

**Assurance Forum  
4th Meeting (via Zoom)  
Minutes of Meeting**

Venue: Zoom Meeting (<https://zoom.us/j/97389769591>)  
Date and time: 8 December 2021 at 5.00 pm – 7.00 pm KL time

**ASC Members Attendance:**

<b>Growers</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Group Representation</b>
Agus Purnomo (Co-chair) (AP)	Golden Agri Resources (GAR)	Indonesian Growers (IGC)
Lee Kuan Yee ( <i>absent</i> )	Kuala Lumpur Kepong (KLK) Berhad	Malaysian Growers (MPOA)
Mariama Diallo	SIAT	Growers RoW
Rosine Nsegbe	Goldtree	Smallholders Group
<b>NGOs</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Group Representation</b>
Joko Sarjito (Co-chair) ( <i>absent</i> )	WWF Indonesia	E-NGO
Paula den Hartog	Rainforest Alliance	E-NGO
Paul Wolvekamp	Both ENDS	S-NGO
Marcus Colchester	Forest Peoples Programme	S-NGO
<b>Supply Chain Sector / Downstream / Others</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Group Representation</b>
Emily Kunen ( <i>absent</i> )	Nestlé	CGM
Hugo Byrnes	Royal Ahold Delhaize N.V	Retailers
Olivier Tichit ( <i>absent</i> )	Musim Mas Holdings	P&T
Michael Zrust ( <i>absent</i> )	Lestari Capital	Financial
Vivi Anita	Musim Mas Holdings	P&T (Alternate member)
Lee Kuan-Chun	P&G	CGM (Alternate member)

**RSPO Secretariat Attendance:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Aryo Gustomo (AG)	Deputy Director, Compliance
Wan Muqtadir Wan Abdul Fatah (WM)	Head, Integrity Unit
Freda Abd Manan	Senior Executive, Integrity Unit

Prasad Vijaya Segaran (PV)	Human Rights & Social Standards Manager
Inke van der Sluijs	Director, Market Transformation
Julia Majail	Director, Standard Development
Citra Hartati	Head, Risk
Ahmad Amirul Ariff	Manager, Certification
Hanis Maketab	Senior Executive, Social Media
Siti Joanni Matlan	Specialist, Environment

**Assurance Forum Participants' Attendance:**

Name	Organisation
Bilge Daldeniz (BD)	Proforest - Lead Facilitator
Shinta Puspitasari	Proforest - Facilitator
Claire Reboah	Proforest - Facilitator
Badrinath Gulur (BG)	SAI
Nicholas Cheong (NC)	BSI
Dian Soeminta (DS)	TÜV Rheinland
Sanjiv Singh (SS)	WIRE
Vivek Gole	WIRE
Jan Pierre Jarrin	ASI
Siobhan Pearce	EIA International
Selvanathan Grapragasem	Independent
Mohd Hafiz	Intertek
Ruth Sliva	HCVN
Arif Yusni	Mutuagung Lestari
Ardiansyah	Mutuagung Lestari
Efrida Sani	TÜV Rheinland
Trismadi Nurbayuto	TÜV Rheinland
Budi Setiawan	TÜV Rheinland
Monang Lingga	TÜV Rheinland
Jenny Francis	Sawit Kinabalu
Dita Galina	Musim Mas
Cristian Marsh	BM Trada
Judith Murdoch	Murdoch Associates
Anne Rosenbarger	WRI
Hubert Jurczynszyn	Control Union
Erik Wakker	Earthqualizer
Adriana Cala	SCS Global
Michel Riemersma	Riemersma Research
Arie Soetjadi	HCVN
Hubert de Bonafos	ASI
Grant Rosoman	Greenpeace
Lee Horlock	BM Trada

Yohannes Ryan	Independent
Octo Nainggolan	Mutu Certification International
Zaidee Tahir	Sabah International Petroleum
Nazlya Syahputri	Musim Mas
Matthias Wilnhammer	ASI

