

# Scaling up Voluntary Sustainability Standards through Sustainable Public Procurement and Trade Policy

**4th Flagship Report of the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS)**



**UNFSS**

United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards



International  
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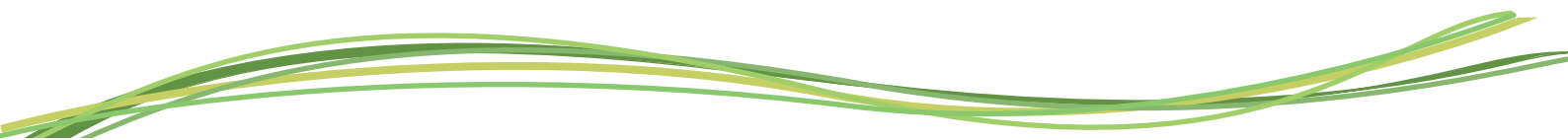
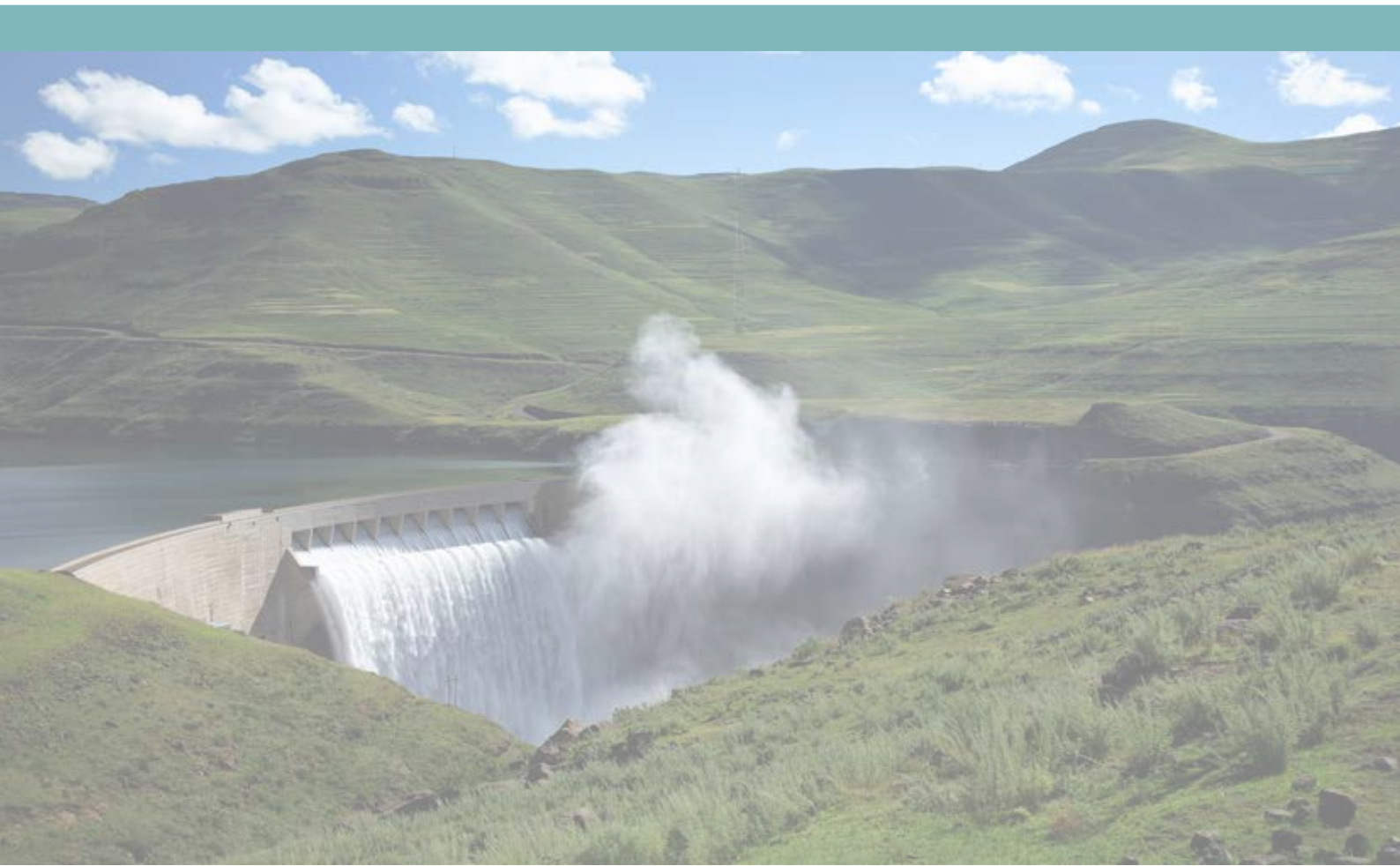


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A Platform of International Dialogue on Voluntary Sustainability Standards

# Scaling up Voluntary Sustainability Standards through Sustainable Public Procurement and Trade Policy





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## About the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards

The United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) is a platform created to analyse voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) and disseminate information about them. It is rooted in existing mandates and activities of participating United Nations agencies. Its value lies in pooling resources, synchronizing efforts and assuring policy coherence, coordination and collaboration in line with the “One UN” concept. UNFSS is coordinated by a steering committee consisting of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the International Trade Centre (ITC), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). UNCTAD is the Secretariat of UNFSS.

