

Food Security Standard on the Right Track

The Food Security Standard (FSS) has passed his baptism of fire: The first tests in Malaysia and Guatemala have shown that the criteria are suited to be integrated into existing sustainability standards. Implemented in regular audits, they deliver a detailed picture about the compliance with the Human Right to Food at local level. The level of interest for the **FSS | Project** is generally high. Producers of agricultural commodities, voluntary certification schemes and certification bodies are widely open for testing and providing feedback on the FSS. Local stakeholders have shown a broad acceptance regarding a future application of the FSS. Nevertheless, there are still some major challenges to overcome: The high expectations placed in the FSS must be balanced against the applicability of the FSS in certain context. A question to be solved in future pilot audits is whether and, if so, under what conditions food insecure smallholders can be certified.

Over the past six months, the project carried out two extensive tests: In Sabah/Malaysia and in Guatemala. First learning experiences were gained regarding the auditability of the FSS criteria and the overall audit procedures.

In Sabah, the FSS was tested in small to medium-sized oil palm farms within the context of an RSPO group certification. The farmers are part of the Wild Asia Group Certification. The test was jointly supported by the Forum for Sustainable Palm Oil (FONAP). The same team of auditors in charge of the RSPO audit tested the auditability of the FSS criteria following a regular RSPO audit. The criteria



Women planting sugarcane on plantation in Guatemala

and indicators as well as the very first versions of the audit tools proved to be applicable, though needed intense revisions. A main learning for the whole concept of the FSS was that a certification system would need to distinguish between food-secure and food-insecure smallholders. Strictness, requirements and time frames to implement the criteria need to be adapted to recognize the

differences between different situations of small farmers. As a general question remains, how a decent living income, and sometimes even food security, can be obtained from very small plots. Here, certification systems reach their limits. Governmental support for these farmers – for instance through job creation programs, promotion of other production models and by providing social security schemes is needed.

After having incorporated the lessons learned from the implementation in Sabah into the FSS, the first test within a regular audit took place within the framework of ISCC, who is strongly supporting this project

and encouraging ISCC certified companies for participation. The pilot audit took place in Guatemala in a large-scale sugar cane plantation attached to a sugar mill. Thanks to the engagement of the company management, it was possible to incorporate the FSS test into a regular ISCC audit.

Prior to the audit, the auditors integrated the whole FSS in the regular audit scheme for the ISCC certification. This was done based on a benchmarking provided by the FSS-Team: Many criteria that are relevant for food security were already part of ISCC. Only new criteria or those that have not yet been fully covered had to be added. ISCC participated in the pilot audit as they were keen on benefiting from the insights gained on the ground for the continuous improvement of its system.

The auditors were able to implement the FSS criteria in the audit. It was also possible to integrate interviews with farm workers to get an overview of their nutritional situation. The auditors and the company staff estimated that the extra time needed to audit the FSS criteria is around two days. This is within the range expected by the FSS team.

In case the criteria would be requested by customers or be mandatory in the EU, the involved companies, producers and certification schemes confirmed that it would be feasible to implement the FSS criteria and to bear the costs for the audits.

Both tests were accompanied by local expert consultations and a workshop. They allowed to

get a better picture of the factors influencing food security and provided valuable inputs to better define the corporate responsibility for the respect of the Right to Food at local level. Experts also provided their views on the role of sustainability

certification including FSS to mitigate the direct potential impacts of export-oriented agriculture on local food security. Based on this, it was possible to determine more precisely the expected impacts of the FSS (see box). At

the same time, the limits of the FSS became much clearer. In the further pilot audits and consultation activities, more focus has to be set on the question on whether and how to address in sustainability certification the occurrence of hunger among casual workers outside harvest season and food insecurity in communities as well as among smallholders.

The project follows an iterative approach. With each test, the FSS criteria and indicators are further calibrated accounting for the different situations of plantations, out-grower and smallholder schemes. The coming pilot audits will target medium sized plantations and then food-insecure small farmers in Africa. The pilot audits become particularly important in smallholder settings where extended hunger periods take place despite being certified.

Expected Impacts of FSS

- ✓ Right to adequate Food is protected by biomass producers as much as it is their responsibility
- ✓ Farmers and employed workers are food secure
- ✓ Food security in surrounding area does not deteriorate

FSS | PROJECT
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