b.	Accreditation requirements specify evaluation and surveillance intensity to be applied by certification bodies.
	c.	Certification procedures require field visits to applicant forest management units before a certificate can be issued.

Guidance	According to ISO rules, accreditation and certification bodies have to make the applied assessment methodology and surveillance intensity publicly available. Information about the documented procedures can therefore be obtained from these bodies.
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification

8.3 Chain-of-custody requirements

Background and rationale: The economic viability of certified operations that are faced with highly competitive international markets depends on the operations' ability to effectively communicate their achieved performance level to clients in the supply chain and to end consumers. The credibility of the message that is handed down through the supply chain is of crucial importance to ensuring the integrity of the system and to providing long-term assurance to certified operations about the potential market benefits. To maintain the confidence of all participants in the system, operations must be able to demonstrate, using chain-of-custody documentation, that timber from illegal sources does not enter certified supply chains.

By definition, the term forest management certification refers to areas under forest management. Thus, timber from forest areas that are being converted to other land use, such as where the forest has ceased to exist after the harvesting operation begins, should not be eligible for certified status. In addition, to avoid the certification instrument becoming an additional incentive for natural forest clearing, it is important that timber from the conversion of natural forests to plantations not be allowed to enter certified supply chains. Because the World Bank's policy excludes support to plantations that permit the conversion or degradation of critical natural habitats,[17] certification systems that comply with the Bank's requirements should exclude timber from such sources.[18]

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[17] World Bank Operational Manual, Operational Policies OP 4.36, Forests, para. 7.
[18] ISO/IEC: 1999, Environmental labels and declarations – Self-declared environmental claims (Type II environmental labelling)

To be compatible with international norms, operations making claims on achievements and the certified status should comply with ISO standards 14020 and 14021.

Requirement	a.	The scheme has a standard for the control of chain of custody that covers production and trade from the forest of origin to the final product.
	b.	Standards and control mechanisms exist to prevent application of logos on uncertified timber.
	c.	Chain-of-custody certificate holders are required to exclude timber from illegal sources and from conversion of forests.
	d.	Procedures for use of claims comply with ISO standards 14020 and 14021.
Guidance	None	
Scope of assessment	Scheme governance	

8.4 Stakeholder consultation in the certification and accreditation process

Background and rationale: The knowledge and experience of stakeholders can be an important source of information. Stakeholder involvement that is actively encouraged during initial evaluation and surveillance can contribute to higher audit quality and to more substantiated audit results. Furthermore, consultation with stakeholder groups can significantly reduce conflicts surrounding certification or accreditation decisions. Hence, the Global Forest Alliance considers adequate examination and consideration of stakeholder opinions as a prerequisite for a successful conformity assessment process.

Requirement	a.	Accreditation bodies undertake proactive and culturally appropriate external consultation as part of initial assessment and surveillance of certification bodies.
	b.	Certification bodies undertake proactive and culturally appropriate external consultation as part of initial assessment and surveillance of certificate holders.
	c.	Appropriate procedures exist to take stakeholders' comments into account in the decision-making process for certification and accreditation.

Guidance	Points a and b— Time and place of initial evaluation and surveillance audits should be made known to stakeholders, together with an invitation to provide comments about the assessed operation to the certification or accreditation body.
	Point c—The certification decision-making committee within the certification or accreditation body should be required to take note of stakeholder comments and to justify its decision accordingly in the public report.The groups to be consulted must correspond to the groups as outlined in criterion 6.
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification

8.5 Complaints and appeals mechanisms

Background and rationale: To identify deficits and unjustified decisions, the Global Forest Alliance considers the possibility to query decisions made by certification, accreditation, and standard-setting bodies as an important mechanism. Properly applied, it allows the correcting of errors and leads to an overall improved quality of standard setting, conformity assessment, and certification.

Development and application of procedures for handling appeals, complaints, and disputes are important elements of all ISO guides and standards governing certification and accreditation (ISO Guides 62, 65, and 66; ISO Standard 17011). Relevant procedures are also included in the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, which can be used as a guidance document for assessing standard-setting bodies (see criterion 1).

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In addition to the content of these documents, mechanisms for filing complaints and appeals of the participating bodies should be free of cost for the complainant. This access is particularly important for interest groups in Bank client countries, which may not have the financial ability to cover the costs incurred for investigating the issues raised. Furthermore, the Alliance deems it important that the instrument not be restricted to selected individuals, groups, or companies. To ensure the adequate efficiency of the mechanisms, those mechanisms should allow anybody who wishes to do so to bring his or her concerns to the attention of the respective body.

Requirement	Complaints and appeals mechanisms of accreditation, certification, and standard-setting bodies area, accessible to any interested party, b. publicly available, and c. free of cost implications for the complainant.
Guidance	This point implies that anybody who wishes to do so can raise a complaint against decisions taken by accreditation, certification, and standard-setting bodies. Relevant documentation can normally be found in the documents on complaints and appeals procedures of certification, accreditation, and standard-setting bodies, which have to be published under ISO and ISEAL rules.
Scope of assessment	Standard setting, accreditation, certification

Criterion 9 — Delivers continual improvement in forest management

Background and rationale: The Global Forest Alliance partners consider independent certification to be an appropriate tool for improving forest management by operations on the ground. However, the forest operations must recognize the need for better practices and consider the necessary steps in their management planning process. Their goals should therefore include the commitment to continual improvement (see Alliance criterion 2(j).

