

The Accountability Framework initiative

The Accountability Framework initiative (AFi) is a collaborative effort to accelerate progress and improve accountability for ethical supply chain commitments in agriculture and forestry. By bringing greater clarity, consistency, and effectiveness to the implementation of these commitments, it helps to:



Halt deforestation



Protect other natural ecosystems



Respect human rights



Support producer & community livelihoods

For more information about the AFi, please visit <https://accountability-framework.org/>.

Overview of the Accountability Framework and its application

The Accountability Framework provides a globally applicable approach for establishing and implementing commitments on deforestation, ecosystem conversion, and human rights in agricultural and forestry supply chains. The Framework references and builds upon international law and existing good practices on human rights and the environment, and is not meant to replace or duplicate existing initiatives, standards, or tools. Likewise, it is not a new certification system. Rather, it provides common norms and guidance to help accelerate progress and improve accountability for responsible supply chains initiatives by:

- offering companies practical guidance on how different activities, tools, and systems can be used to support improvement trajectories and achieve full implementation of commitments;
- clarifying good practices and critical details for setting, implementing, monitoring, verifying, and reporting on supply chain commitments and their achievement;
- helping companies to credibly demonstrate and communicate progress;
- helping to increase coherence and alignment among different implementation standards, tools, and systems; and
- increasing the level of global consensus around responsible supply chains, particularly from civil society.

The purpose and application of the Framework are further explained by the answers below.

Who is putting forward the Accountability Framework?

The Framework is put forward by the AFi partners, a coalition of civil society representatives who, together with other supporters, advocate for its adoption in the context of agricultural and forestry production and trade.

How is the Accountability Framework being developed?

The Framework is being developed through a consultative process led by the AFi partners, with close involvement of private sector, NGO, and government stakeholders, and following applicable good practices for multi-stakeholder initiatives. For more information, please see <https://accountability-framework.org/governance-participation-structure>.

What are the main uses of the Accountability Framework?

The Framework is used to inform the establishment, implementation, and monitoring of responsible supply chains in ways that are effective, credible, cost-efficient, and scalable. This requires action from producers, supply chain companies, financial institutions, NGOs, governments, and others – all of whom are encouraged to use the Framework. See “specific uses” below for more details.

Do companies need to adhere to the whole Framework? Is it an ‘all-or-nothing’ approach?

The AFi partners and supporters advocate for companies and other users to fulfill all elements of the Framework that apply to their organization and context. However, it is also recognized that full implementation may take time. For companies that are still working toward responsible supply chains, the Framework provides a structured approach to pursue stepwise improvement and demonstrate progress along the way.

Does the Framework “raise the bar” relative to existing company commitments?

The environmental and social scope of commitments recommended in the Core Principles (Sections A-D) defines a performance level that is higher than some existing commitments. Companies whose commitments are presently weaker or less inclusive than these Principles (and those who lack commitments altogether) are strongly encouraged to develop or review their commitments based on these sections of the Framework. All companies – regardless of their present commitments or lack thereof – should apply the Core Principles on Implementation and Monitoring (Sections 1-9). Doing so helps ensure a meaningful and measurable improvement trajectory.

Will companies be assessed against the Framework? Can they get certified against it?

The Accountability Framework is not a compliance standard or certification system, so it is not possible to get certified or verified against it. Rather, the Framework is a means for companies to demonstrate and be held accountable for implementation of commitments related to deforestation, ecosystem conversion, and human rights. Such progress will be tracked and measured by companies themselves and by external bodies including reporting and assessment initiatives and NGOs; use of the Accountability Framework can help ensure that this is done in a way that is consistent and credible.

Can companies make claims related to the Accountability Framework?

Companies are encouraged to communicate their intent to follow the Accountability Framework. They are also strongly encouraged to use the Framework to guide how they track and report progress toward fulfilling their commitments. Such reporting can help substantiate credible claims related to supply chain commitments. However, since the Accountability Framework is not a certification system, the AFi does not intend to support company claims regarding compliance to the Framework itself. For more information, please see <https://accountability-framework.org/claims>.

Specific uses of the Accountability Framework

The Accountability Framework responds to requests from the private sector for NGOs to offer clearer, simpler, and more unified direction on how to formulate, implement, and measure progress toward responsible supply chain commitments. As such, the Framework is designed to be used by companies that produce, trade, or purchase agricultural and forestry commodities, along with these companies’ suppliers, customers, and financiers.

How can companies use the Accountability Framework?