Item	Description	Action Points
	<p><b>Opening</b></p> <p>BD welcomed everyone joining the call and invited WM to give a welcome remark as the Assurance Standing Committee (ASC) Co-Chair was slightly delayed.</p> <p>WM welcomed all participants and explained that the forum will focus on social auditing and acknowledged that the journey is challenging.</p> <p>BD read out the RSPO Antitrust Guidelines for the audience to acknowledge and shared the agenda for this forum.</p> <p>BD explained the modalities of the session. A participant asked about the chat function and BD explained that this was not enabled in the Zoom Webinar settings but that the audience could use the available Q&amp;A and 'raise your hand' functions.</p> <p>BD invited AG to begin the sharing session.</p>	
1.0	<p><b>Sharing Session: Strengthening RSPO Social Auditing Protocols</b></p> <p>AG introduced himself and explained that he will provide a background to the sharing session. Before proceeding further, AG invited participants to share their opinions on which of the six challenges that they think is the biggest challenge in social auditing via the Mentimeter application. The result is referenced in the Minutes below [and included in the accompanying slide deck].</p> <p>AG gave a brief background on the RSPO Assurance Gap Analysis report that was published in September 2021. AG explained the methodology that involved a review of external reports from independent third parties and NGOs. The report identified three main weaknesses that affect the effectiveness of the RSPO Assurance System. AG explained that one area of concern, Labour and Human Rights, formed the basis of the sharing session and emphasised the need to strengthen RSPO Social Auditing Protocols.</p> <p>AG shared that the Secretariat has developed a new workplan which merges the Secretariat's Operational Plan with the workplan from the gap analysis. AG gave examples of the planned activities relating to standards development, certification and systems documents (which include the development of labour and social guidance, accompanied by customised audit methodology) as well governance of assurance.</p>	

<p>1.1</p>	<p>AG shared the result of the Mentimeter poll. On the biggest challenge in social auditing, 48% voted for limited time to conduct audits, 33% voted for auditors' competencies, 10% voted for difficulty/restrictions to conduct unannounced audits, 5% voted for lack of meaningful sampling and another 5% voted for lack of confidence in interviewees, respectively.</p> <p>AG introduced the speakers for the sharing session. They were Badrinath Gulur (SAI), Nicholas Cheong (BSI) and Dian Soeminta (TÜV Rheinland). [All panelists' slides are included in the accompanying slide deck].</p> <p><b>Overview of the SA8000® Certification System (SAI), Badrinath Gulur (BG)</b>          BG introduced the SA8000 standard as the leading voluntary social certification standard for decent workplaces which measures organisations' social performance in nine areas important to social accountability. BG explained that the SA8000 is voluntary and has a 3-year certification cycle. BG gave an overview of SAAS which is the accreditation arm of SAI. Auditing bodies apply to be SA8000 CBs and are accredited for specific countries and undergo ongoing monitoring as well as re-accreditation audits.</p> <p>On certifying labour and social standards, BG explained key challenges in assurance include knowing what to evaluate, giving enough time for thorough evaluation, evaluating the negative (i.e. absence of forced labor) and auditor competence, commitment, integrity, diligence. To address these, SA8000 promotes worker engagement through the Social Performance Team (SPT) requirement which involves workers in the audit process and takes a holistic approach to risk assessment. SAI also conducts initial self-assessment for certified companies as well as training &amp; capacity building, which includes topical webinars and workshops on specific areas of the standard. In the complaints process, SAAS follows prescriptive dissatisfaction (complaint and appeal) protocols and 'triages' each dissatisfaction based on risk. To ensure auditors' competency, SAAS evaluates auditors' background, imposes a qualification pathway, ensures ongoing calibration, provides prescriptive social audit program, rotation oversight and training &amp; capacity building to ensure all its 32 certification bodies are consistent.</p> <p>BD relayed a question about the advantages of having an in-house accreditation body as part of the organisation that owns the standard. BG responded that being the only accreditation body for SA8000 gives SAAS the advantage of being able to ensure the certifications and certification bodies are more consistent and sustainable. It also allows SAAS to develop specific training modules and programs based on actual issues and findings from the audits.</p>	
<p>1.2</p>	<p><b>RSPO Labour Auditing Field Test Malaysia, BSI, Nicholas Cheong (NC)</b>          NC shared that BSI took the initiative to conduct the pilot at two locations with significant differences in size of production area and workers demographic. Field test for Certificate Holder (CH) A is conducted with P&amp;C audit while CH B is not, and an independent translator was appointed for CH A and not for CH B. The guidelines indicated sampling size of 50% individual and 50% in groups, and 50% onsite and another 50% offsite (including workplace and housing compound).</p>	