Continual improvement of standards is foreseen in many international guidelines for standard-setting bodies. According to the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, a standard review process has to take place after five years, taking into account new developments and following the same procedural guidelines as the initial standard-setting process.

In addition, many certification systems foresee possibilities that allow certificate holders to get certified or to maintain certification in the absence of full conformity with the standard. Noncompliances can still exist after the certificate is granted or after the noncompliances are identified through surveillance, respectively. Again, these procedures favor continual improvements by adapting certification procedures. Although Global Forest Alliance partners support this approach in principle, they point to the need for clear guidelines that limit the time noncompliances can persist under certified status.

In addition to ISO rules for surveillance visits, and to ensure certificate holders' ongoing compliance with the standard, Global Forest Alliance partners consider annual surveillance visits as the minimum monitoring frequency for certification and accreditation in the field of forest management.

Requirement	a. The scheme sets deadlines for full compliance if certificates are issued under the condition of fulfillment of outstanding noncompliances. b. Surveillance visits from certification bodies and accreditation bodies are carried out at least annually. c. Clear deadlines exist for compliance, with corrective action requests issued as a result of surveillance.
Guidance	Point a—Normally, deadlines specified for full compliance of certificate holders with all standard requirements should not exceed two years. Point b—The minimum requirement of most certification schemes is an annual visit by certification bodies to certificate holders and by accreditation organizations to certification bodies. In high-risk areas and in cases of complaints, a more frequent schedule of visits should be foreseen. Point c—Deadlines set for compliance with corrective action requests should not exceed six months.
Scope of assessment	Certification, accreditation

Criterion 10 — Accessible to and cost-effective for all parties

Background and rationale: Forest owners with small areas are important custodians of the forests in many parts of the world. The Global Forest Alliance partners acknowledge the significance small forest owners for forest conservation and sustainable forest management. That significance will increase with programs aimed at handing over formerly state–owned forests to communities. Though certification can provide incentives and safeguards for sustainable forest management, these groups often are confronted with high barriers that make access to certification services difficult. Maintaining these groups' access to markets for certified products is therefore a particular concern of the Global Forest Alliance.

Requirement	a. Mechanisms exist that allow equity of access to all participants, regardless of the size, location, or forest type under the operation's management. b. The above mechanisms provide access to forest certification at a cost that does not exclude small forest owners, communities, and other groups that may have limited access.
Guidance	Provisions for better access to certification for owners of small forest areas can be made at two levels: a. On the level of accreditation, by reducing evaluation intensity, e.g., in the framework of group certification or multisite certification. b. On the level of standards, by reducing performance levels or waiving compliance with certain standard requirements for this group. Compliance can normally be assumed when these forest owners participate in the scheme. Information may be obtained from the list of certificate holders published by the certification bodies according to ISO rules. However, the possibility that substantial subsidies are provided to these groups should be considered for the evaluation of the accessibility of the schemes for this forest owner group. The notion of the area that is considered as small may vary from region to region, depending on the traditional forest ownership structures. A definition should therefore be developed in the context of the national standard-setting process.
Scope of assessment	Standard setting (standards for forest management evaluation and standards for the certification process)

Criterion 11 — Voluntary participation

Background and rationale: According to ISO rules, a contract has to be signed between the certificate holder and the certification body specifying the certificate holder's obligation of continual compliance with the standard. In deviation from this general requirement, most forest management certification schemes specify rules and procedures that allow forest owners with small areas to participate in group schemes in which this requirement is sometimes waived. Though in principle the Global Forest Alliance partners strongly favor appropriate mechanisms for joint certification, they deem it important that certification not be carried out without the free consent and commitment of all participating forest owners. Voluntary participation of forest owners in group schemes and compliance of all participants with the standard requirements are regarded as necessary elements to deliver the expected outcomes.

Requirement	a. In cases of group certification, a set of contractual arrangements exists between the owners or their designated intermediary and the entity that holds the group certificate for the requirements of certification.
	b. A mechanism exists to ensure that each member of the group must meet the standard or will have to leave the group.
	c. Enforcement mechanisms exist in case of breach of the group's rules.
	d. All participating forest owners have signed a commitment to adhere to the standards set by the scheme.
Decision	Pass/fail
Guidance	Point a—The contractual relationship between the group member and the entity that holds the group certificate should foresee that members can be removed from the group in case of unresolved corrective action requests.
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification

ANNEX 1
International Standards for Certification and Their Application to Assessments of Systems/Schemes

1 Introduction

Over recent years a growing number of international standards have been developed for all kinds of products and systems and for a wide range of industry sectors. At the same time, many schemes and systems emerged for the assessment of conformity with these standards and subsequent certification. Growth of international trade, widespread consumer concerns with regard to environmental and social production, and demand from many industry sectors for independent audit services were and still are some of the major drivers for this development.