The Accountability Framework helps inform company decision-making and action to establish, implement, and monitor responsible supply chain programs. Specifically:

- i) **Setting commitments:** Companies can reference the Accountability Framework definitions and Core Principles (especially Section A-D) to help develop a new commitment or refresh their current commitment.*
- ii) **Implementing and monitoring commitments:** Companies can use Sections 1-9 of the Core Principles, and corresponding definitions and Operational Guidance, to guide efforts to fulfill their commitments. This material may be applied in various ways, including through: i) the company's own processes, systems, and activities; ii) supplier codes, contracts, management, and support activities; and iii) work contracted to service providers that support implementation or verification of responsible supply chains.*

Intended company user groups include directors, managers, and staff members responsible for procurement, regional operations, supplier management, and sustainability (including sustainability-related programs, policies and procedures, monitoring and verification, and sustainability reporting). The Core Principles provide a high-level view of key elements of a responsible supply chain program, while the Operational Guidance provides a deeper level of detail that may be especially relevant for operational team members and regional staff.

Other intended users include:

- **Groups affected by commodity production and trade** can use the Framework to help monitor conditions and impacts on the ground, and to participate in accountability processes to help protect their rights and interests.
- **Producers and producers' associations** can apply the Framework to meet buyers' preferences for responsible supply and seek market advantages for providing such supply.
- **Governments** can use the Framework to inform policy development, implementation, and monitoring to develop national commodity sectors that are competitive in the context of current global policy frameworks and market expectations. In their role as commodity buyers or regulators of trade, governments can use the Framework to help implement procurement standards or trade provisions that promote responsible supply chains.
- **Reporting and assessment initiatives** can use the Framework to help develop methodologies that support a common and meaningful approach to the assessment of progress related to supply chain commitments.
- **Financial institutions** can use the Framework to inform responsible lending practices based on the actual performance of prospective borrowers relative to key social and environmental risks.
- **Implementation service providers** can use the Framework to improve the credibility and value of their work by applying accepted best-practice approaches to implementation, monitoring and verification.
- **Other supply chain initiatives (including certification systems and sector programs)** can use the Framework to inform the development of new or revised standards, pledges, or metrics to align these with common global approaches.

As users apply the Framework, the AFI encourages them to share case studies, highlight implementation challenges, and identify topics on which greater clarity or guidance is needed. This type of input – which will be facilitated through a feedback mechanism to be developed – will help strengthen the Framework over time through the collective experience of users working to implement responsible supply chains.

Scope and organization of the Accountability Framework

Topical scope

At present, the Accountability Framework focuses on those critical environmental and social topics that are most commonly included in company supply chain commitments and for which clarity on implementation and monitoring is most urgently needed. These topics include the protection of forests and other natural ecosystems, land rights, workers' rights, and other human rights.

The AFi recognizes that there are many other important sustainability issues related to agriculture and forestry, such as increasing production efficiency, reducing pesticide risk, and protecting water resources. In the future – depending on demand and stakeholder feedback – the Framework may be expanded to address additional topics such as these. For now, companies are strongly encouraged to address these other important issues by applying or participating in other standards, partnerships, and initiatives focused on these topics.

Physical and supply chain scope

The Framework addresses the focal topics in the context of agricultural and forestry production units (i.e., farms and forests), primary processing facilities, and the landscapes and communities in which they are situated. This includes the critical role of traders, downstream companies, and financial institutions in managing, supporting, financing, monitoring, and reporting on their respective supply chains and investment portfolios. The Framework does not address environmental or social impacts or risks associated with value chain stages beyond production and primary processing, such as shipping or manufacturing.

Organization of the Accountability Framework

The Accountability Framework includes three parts. The **Core Principles** provide a high-level framework for setting, implementing, and monitoring effective supply chain commitments. The **Operational Guidance** provides more detailed guidance on the application of the Core Principles. It also specifies the relationship between the global Accountability Framework and different regional, national, and commodity-specific definitions, standards, tools, and initiatives. Finally, a **User Interface** will be provided by early 2019 to enable company personnel and other users to easily access material on the topics and at the level of detail suited to their needs.

Framework development process and timeline

The Accountability Framework is being developed throughout 2018 through an iterative and consultative process. In July 2018, a revised version of the Core Principles and a partial draft of the Operational Guidance (covering a subset of topics) are being released for stakeholder consultation. Remaining sections of the Operational Guidance will be released for consultation later in 2018. Consultation drafts will be followed by public working drafts to enable companies and other stakeholders to begin applying the Framework in late 2018. The full Framework is expected to be released for a final stakeholder review around January 2019, followed by publication of the full Framework Version 1.0 shortly thereafter. Please see the AFi website for the latest process updates and draft materials available for stakeholder review and consultation.