



# **EPOA highlights importance of certification schemes**

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In light of the current discussions at the European Union to tackle deforestation and human rights risks, governments, civil society organizations and industry are reflecting on the role of certification schemes. As EPOA, we believe certification schemes play a key role in moving toward fully sustainable supply chains.

## **Certification is a key piece of the puzzle**

Industry, civil society and even certification schemes agree that voluntary standards are not the only solution to solve global issues like deforestation or human rights violations. When assessing certification schemes, it is important to see them as a key piece in the great puzzle of global sustainability governance. Certification schemes, next to other measures like due diligence regulation and partnerships with producing countries, are needed to address the major challenges we are facing today.

## **Acknowledge the importance of certification**

Voluntary schemes were developed and implemented by producers, industry and civil society organizations to address the lack of good governance for major sustainability challenges. A distinctive characteristic of certification is its work on a large scale: it connects a great variety of actors from consumer to producing countries to work toward the sustainability agenda.

## **Certification continuously seek improvement**

Since its introduction, we have observed various improvements in the principles and criteria of the voluntary schemes as well in the auditing systems and complaint mechanisms. As EPOA, we believe that we should work in strengthening these systems rather than replacing or even abandoning them.

## **Certification offers opportunities for small-scale producers**

Although it is important to move toward fully traceable supply chains, certification schemes offer medium and small-scale producers an opportunity to be part of the market for sustainable commodities. Mass balance and independent smallholder credits play a key role in enabling this access. By excluding these trading systems, we miss the possibility of including small-scale and medium producers in the transformation of the supply chains. It is therefore important to acknowledge the importance of each trade system in a certification scheme.

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### **Don't underestimate the role of national mandatory schemes**

National mandatory schemes are often criticized for not meeting the standards of transnational voluntary schemes. This discussion fails to see the role national schemes can play to leave no-one behind. National standards are an important tool to raise the floor through mandatory requirements. These standards make it possible for producers who cannot meet the transnational schemes to work towards more sustainable production. Both mandatory and transnational voluntary schemes are therefore needed to have everyone on board.

Certification schemes are an essential tool to move toward supply chains free from environmental and human rights risks. Building on the work and knowledge of certification schemes is therefore key. Together with other measures like due diligence legislation and partnerships with producing countries, we can create real change on the ground. As EPOA, we advocate a constructive dialogue, cooperation and acknowledgement of the contribution of each instrument and partner in this sustainability journey.