To provide a framework for all aspects of a credible and independent conformity assessment, international bodies have developed detailed standards that govern the different steps of the verification process. These guidelines specify minimum requirements for structure and procedures that have to be in place to ensure an acceptable certification process. The purpose is to provide clients and consumers with reliable information about producers' compliance with features required by a given standard.

A key element of the Alliance's approach is to make use of these existing international norms for assessing forest management certification standards and processes. However, the multifaceted challenges for credible certification in the forest sector—in which economic, social, and ecological aspects are to be considered—require a wide range of elements that are not normally part of international frameworks and have to be addressed in addition to traditional certification concepts.

The approach to building on existing standards and mechanisms can improve the quality of assessments and facilitate the tool's application for other purposes for the following reasons:

- More aspects can be more thoroughly assessed by existing control systems, because access to procedures and operations of certificate holders and certification bodies is not normally granted to persons outside the system.

- Because ISO rules are internationally recognized, their application is accepted by a wide range of stakeholders, including NGOs, industry, and the different certification schemes.

- The complexity and magnitude of assessment can be significantly reduced, allowing the assessment to concentrate on additional key issues relevant for the Alliance partners.

- It can be assumed that standards developed by renowned experts in the field of certification and standard setting reflect the best available knowledge about necessary safeguards. In addition, the participation of different interest groups, with their own general procedural guidelines, provides an adequate balance between legitimate interests.

- Both the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC), the two internationally operating umbrella systems for forest management certification, require operational units in the respective system to comply with at least the ISO standards for certification and accreditation.

- Assessments are more comprehensive because many aspects, for example, independence, avoidance of conflicts of interest, or qualifications of personnel, are being dealt with broadly in the international framework standards for certification.

Properly used, the existing mechanisms can provide sufficient evidence for the quality of certification schemes or systems. However, the limitations of these frameworks and the factual application of the rules, particularly in the field of forest management certification, have to be carefully evaluated. This paper outlines some aspects of the standards and the mechanisms applied by international systems for guiding and controlling the conformity assessment

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process, together with their possibilities and limitations. The structure follows the main parts of the process, namely, standard setting, certification, and accreditation.

2 International norms and control mechanisms for certification schemes

2.1 Standard setting

2.1.1 The standard-setting process and its control

Standard development can be conducted by a wide range of organizations. Traditionally, national standard-setting bodies operate as members under the umbrella of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). To govern the standard-setting processes of its members and other standard-setting bodies, ISO issued rules that are included in the ISO Guide 59.[19] Because the rules were first issued in 1994, international perspectives and approaches to standardization have changed considerably. In particular, the problem of trade restrictions imposed by the standards has been considered in the relevant documents approved in the framework of the WTO.[20] The ISO Guide 59 is therefore under revision and should be applied only with the relevant WTO guidance on standard-setting processes. The ISO itself does not monitor compliance with ISO Guide 59, but national standard-setting bodies that are ISO members are obliged by ISO membership requirements to adhere to these standards.

For standard-setting bodies operating at the international level in the field of environmental and social standards, the International Social and Environmental Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance (isealalliance.org) provides guidance and monitoring for standard-setting processes and organizations. Member organizations of ISEAL have to adhere to the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards and additional guidance.[21] This ISEAL code incorporates relevant content of the ISO Guide 59, ISO Standard 14021[22], and the applicable WTO guidance. ISEAL documents and procedures can therefore be regarded as an appropriate framework for assessment of standard-setting processes and organizations. For standard-setting organizations that are members of ISEAL, the ISEAL code is a binding document and implementation is monitored through the ISEAL procedures.

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[19] ISO/IEC Guide 59 (1994), Code of Good Practice for Standardization, Geneva.

[20] WTO: Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, Annex 3, Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards.

[21] ISEAL (2004): Guidance on the Application of the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, Bonn.

[22] ISO/IEC (1998): Environmental Labels and Declarations—Self-Declared Environmental Claims (Type II environmental labeling), Geneva.

2.1.2 ISEAL Alliance guidance and its relation to Global Forest Alliance criteria

The elements of the ISEAL code that are relevant in the context of specific Alliance criteria are given below. Because the ISEAL code predominantly deals with standards and procedures for standard setting, Alliance criteria 3 through 5 are being considered in this chapter.

Criterion 3 — Meaningful and equitable participation of all major stakeholder groups in governance and standard setting

An element of the ISEAL code that is crucial for ensuring broad acceptance of the standard is the involvement of interested and directly affected parties in the standard-setting and decision-making processes. The basic requirements in this respect include the identification of relevant stakeholders and the use of proactive measures to engage interested parties in the process before beginning any standard-setting activities. The provisions also encompass other elements for broad stakeholder involvement, such as publication of draft standards, specification of an appropriate period for receiving comments, and procedures for handling comments. The ISEAL code also requires standard-setting bodies to have an appropriate mechanism for dealing with complaints and disputes.