<p>1.3</p>	<p>NC explained the challenges which include incomplete document submission by CHs prior to audits, too much time taken for interviews, not all categories can be covered and how auditors should handle calls outside the audits (and what the Secretariat would do with the information received). NC highlighted feedback from participating growers such as audit being similar to NGO investigative approach and cost for additional man-days required. NC continued that the use of independent interpreters and in-depth conversation with workers helped in obtaining more data points. NC pointed out that the procedure needs to be refined and suggested the inclusion of guidelines to determine man-days which should be based on the size &amp; number of workers in the certification unit and the use of a standardised questionnaire.</p> <p>A participant asked if there is a best practice calculation to determine the number of man-days for social auditing. BG responded by relating to SA8000 Procedure 200 which requires maximum effort in estimating the minimum number of audit days and documents to review and added that while it may increase cost, the procedure allows for a deep dive. NC shared that establishing trust for workers' interviews was a challenge during the field test and time required for each interview varies. NC agreed with BG that the minimum time for an interview needs to be determined. BG added that RSPO may benefit from the nature of workers' interview in a plantation which is more natural compared with inside a factory.</p> <p><b>RSPO Labour Auditing Field Test Indonesia, TÜV Rheinland, Dian Soeminta (DS)</b></p> <p>DS shared the objectives of the field test were to check the practicality of the checklist, if additional mandays are required and the potential obstacles. A state-owned company was chosen since it does not have full authority compared with a private company and has a diverse workers' structure. DS continued to share the methodology and elaborated on the stakeholder consultation which raised several issues, some of which were from the workforce agency, gender committee, labour union and head of villages. DS also explained how the sampling was done and the activities that were conducted offsite and onsite.</p> <p>On obstacles encountered, DS highlighted the delay in document submission and unavailability of third-party workers. In summary, DS stated that the checklist was helpful in social audit and that time constraints need to be considered and strongly suggested that RSPO considers workers demographic as basis for man-days calculation rather than hectareage or size of the unit of certification.</p> <p>BD summarised that there was a clear message from all presenters to consider the number of workers when calculating the time needed for audits.</p> <p>A participant asked about the protocol to follow when someone alerts the CB about a gross misconduct or violation of human rights. DS responded that TÜV Rheinland clearly informed stakeholders during the audit that they can email the CB to report on any misconduct and that their details will not be disclosed in the audit report. NC added that the guidelines clearly stated only two management representatives are allowed to accompany the CB to the field and requires CB to hand out their phone numbers to provide assurance to the interviewees that their</p>	
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<p>1.4</p>	<p>identity will be protected. However, NC noted that the guidelines do not tell CB what to do with the information received and timeline to accept the calls. NC explained that once the closing meeting is done, the CB’s obligation for the audit is over. NC suggested for the guidance to state what needs to be done with information received after the audit.</p> <p><b>Additional exchange via the Zoom Webinar Q&amp;A box</b></p> <p><b>1. Question:</b> As BG rightly indicated, worker interviews (and other local stakeholders, especially community members, women in particular) takes time, more than the 9 days now suggested under the RSPO Certification Systems. How can we ensure that social auditing is given sufficient time? This is something which will eventually benefit all companies, workforce and certification bodies.  <b>Answer:</b> This has been part of our consideration. We also expect similar input from the field test for the Labour Auditing Guidance on how many man-days are sufficient to audit the labour aspects.</p> <p><b>2. Question:</b> Who chooses and pays for the SA8000 auditors?  <b>Answer:</b> All SA8000 auditors work for certification bodies, either as full-time employees or as non-exclusive auditors.</p> <p><b>3. Question:</b> How do your auditors ensure strict confidentiality, enabling workers or interviewees to speak freely? And how do you guarantee safety of whistleblowers, especially for undocumented workers and women? Does your organisation have a protocol and a clear understanding with the RSPO Secretariat on how to deal with such expressed concerns? What would be your recommendation to RSPO and ASI on the matter of sufficient time for social auditing?  <b>Answer:</b> One of the suggestions discussed with the RSPO Secretariat during the pilot audit was to put in the guidelines that the CB shall check again if the previously interviewed workers have been absconded. However, the guidelines does not provide the next course of actions if CB received a call or if the CB found the abscondment to be unfair. I think this needs to be addressed to ensure more certainty is given to workers.</p> <p><b>4. Question:</b> Can we use “audit days” instead of “man-days”? In terms of aligning our language with our gender diversity ambitions.  <b>Answer:</b> Man-day is for human man-day not man/male, which means the term already covers female/woman day. In the certification world, if we use audit days, it will count all the number of days spent by the whole audit team, which can be only one auditor or more.</p> <p><b>5. Question:</b> Why did growers state the audit was not effective and that the audit is like an investigative approach - was this seen as a negative?  <b>Answer:</b> The feedback was purely from the participating certificate holders. They are concerned if the audit was focusing too much on interviews, it will be ineffective to complete the indicators as the indicators are not only about interviews but also include document verification. Both growers did not see the guidance as negative but rather suggested a clearer term to effectively implement the guidelines.</p> <p><b>6. Question:</b></p>	
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	<p>(i) What percentage of the time available for such an audit is dedicated for field verification, especially interviews with local communities and workers? Who interviews female workers?</p> <p>(ii) How can you be sure the village head represents the views of all villagers? They may have a vested interest and not be fully representative.</p> <p>(iii) How about village focus group discussions?</p> <p>(iv) How to enable the women to speak up? They may have very different opinions and concerns.</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>(i) Around 50% of total man-days is dedicated for field verification including interviews with local communities and workers. A female auditor interviews female workers. The team consists of a female auditor after we know the demographic of workers.</p> <p>(ii) During the interview, the village head is always accompanied by the community leader so the auditor will also get information from the community leader.</p> <p>(iii&amp;iv) During our village focus group discussions, we usually meet with housewives, to explore their impressions about the company, because most of the sprayers' wives live in the village surrounding the company's area.</p>	
<p><b>2.0</b></p> <p><b>2.1</b></p> <p><b>2.2</b></p>	<p><b>Updates from the Secretariat</b></p> <p><b>RSPO Social Guidance Documents, Prasad Vijaya Segaran (PV)</b>  PV shared about the guidance documents that have been published and are currently being developed by the Secretariat and the Human Rights Working Group related to Social Standards. The 2015 Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) Guide is available on the RSPO website. The Secretariat is also working on a revised version of the 2015 FPIC guide. The new guide will include a chapter on conflict resolution that was developed by the BHCV working group, and will color-code P&amp;C 2018 FPIC requirements and recommendations, respectively, for ease of reference. PV continued to share about two guidance documents available for Decent Living Wages and Prevailing Wage.</p> <p>In 2020, the Secretariat introduced three child rights guidance documents for palm oil producers, smallholders and group managers and downstream supply chain actors. There is also a child rights guidance document for auditors that is being developed in parallel with the Labour Auditing Guidance and is expected to be completed by Q2 2022. PV also talked about the recent publication of the Practical Guidance on Gender Inclusion and Compliance to the 2018 P&amp;C and the 2019 ISH standard as well as the policy for Human Rights Defenders that was produced as a result of Resolution 6(e)2 adopted by the RSPO General Assembly in 2016, by the Human Rights Working Group</p> <p><b>RSPO P&amp;C Social Auditing Training, WIRE, Sanjiv Singh (SS)</b>  SS shared about the recently concluded 3-day online social auditing training which involved 12 participants from various certification bodies and observed by 6 personnels from the Secretariat. The training focused on among others, understanding the gaps and root causes from the RSPO Assurance Gap Analysis, and the RSPO in the whole social standard ecosystem. SS also shared the methodology of the training which includes class discussions, role play based on</p>	



