



An initiative of Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) for Sustainability Standards organisations operating in India to be better informed about each others' features and initiatives, and explore opportunities to Collaborate

Walking Together with Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) in India

**Brief Report
Inaugural Meeting
17 Jan 2019, CRB, Delhi**



1. Background

Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) kicked-off an initiative through a meeting on 17th January 2019 in Delhi, to start a process of dialogue involving **Voluntary Sustainability Standards** operating in India. From CRB's engagement and interactions with Sustainability Standards organisations and various experts and actors, *the need for collaboration among sustainability standards had been raised as an imperative.*

However, there has been little discussion and actual actions on this issue in India. Together with VSS organisations and initiatives, CRB would contribute to this need through this initiative. To start with, it would involve quarterly physical meetings between sustainability standards organisations working in India, and identifying actions/activities which can enable better understanding among the Sustainability Standards of each other's features and initiatives. It would also enable sharing lessons, good practices, policy pointers and identifying common issues of interest for joint interventions.

Given that a number of Sustainability Standards are operating in India, CRB believes, ***our country can take a lead in demonstrating ways for achieving greater engagement and collaboration between VSS.*** This would help address some of the challenges encountered in the Indian market (both individual and common), highlight policy issues and leverage opportunities to pursue sustainable business and SDGs.

This report has been prepared based on the discussions at this **inaugural meeting**, and is organized into the following sections: (i) expectations from the initiative, (ii) overview of priority areas (iii) issues of common interest and (iv) agreed actions.

2. Expectations from the Initiative

Based on the inputs from the participants, the following broad expectations emerged:

- Better awareness and understanding about the salient features, domains, experiences and achievements of various existing Sustainability Standards operational in India
- Discussions about possible ways to collaborate between Sustainability Standards in India

3. Priorities for 2019

The organisations which were present in the meeting shared their top three priorities for 2019, which have been enumerated here below in the table¹:

Sl No	Organisation	2019 Priorities
1	Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Campaign and Activities pertaining to Responsible Shopping (FMCGs) • National Interpretation of RSPO Standards in India • Multi-stakeholder Platform (India-SPOC)
2	Rainforest Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Agriculture Standard • Building on Influencing leadership in South Asia (Business, Government)
3	Alliance for Water Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interoperability among the standards • Priority Sectors: Agriculture, Food and Beverages, Micro-electronics and Textiles • Collaboration between Standards (AWS-BCI, AWS-BonSucro)
4	Social Accountability International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rating System for SMEs, for them to graduate to adopting SA8000 • Working with Waste Pickers (electronics waste, municipal solid waste) • Approaching Niti Aayog, Ministry of Labour and the Commerce Ministry, GOI for providing incentives to SME's
5	Goodweave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certification of Apparel and Home textiles • Work with domestic suppliers of Apparel and home textiles – moving towards their certification (pilot in Jaipur, with other CSOs) • Expanding agro-industry work, for example the work done with Rainforest Alliance on tea
6	Traidcraft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in Value Chains (Coalition of CSOs working together) • Business and Human Rights (focusing on Workers' Rights – working with Brands to develop model 'Code of Conduct') • Initiatives aimed at using textiles wastes in developing upcycled products (Recycle Economy)
7	Global Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with Top-500 companies in India (for uptake of GRI Reporting Standard)

¹ Green Electronics Council (GEC), Global Infrastructure Basel (GIB) and Responsible Mica Initiative (RMI) participated through SKYPE – but were unable to share their priorities due to problem with connection and time constrains – and have been requested to share their inputs by email

Sl No	Organisation	2019 Priorities
	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector specific Workshops – possibility of joint events with other sector-specific Standards and/or standards with sector-specific experiences
8	International Integrated Reporting Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity Building of Corporates on ‘Value Creation for Business through improved Corporate Governance’ Engagement with Investor Community and Regulators
9	Better Cotton Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration to address some of the critical sustainability challenges, e.g. biodiversity, water resources management National Embedding of BCI Standard in India Creating consumer awareness for uptake of the BCI standard
10	Fairwear Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living Wages & Non-discrimination Supporting Tier1 SMEs (CTM Units) Collaboration across Multi-stakeholder Initiatives

4. Areas of Common Interest

Based on the discussions, the following areas/subjects of common interest emerged from the discussions:

- Sharing information about various Sustainability Standards among themselves
- Uptake of Sustainability Standards among SMEs (expansion and achieving scale)
- Supporting Private Sector companies (buyers) on Supply Chain Transparency and Sustainability
- Engagement on Policy issues with relevant organs of the government
- Certification of Domestic Industry
- Mindset change and engagement with decision makers (business and government)

5. Actions to be taken (by CRB)

- Create an **Email Group** adding emails of representatives of all the organisations who were invited and participated in this meeting, to enable sharing of information among the Sustainability Standards.
- CRB will create a **2-page template** which each Organisation would fill-up with information about the Standards. Once all the information is received – this would be collated into a Dossier and shared with all the Organisations using this Email Group
- CRB would also do a poll of dates to finalise the dates of the next three meetings in 2019 to be held mid-April, mid-July and mid-Oct.

6. List of Participants

Sl No	Representatives	Designation	Organisation
1	Rosy Choudhury	India Country Manager	Rainforest Alliance
2	Kamal P Seth	India Representative	Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil
3	Rebecca Aranha	India Programme Coordinator	Better Cotton Initiative
4	Manoj Bhatt	Country Director, India	Goodweave
5	Archana Panda	Operations Manager	Social Accountability International
6	Ashish Bharadwaj	India Coordinator	Alliance for Water Stewardship
7	Rakesh Supkar	Business Head, India	Traidcraft
8	Vijay Jain	Programme Manager, India	Responsible Mica Initiative
9	Rubina Sen	Senior Coordinator, India	Global Reporting Initiative
10	Vrushali Gaur	India Adviser	International Integrated Reporting Council
11	Louis Downing	Chief Operating Officer	Global Infrastructure Basel
12	Mousumi Sarangi	Country Manager	Fair Wear Foundation
13	Rijit Sengupta	Chief Operating Officer	CRB
14	Arun Asthana	Executive Director	CRB
15	Ria Sinha	Research Fellow	CRB