Criterion 4 — Avoidance of unnecessary obstacles to trade

The ISEAL code emphasizes the links between international standards, making them a basic requirement on which national or locally adapted standards are based. This is an important means to give a wide range of potential users access to certification that is independent from their location, thus avoiding trade barriers that may be induced by standards that have a limited regional or national scope. By allowing a national adaptation process along the lines of the international framework standard, the guidelines provide the necessary flexibility for adjusting to the widely differing local situations that are frequent, particularly in forest management.

In addition the ISEAL code requires that standard-setting bodies have procedures to harmonize standards with other standard-setting processes that deal with the same subject matter and that participate in relevant international processes. These requirements, derived from the WTO [23] agreements, should contribute to avoiding conflicts and contradictions between different standards that are based on the same set of internationally applicable principles and criteria.

Criterion 5 — Based on objective and measurable performance standards that are adapted to local conditions

The ISEAL code provides guidelines for the adaptation and development of locally applicable standards under the overall objective of harmonizing standards and reducing inconsistencies between different standard-development processes (see also the criterion 4 discussion above). The code requires that language in standards avoid

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[23] WTO: Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, Annex 3, Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards.

ambiguities and be objective. Standards should include verifiable indicators and related benchmarks.

2.2 Conformity assessment and certification

2.2.1 The process and its control

The organizations assessing conformity with the standard and issuing certificates (certification bodies) play an important role in the process. Thus, their work is governed by different standards developed under the auspices of the ISO. One of three ISO guides can be applied, depending on the kind of standard against which the applicant for certification wants to be assessed. For quality management systems, a certification body operating under the ISO umbrella has to apply ISO Guide 62[24], for environmental management systems it has to adhere to ISO Guide 66,[25]; and for certification of products, it must use ISO Guide 65,[26] which provides the rules for the certification body's systems. Although considerable overlap exists between these ISO guides, some minor differences relate to the specific processes involved in product certification or system management certification, respectively.

Application of ISO guidelines is voluntary, and certificates can be issued without certification bodies complying with these requirements. Therefore, accreditation of certification bodies as an additional control level is required, which monitors compliance with the ISO guides mentioned above. Consequently, only accredited certification provides sufficient assurance of a reliable certification process.

In addition, accreditation is granted for specific certification services that are offered for defined industry sectors, so-called scopes. Examples for scopes may be environmental management system certification in the food sector, quality management certification in the automotive industry, or certification of specific products. Consequently, certification bodies can at the same time offer services that are covered under accreditation and others that are not. For all services without accreditation, the certification body is free to apply the procedures detailed in the relevant ISO guides, but there is no assurance that the certification process has been carried out according to these international standards. When assessing the quality of the certification process, it is therefore of utmost importance to verify whether or not the activities of certification bodies in the field of forest management are subject to independent accreditation.

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[24] ISO/IEC Guide 62 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Assessment and Certification/Registration of Quality Systems, Geneva.

[25] ISO/IEC Guide 66 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Assessment and Certification/Registration of Environmental Management Systems, Geneva.

[26] ISO/IEC Guide 65 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Product Certification Systems, Geneva.

2.2.2 ISO norms and their relation to Alliance criteria

The purpose of the ISO guides is to define minimum requirements for the structure and procedures necessary to ensure a credible and independent conformity assessment and certification process. The following sections outline the contribution of ISO rules to specific Alliance criteria, highlighting the aspects deemed essential in addition to ISO rules.

Criterion 6 — Certification decisions free of conflicts of interest from parties with vested interests

This is one of the key aspects of the ISO guidelines that appears in various paragraphs. To comply, the certification body must be structured in a way that ensures its impartiality and independence. Furthermore, the certification body and all personnel involved in auditing or certification decisions, as well as senior executive staff responsible for finances, supervision, and policy implementation, must be free of any undue commercial or financial influence on decisions. This condition includes a proven financial stability. Auditing personnel are not permitted to be involved in certification decision making. Appropriate procedures must ensure that operative personnel and committee members are free from any conflicts of interest that may influence their decisions. Although subcontracting is generally permitted, subcontractors are limited to auditing tasks and are subject to the same requirements for independence and impartiality as the certification body's own operations.

It can be assumed that the comprehensive rules for a certification body's structure, organization, and personnel and their assessment provide sufficient detail to ensure compliance with this Alliance criterion.

Criterion 7 — Transparency in decision making and public reporting

The report on the assessment has to be prepared by the audit personnel and be forwarded to the certification body and the applicant for certification. Apart from the information that the conformity assessment process has been completed successfully (available through the publicly available register of issued certificates), other details of the certificate holder's performance and the assessment process remain confidential. Additional requirements on publicly available information are deemed necessary to achieve a higher transparency and, thus, credibility of the process.