	<p>case studies and polling exercises. SS explained that the role play exercise focused on conducting workers and management interviews and highlighted the importance of audit planning to ensure stakeholder consultation is done correctly.</p> <p>SS continued to share positive feedback from the participants such as they wanted to learn more about managing and writing non-compliances and requested for more material on social issues like indigenous communities. SS provided some recommendations including enhancing certification systems to address social auditing and raising awareness among certificate holders.</p> <p>A participant asked about the time, effort and space available to ensure community members, especially women are able to express their concerns or make recommendations. SS stressed that auditors must develop the skills to build trust among interviewees during the short duration of the audit. NC suggested minimising the use of pen and papers and making the RSPO indicators more efficient so CBs have more time to engage with stakeholders.</p> <p>Another participant shared that local communities were often reluctant to speak up because they thought the auditors were consultants of the company since they turned up in company vehicles and stayed in company's accommodation. The participant asked how to make auditors visibly independent of the company. SS explained that this is usually due to limitations such as remote locations and limited number of audit days and it is an issue that RSPO needs to consider since these are regularly practiced and accepted at the moment. SS also emphasised the need for better audit preparation to understand workers demographics. BG suggested dividing the audit into different stages to determine the aspects to focus on.</p> <p>BD asked PV for his comments on how the sharing from all the speakers fit into the documents that are being developed. PV shared that the input is valuable and timely especially since the Secretariat is at the stage of incorporating comments to enhance the usability of the RSPO Labour Auditing Guidance and the Child Rights Guidance for auditors.</p> <p><b>2.3 Additional exchange via the Zoom Webinar Q&amp;A box</b></p> <p><b>1. Question:</b> Have any of you had experience of carrying out audits independently of the grower i.e. without using the company's accommodation, transportation/vehicles, logistics and any accompanying staff? (Our field investigation shows that many community members see auditors as company consultants and so don't feel confident to raise their real concerns with them for fear of negative consequences from the company.)</p> <p><b>Answer 1:</b> We have experienced conducting a short notice audit without using the company's facility to verify input from stakeholders. The company refused and did not accept the team and we couldn't access any document because the visit was not agreed.</p> <p><b>Answer 2:</b> The CB conducts the audit using methodology that follows ISO 17021 or ISO 17065. This is very different from the method investigators use to find data. The result can be different.</p>	
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	<p><b>2. Question:</b> With regard to reading local newspapers and ensuring auditors are informed about local situations, how does that fit in the limited time allocated for preparatory reading as shown in the previous presentation?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b> This is also the auditor's challenge, time concern. In fact, the auditor has to use their rest time after working hours to explore information about the companies that will be audited from many sources.</p>	
<p><b>3.0</b></p>	<p><b>Closing remarks</b></p> <p>BD thanked all attendees for their time, all presenters for sharing insights from different perspectives and experiences and handed over to AP, Co-Chair of the ASC for his closing remarks.</p> <p>AP thanked all resource persons and mentioned that a lot was learned from their many experiences on the ground. AP also thanked everyone who participated with questions and assured that the input will be deliberated and will ultimately feed into recommendations for the Board of Governors.</p> <p>The meeting was adjourned at 7 pm.</p>	