UNFSS works in partnership with VSS experts representing civil society, producer associations, processors and traders, standard-setting organizations and certifiers, trade negotiators, consumers and researchers. It facilitates dialogue and knowledge exchange among intergovernmental actors enabling them to communicate with each other and their target groups with a view to providing relevant information and influencing concerned stakeholders.

For further information, see: [www.unfss.org](http://www.unfss.org)

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## About the UNFSS Flagship Series

UNFSS publishes its flagship report on diverse topics relating to VSS once every two years. It seeks to serve as an important tool for stakeholders in both the public and private sectors to gain impartial and substantive information about VSS systems throughout the world. The topics discussed in the UNFSS Flagship Report series are collectively identified by VSS practitioners, namely the national platforms which are national initiatives for VSS, created and shared by stakeholders under each country's designated coordinating body, that aim to provide a neutral forum for information exchange on VSS. Given the specificities of the topics relevant to the activities carried out by the national platforms, the information and analyses provided are intended to serve as a basis for policy dialogues leading to action for sustainable development appropriate to different countries' respective needs, conditions and levels of development.

In 2013, UNFSS published its 1st Flagship Report<sup>1</sup> which presented an array of salient VSS and public policy issues, and developed an inventory of some of the leading initiatives relating to VSS. The report elucidated tensions at the nexus of VSS and public governance.

In September 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted a new set of development goals known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which stipulated that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) "are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental." Accordingly, governments, businesses and civil society are encouraged to promote synergies between their actions.

The 2nd Flagship Report,<sup>2</sup> published in 2016, further dissected the interplay between VSS and public governance by identifying the optimal dynamics between public policy processes and VSS to ensure sustainability objectives would be effectively met. The report delineated the implementation of VSS within the public sector. It also identified the economic, environmental and social benefits of VSS, as well as the rationales public sector engagement with VSS.

In 2018, the 3rd Flagship Report<sup>3</sup> highlighted the role of private actors mainly through an emphasis on global trade. The report, titled *VSS, Trade and the SDGs*, sought to promote an understanding of VSS either as an enhancer or a facilitator of global trade, and examined the direct and indirect impacts of VSS on an economy. The report also provided a benchmarking analysis for identifying the links between VSS and the SDGs, and the result revealed strong linkages with SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption, and SDG 15: Life on Land.

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<sup>1</sup> This Report (Part 1: Issues and Part 2: Initiatives) is available at: [https://unfss.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/unfss-report-issues-1\\_draft\\_lores.pdf](https://unfss.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/unfss-report-issues-1_draft_lores.pdf), [https://unfss.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/unfss-reportinitiatives-2\\_draft\\_lores.pdf](https://unfss.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/unfss-reportinitiatives-2_draft_lores.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> This Report is available at: [https://unfss.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/final\\_unfss-report\\_28092016.pdf](https://unfss.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/final_unfss-report_28092016.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> This Report is available at: <https://unfss.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/UNFSS-3rd-Flagship-Report-FINAL-for-upload-1.pdf>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://unfss.org/icsts/>

<sup>5</sup> VSS Academic Advisory Council, at: <https://unfss.org/academic-advisory-council/>. For a full list of participants, see: <https://unfss.org/aac-council-members/>

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## List of Abbreviations

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| AGP         | Agreement on Government Procurement                                |
| BCI         | Better Cotton Initiative   |
| EFTA        | European Free Trade Association                                    |
| EUTR        | European Union Timber Regulation                                   |
| FAO         | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations            |
| FSC         | Forest Stewardship Council   |
| FTA         | free trade agreement   |
| GATT        | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade                             |
| GDP         | gross domestic product   |
| GPA         | Government Procurement Agreement                                   |
| GSP         | Generalised System (or Scheme) of Preferences                      |
| HDI         | Human Development Index  |
| ILO         | International Labour Organization (Office)                         |
| ISEAL       | International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling |
| ITC         | International Trade Centre   |
| LDC         | least developed country  |
| MFN         | most-favoured nation   |
| MSC         | Marine Stewardship Council   |
| NAFTA       | North American Free Trade Agreement                                |
| NGO         | non-governmental organization                                      |
| OECD        | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development             |
| PEFC        | Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification              |
| PTA         | preferential trade agreement                                       |
| RED         | Renewable Energy Directive   |
| SDG         | Sustainable Development Goal                                       |
| SPP         | sustainable public procurement                                     |
| UN Comtrade | United Nations International Trade Statistics Database             |
| UNDP        | United Nations Development Programme                               |
| UNEP        | United Nations Environment Programme                               |
| UNFSS       | United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards                   |

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