Criterion 8 — Reliable and independent assessment of forest management performance and chain of custody

Personnel: Because the ISO guides are general documents applicable to a wide range of sectors, specification of necessary qualification or personnel is left to the discretion of the certification body. However, all staff, including subcontractors, have to be competent for the tasks performed. Records must be kept on education, experience, and training. In addition, the certification body has to conduct regular appraisal of staff performance.

Field evaluation: Certification bodies have to assess the operation for compliance with the standard. Because the ISO rules provide general guidance on this issue, more specific requirements are included in the Alliance Guide.

Complaints and appeals: The certification body must have appropriate procedures to deal with complaints from clients as well as from other parties. Reaction to complaints has to be effective to resolve the issue. Taking these provisions into account, the Alliance specified in criterion 8 a few more details on the complaints mechanism that address the specific needs of stakeholders from a wide range of countries and different interest groups.

Criterion 10 - Delivers continual improvement in forest management

ISO guides require regular surveillance visits. Annual visits are nevertheless deemed a minimum frequency and thus are specified in this Alliance criterion. The ISO guidelines are vague on the issue of conditional certification and compliance with corrective action requests because, in general, full compliance with the standard is considered the norm. In this respect the Alliance requirements can be regarded as being less demanding, but they consider the often complex reality in forest management and subsequent certification.

Criterion 11 — Voluntary participation

ISO rules specify that the applicant for certification has to sign a form stating that it will comply with the requirements for certification, which includes compliance with the standard. Because forest ownership is a fragmented situation, group certification schemes or even regional certification schemes are frequent means to allow access to certification services independent of the size of the forest. In such cases the forest owner is linked to the certification body through an intermediary and has no direct relation to the body issuing the certificate and monitoring compliance. The Alliance therefore covered this particular situation under additional contractual requirements supplementing the respective ISO rules.

2.3 Accreditation

2.3.1 The process and its control

As in the case of certification bodies, application of the relevant ISO rules for accreditation bodies, as codified in ISO standard 17011, is voluntary. To increase credibility, accreditation bodies formed alliances that issued certain rules for membership, one of the most important of which is compliance with ISO standard 17011. The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) provides an appropriate umbrella for accreditation bodies operating at a national level. For internationally operating accreditation bodies, the International Social and Environmental Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance emerged as a body that monitors evidence of compliance with ISO

Standard 17011. In addition, both umbrella organizations have rules to assess their accreditation body members against specific additional requirements.

International umbrella organizations may recognize accreditation bodies only for specified scopes and products. For example, the IAF initiates and organizes assessment of the operations of its accreditation body members for their services in the field of environmental management, quality management, and product certification. There are limited possibilities to use the IAF umbrella for controlled accreditation operations in specific industry sectors. As for ISEAL, the operations of its members are assessed as a whole in all sectors in which these accreditation bodies operate.

For the assessment of the certification process in terms of credibility and independence it is therefore relevant to verify the role of international umbrella organizations for the certification scheme. In the absence of monitoring of accreditation bodies through other parties, compliance with ISO Standard 17011 should be provided through a stand-alone evaluation of the accreditation body's performance.

2.3.2 ISO norms and their relation to Alliance Criteria

As in the case of certification, the detailed standards for accreditation in the ISO framework specify requirements for the structure and the procedures that have to be in place for credible and independent accreditation. Requirements of ISO Standard 17011 are similar to those of the ISO guides for certification bodies, but the standard is tailored in some details to the specific tasks of accreditation. The opportunities provided by the use of ISO Standard 17011 [27] for assessment of schemes, as well as the deficits of these rules in relation to Alliance criteria, are therefore similar for certification and accreditation. Rules for independence and avoidance of conflict of interest, requirements for qualification of personnel, and existence of an appropriate complaints and appeals mechanism are handled for accreditation in the same ways as for certification in ISO Guides 62, 65, and 66. The same applies to reporting requirements and surveillance intensity and frequency. Thus, the same additional guidelines, particularly concerning public reporting, access to complaints and appeals mechanisms, and field evaluation, are deemed necessary in the field of accreditation and are included as additional elements in criteria 7 through 9.

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[27] ISO/IEC 17011:2004, Conformity Assessment—General Requirements for Accreditation Bodies Accrediting Conformity Assessment Bodies, Geneva.

ANNEX 2
Assessment of the Comprehensiveness of Forest Management Certification Schemes

A guidance note for the World Bank/WWF Global Forest Alliance

Version 2.0

PART 1
Compliance with international norms and standards

Criterion 1 — Compliance with international frameworks for certification, accreditation, and standard setting

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. The accreditation body is affiliated with an international accreditation organization (alliance/forum) such as the International Accreditation Forum (IAF; iaf.org) or the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance (ISEAL; isealalliance.org).		
	b. Monitoring and surveillance carried out by the organizations under point a cover the activities of accreditation in the field of forest management.		
	c. All certification bodies are accredited for their activities carried out for the forest management certification scheme under assessment.		
	d. Accreditation requires compliance with ISO Guide 62, 65, or 66. [28]		
	e. Standard-setting bodies are affiliated with the ISEAL Alliance.		
Guidance	Point a—Affiliation with IAF or ISEAL should be as an accreditation or standard-setting body, respectively. Other forms of membership exist with these bodies but do not require		

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[28] ISO/IEC Guide 62 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Assessment and Certification/Registration of Quality Systems, Geneva; ISO/IEC Guide 65 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Product Certification Systems, Geneva; ISO/IEC Guide 66 (1996): General Requirements for Bodies Operating Assessment and Certification/Registration of Environmental Management Systems, Geneva.

		Assessment Results	Comments
	compliance with relevant requirements (ISO 17011 [29], ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards [30])		
	Point b—International bodies for mutual recognition of accreditation often limit their services to specific scopes, such as for quality management certification or environmental management certification. Monitoring and surveillance should therefore be evaluated if the activities of accreditation bodies in the field of forest management certification are in fact covered by international umbrella organizations.		
	Point c—It is important to assess that certification bodies are accredited for their activities in the field of forest management and carried out for the specific certification scheme. Accreditation for ISO 14001 or ISO 9000 is not sufficient.		
	Point d—Alternatively, a certification system can provide evidence of compliance with the above-referenced documents (ISO 17011; ISO Guide 62, 65, and 66; and ISEAL Code of Good Practice) through other means. In this case the elements of the certification system have to be assessed against the requirements specified therein.		
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification, standardization		

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[29] ISO/IEC 17011:2004, Conformity Assessment — General Requirements for Accreditation Bodies Accrediting Conformity Assessment Bodies, Geneva.

[30] ISEAL (2004): ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, Bonn.

PART 2
Standards and the standard-setting process

Criterion 2 — Compatible with globally applicable principles of forest management that balance economic, ecological, and equity dimensions

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. Compliance with all relevant laws. The scheme/system requires that forest management respect all applicable laws in the country in which operations occur and international treaties and agreements to which the country is signatory.		
	b. Respect for tenure and use rights. The scheme/system requires respect for any legally documented or customary land tenure and use rights.		
	c. Respect for indigenous peoples' rights. The scheme/system explicitly requires respect for the legal and customary rights of indigenous people to own, use, and/or manage their lands, territories, and resources.		
	d. Respect for community relations. The scheme/system explicitly requires recognition and respect for the rights of communities as well as the maintenance and enhancement of the long-term social and economic well-being of forest communities.		
	e. Respect for workers' rights. The scheme/system explicitly requires recognition and respect for the rights of workers.		

		Assessment Results	Comments
	f. Delivery of multiple benefits from the forest. The scheme/system explicitly requires management systems that encourage the efficient use of the multiple products and services of the forest to enhance economic viability and foster a wide range of environmental and social services.		
	g. Assessment and mitigation of environmental impact. The scheme/system explicitly requires that management systems assess and manage environmental impacts (including issues addressed in either World Bank or WWF policiesto conserve biological diversity and its associated values, water resources, soils, and unique and fragile ecosystems and landscapes.		
	h. Maintenance of critical forest areas and related natural critical habitats. The scheme/system explicitly requires that forest operations maintain critical forest areas and other critical natural habitats affected by the operation.		
	i. Specific provisions for plantations. The scheme/system has adequate and explicit requirements to ensure that the establishment of plantations does not lead to the conversion of critical natural habitats.		
	j. Implementation of management plan. The scheme/system requires effective forest management planning through the maintenance of a comprehensive and up-to-date management plan appropriate to the scale and intensity of the operation concerned.The scheme/system		

		Assessment Results	Comments
	explicitly requires these management plans to have clearly articulated goals for continual improvement and descriptions of the means for achieving these goals. k. Effective monitoring and assessment. The scheme/system explicitly require the use of monitoring systems appropriate to the scale and intensity of the operation to assess the condition of the forest, yields of forest products, chain of custody (where relevant), management activities, and social and environmental impacts.		
Guidance	Points c and d—Standards should require the protection of the rights of indigenous people and local communities where use is made of their cultural knowledge or of the biological diversity on which they traditionally depend. Reference should be made in the standard to the rights of indigenous people and local communities with respect to tenure, customary use, and sites of cultural or religious significance. Point e—Standards should, at a minimum, meet the core International Labour Organization (ILO) requirements outlined in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Point k—Standards should include the requirement that results of monitoring be taken into account during review of plans.		
Scope of assessment	Standardization		

Criterion 3—Meaningful and equitable participation of all major stakeholder groups in governance and standard setting

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	*Effective stakeholder involvement*		
	a. Relevant stakeholder groups (see annex 2 checklist) have been officially invited to participate.		
	b. Relevant stakeholder groups (see annex 2 checklist) participated meaningfully.		
	c. A procedure is in place to involve stakeholders in case of failure to achieve meaningful participation of relevant major stakeholder groups.		
	d. Written documents are available on what efforts have been taken to include stakeholders as well as on how issues raised by stakeholders have been addressed.		
	Balanced decision-making procedures		
	e. The decision-making process is striving for consensus among relevant stakeholder groups.		
	f. Procedures are in place to achieve balanced decision making in the absence of consensus. These procedures do the following:		
	■ Ensure that no major interest group can dominate nor be dominated in the decision-making process.		
	■ Specify a voting system that prevents major environmental, social, or economic interests from being overruled.		
	g. Contain a mechanism that prevents decision making in the absence of any representative of one of the major interest groups.		

		Assessment Results	Comments
Guidance	Point a—Definition of the two terms *relevant stakeholder groups* and *major interest groups*.		
	The following relevant stakeholder groups should be represented in the standard-setting process and in the governance of the scheme/system:		
	▪ Forest owners, including governments,[31] and/or representatives of their associations		
	▪ Product manufacturers, distributors, retailers		
	▪ Scientists/scientific bodies		
	▪ Environmental NGOs Social NGOs/organizations (e.g., worker unions and consumer associations)		
	▪ Representatives of indigenous peoples		
	▪ Major interest groups are divided into economic, social, and ecological interests and are relevant for decision making in the absence of consensus.		
	Point b—NGOs participating in standard setting and governance should		
	▪ Legitimately represent the respective interests		
	▪ Ensure that representatives are accountable to their constituencies		
	▪ Have a proven record in the subject matter		
	▪ Be interested and affected by the certification system		
	▪ Have a broad membership base		
Scope of assessment	Governance, standard setting		

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[31] It is normally not the role of governments to participate in voluntary standard setting, as this may conflict with their duties in law-making processes. However, governments often are important forest owners and may participate in this function in such processes.

Criterion 4 — Avoidance of unnecessary obstacles to trade

The Global Forest Alliance partners regard the provisions set in the ISEAL code as an appropriate basis to avoid obstacles to trade (see also criterion 1), including the requirement to base national standards on international principles and criteria.

Criterion 5 — Based on objective and measurable performance standards that are adapted to local conditions

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. The standard contains explicit performance requirements, including chain of custody, if relevant.		
	b. The standard is written in measurable terms, with guidance on interpretation if flexibility is required.		
	c. International principles and criteria used as the basis for development of national standards include provisions for the operational level (forest management unit).		
	In case of internationally operating systems:		
	d. Mechanisms and processes are in place to facilitate the harmonization/equivalence of national standards or national schemes within the international system.		
	e. Processes exist by which consistency between national standards can be sought		
	f. National standards are endorsed by the international system.		

		Assessment Results	Comments
Guidance	Although the national standard may include requirements for the management systems in place, the Global Forest Alliance requirements should be translated into performance indicators that are applicable at the national or subnational level. Wording of the indicators should prevent ambiguities and potentially inconsistent interpretation by avoiding terms such as "where applicable" or "where appropriate" without explanations for interpretation.		
Scope of assessment	Governance, standard setting		

PART 3
Conformity Assessment, Certification, and Accreditation

Criterion 6 — Certification decisions free of conflicts of interest from parties with vested interests

Given the detailed provisions in the relevant ISO documents for these elements, the Global Forest Alliance partners recognize that independence of the assessment and the absence of conflicts of interest in the certification decision making process are fully ensured when monitoring mechanisms are in place, which provide evidence of compliance with relevant ISO rules. No further guidance is therefore needed in addition to ISO rules for evaluation of compliance of a scheme with Global Forest Alliance criterion 6.

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Criterion 7 — Transparency in decision making and public reporting

7. 1 Public availability of scheme requirements

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	The certification scheme/system makes its documents publicly available, specifying all its requirements related to accreditation, standardization and certification, including chain of custody and control of claims, where applicable.		
Guidance	Certification schemes frequently specify regulations for certification and accreditation normally requiring ISO compliance or exceeding ISO rules. All these scheme-specific rules have to be publicly available.		
Scope of assessment	Scheme governance		

7.2 Public availability of certification and accreditation reports

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. Public reports on forest management evaluation and surveillance provide the rationale for the certification decision or the maintenance of certification, respectively. b. Public reports on forest management evaluation justify the certification decision by providing key findings with respect to compliance with the standard. c. Public reports on forest management evaluation and surveillance include the corrective action requests raised in regard to the performance of the operation being evaluated. d. Public reports on accreditation provide the rationale for the accreditation decision. e. Public reports on accreditation provide the corrective action requests raised in regard to the performance of the evaluated certification body. f. Public reports are readily available.		
Guidance	Point c—The main strengths of the assessed operation should be summarized in the public report and provide the evidence for standard compliance. Point f—Public reports should be available from the Web sites of certification and accreditation bodies. Otherwise they should be sent to any interested party at no charge and without delay		
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification		

Criterion 8 — Reliable and independent assessment of forest management performance and chain of custody

8.1 Independence of assessments

The Global Forest Alliance partners consider the independence of the assessment as the basis of any credible certification. This view is widely accepted by all international rules guiding the conformity and certification process, and comprehensive requirements are established in the relevant ISO guides (see criterion 1). Compliance with the ISO rules is therefore deemed sufficient to ensure independence and no further Global Forest Alliance requirements are necessary to fully assess schemes against this part of Alliance criterion 8.

8.2 Field evaluation of forest management and certification body performance

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. Accreditation procedures for the initial evaluation and surveillance of certification bodies foresee field visits to certified forest management units. b. Accreditation requirements specify evaluation and surveillance intensity to be applied by certification bodies. c. Certification procedures require field visits to applicant forest management units before a certificate can be issued.		
Guidance	According to ISO rules, accreditation and certification bodies have to make the applied assessment methodology and surveillance intensity publicly available. Information about the documented procedures can therefore be obtained from these bodies.		
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification		

8.3 Chain-of-custody requirements

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. The scheme has a standard for the control of chain of custody that covers production and trade from the forest of origin to the final product. b. Standards and control mechanisms exist to prevent application of logos on uncertified timber. c. Chain-of-custody certificate holders are required to exclude timber from illegal sources and from conversion of forests. d. Procedures for use of claims comply with ISO standards 14020 and 14021.		
Guidance	None		
Scope of assessment	Scheme governance		

8.4 Stakeholder consultation in the certification and accreditation process

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. Accreditation bodies undertake proactive and culturally appropriate external consultation as part of initial assessment and surveillance of certification bodies. b. Certification bodies undertake proactive and culturally appropriate external consultation as part of initial assessment and surveillance of certificate holders. c. Appropriate procedures exist to take stakeholders' comments into account in the decision-making process for certification and accreditation.		
Guidance	Points a and b— Time and place of initial evaluation and surveillance audits should be made known to stakeholders, together with an invitation to provide comments about the assessed operation to the certification or accreditation body. Point c—The certification decision-making committee within the certification or accreditation body should be required to take note of stakeholder comments and to justify its decision accordingly in the public report.The groups to be consulted must correspond to the groups as outlined in criterion 6.		
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification		

8.5 Complaints and appeals mechanisms

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	Complaints and appeals mechanisms of accreditation, certification, and standard-setting bodies area, accessible to any interested party, b. publicly available, and c. free of cost implications for the complainant.		
Guidance	This point implies that anybody who wishes to do so can raise a complaint against decisions taken by accreditation, certification, and standard-setting bodies. Relevant documentation can normally be found in the documents on complaints and appeals procedures of certification, accreditation, and standard-setting bodies, which have to be published under ISO and ISEAL rules.		
Scope of assessment	Standard setting, accreditation, certification		

Criterion 9 — Delivers continual improvement in forest management

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. The scheme sets deadlines for full compliance if certificates are issued under the condition of fulfillment of outstanding noncompliances. b. Surveillance visits from certification bodies and accreditation bodies are carried out at least annually. c. Clear deadlines exist for compliance, with corrective action requests issued as a result of surveillance.		
Guidance	Point a—Normally, deadlines specified for full compliance of certificate holders with all standard requirements should not exceed two years. Point b—The minimum requirement of most certification schemes is an annual visit by certification bodies to certificate holders and by accreditation organizations to certification bodies. In high-risk areas and in cases of complaints, a more frequent schedule of visits should be foreseen. Point c—Deadlines set for compliance with corrective action requests should not exceed six months.		
Scope of assessment	Certification, accreditation		

Criterion 10 — Accessible to and cost-effective for all parties

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. Mechanisms exist that allow equity of access to all participants, regardless of the size, location, or forest type under the operation's management. b. The above mechanisms provide access to forest certification at a cost that does not exclude small forest owners, communities, and other groups that may have limited access.		
Guidance	Provisions for better access to certification for owners of small forest areas can be made at two levels: a. On the level of accreditation, by reducing evaluation intensity, e.g., in the framework of group certification or multisite certification. b. On the level of standards, by reducing performance levels or waiving compliance with certain standard requirements for this group. Compliance can normally be assumed when these forest owners participate in the scheme. Information may be obtained from the list of certificate holders published by the certification bodies according to ISO rules. However, the possibility that substantial subsidies are provided to these groups should be considered for the evaluation of the accessibility of the schemes for this forest owner group. The notion of the area that is considered as small may vary from region to region, depending on the traditional forest ownership structures. A		

		Assessment Results	Comments
	definition should therefore be developed in the context of the national standard-setting process.		
Scope of assessment	Standard setting (standards for forest management evaluation and standards for the certification process)		

Criterion 11 — Voluntary participation

		Assessment Results	Comments
Requirements	a. In cases of group certification, a set of contractual arrangements exists between the owners or their designated intermediary and the entity that holds the group certificate for the requirements of certification. b. A mechanism exists to ensure that each member of the group must meet the standard or will have to leave the group. c. Enforcement mechanisms exist in case of breach of the group's rules. d. All participating forest owners have signed a commitment to adhere to the standards set by the scheme.		
Decision	Pass/fail		
Guidance	Point a—The contractual relationship between the group member and the entity that holds the group certificate should foresee that members can be removed from the group in case of unresolved corrective action requests.		
Scope of assessment	Accreditation, certification		

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