



NETWORK FOR CERTIFICATION AND CONSERVATION OF FORESTS (NCCF)

Group Certification Standard

NCCF-STD-GM-ToF 01 /2019

Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF)

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Foreword

The Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is a not for profit organization registered under Societies Registration Act, 1860. NCCF is involved in developing Forest Certification scheme in the country. It is an institutional mechanism to ensure collaborative and streamlined efforts for development of National Forest Certification System and Standards. It aims to promote the implementation of improved Forest practices in the country and further the development of healthier, sustainable: economically beneficial, environmentally responsible and socially appropriate in accordance with national policies, institutional frameworks and sustainability usage norms.

The Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is the National Governing Body of the National Forest Certification Scheme and Standards (NFCSS) and has overall responsibility for the smooth working/functioning of the NFCSS while maintaining its credibility.

This document describes the requirements for the Group Certification in the NFCSS

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1. Scope

The document covers requirements for group certification against the NCCF Management Standards.

2. Normative References

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application¹ of this document. For both dated and undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendment) applies

- i. PEFC ST 1002:2018 - PEFC Group Forest Management Certification – Requirements
- ii. NCCF-STD-FM- 01/2017, NCCF National Forest Management Certification Standard
- iii. NCCF-STD-TOF-01/2019, NCCF National Trees Outside Forests Certification Standard
- iv. *IAF MD 1:2007, Mandatory Document for the Certification of Multiple Sites Based on Sampling (IAF MD 1:2007)*

3. General requirements for Group Entity

The participants of a group certification shall be managed by a group entity that is centrally administered to ensure participants' conformity with the sustainable forest management/ToF standard and is subject to central review, and that all the participants shall be subject to an internal monitoring programme.

- 3.1. The group entity shall be an independent legal entity, registered committees, cooperatives, societies or an individual acting as a legal entity.
- 3.2. Clear definitions shall be provided for the following terms, which are in conformity with the definitions present in PEFC ST1002:2018 and in this standard
 - a. Group Organisation
 - b. Group Entity
 - c. Participant/Group Member
 - d. Certified Area
 - e. Group Certificate
 - f. Document confirming participation in Group Certification
 - g. Landscape level requirements
- 3.3. The entity shall comply with the applicable and relevant legal obligations.
- 3.4. The entity shall operate an annual internal monitoring programme that provides for the evaluation of the participants' conformity with the certification requirements.
- 3.5. The Group entity shall define training needs and implement training activities and/or communication strategies relevant to the implementation of the applicable NCCF standards.

¹ FM/ToF Certification Standard as applicable

- 3.6. The Group entity shall operate a review of conformity with the sustainable forest management/ToF standard, that includes reviewing the results of the internal monitoring programme and the certification body's evaluations and surveillance; corrective and preventive measures if required; and the evaluation of the effectiveness of corrective actions taken.
- 3.7. To provide a public policy of commitment on behalf of the whole group organisation to comply with the applicable requirements of the NCCF standards.

Note: The requirement for "written agreement" and participants' "commitment" is also satisfied by the written agreement of the forest/ToF or land owners/managers' association with the group entity, where the forest/ToF or the land owners/managers' association can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent the participants and where its commitment and the terms and conditions of the written agreement are enforceable.

4. Responsibilities and Functions of Group Entity

- 4.1. To represent the group organisation in the certification process, including in communications and relationships with the certification body, submission of an application for certification, and contractual relationship with the certification body.
- 4.2. The entity shall establish clear objectives and written procedures for the management of the group organisation clearly defining the division of responsibilities between the Group entity and the members in relation to the management activities like adhering to the management planning, monitoring, harvesting, quality control etc, for the implementation of the NCCF Standard.
- 4.3. The Group entity shall appoint a management representative as having overall responsibility and authority for the Group entity's compliance with all applicable requirements of this standard.
- 4.4. Group entity staff and Participants shall demonstrate knowledge of the Group's procedures and the applicable NCCF Standard.
- 4.5. The group entity shall have a written contract or other written agreement with all participants covering the right of the group entity to implement and enforce any corrective or preventive measures, and to initiate the exclusion of any participant from the scope of certification in the event of non-conformity with the applicable standard.
- 4.6. The Group Entity shall establish, implement and maintain written procedures for the membership covering all applicable requirements of the applicable standard, according to scale and complexity of the group including:
 - a. Organizational structure
 - b. Responsibilities of Group entity and Participants including main activities to fulfill such responsibilities
 - c. Rules regarding eligibility for membership to the Group
 - d. Rules regarding withdrawal/ suspension of members from the Group
 - e. Clear description of the process to fulfill any corrective action requests issued internally and by certification body including timelines and implications if any of the corrective actions are not complied with
 - f. Documented procedures for inclusion of new participants
 - g. Complaints procedure for Participants

- 4.7. The Group Entity shall provide participants with a document confirming participation in the group certification.
- 4.8. The Group Entity shall provide all participants with information and guidance required for the effective implementation of the sustainable forest management/ToF standard and other applicable requirements of the NCCF standard.
- 4.9. The Group entity shall provide each group participant with documentation, or access to documentation, specifying the relevant terms and conditions of membership. The documentation shall include:
- a. Access to a copy of the applicable Standard(s)
 - b. Explanation of the certification body's process
 - c. Explanation of the certification body's, and NCCF's rights to access the participants forests/ToF and documentation for the purposes of evaluation and monitoring
 - d. Explanation of the certification body's, and NCCF's requirements with respect to publication of information
 - e. Explanation of any obligations with respect to membership, such as:
 - i. maintenance of information for monitoring purposes
 - ii. use of systems for tracking and tracing of forest/ToF products
 - iii. requirement to conform with conditions or corrective action requests issued by the certification body and the group entity
 - iv. any special requirements for participants related to marketing or sales of products within and outside of the certificate
 - v. other obligations and explanation of any costs associated with membership

Note: *In some groups, it may be sufficient to provide individual members with a summary of these items, provided that full documentation is readily available on request at the Group entity's offices. The information should be presented in a way adapted to the language and knowledge of the Participants.*

- 4.10. A consent declaration or equivalent shall be available between the Group Entity and each Participant or the Group member's representative who voluntarily wishes to participate in the Group. The consent declaration shall:
- a. include a commitment to comply with all applicable certification standard requirements
 - b. acknowledge and agree to the obligations and responsibilities of the Group entity
 - c. acknowledge and agree to the obligations and responsibilities of membership
 - d. agree to membership of the scheme
 - e. declare their participation in only one group or individual forest management/ToF certification
 - f. authorize the Group entity to be the primary contact for certification and to apply for certification on the member's behalf

Note: *A consent declaration does not have to be an individual document. It can be part of a contract or any other document (e.g. meeting minutes) that specifies the agreed relationship between the Participant and the Group entity.*

5. Group Records

- 5.1. The group entity shall maintain up-to-date records the group entity and participants' conformity with the requirements of the sustainable forest management/ToF standard, and other applicable requirements of the NFCSS, including but not limited to:

- a. List of names and contact details of Participants, together with dates of entering and leaving the Group scheme, reason for leaving, and identification of their forest/ToF property and its/their size(s),
- b. Any records of training provided to staff or Participants, relevant to the implementation of this standard and applicable NCCF standard;
- c. the certified area, map or supporting documentation describing or showing the location of the member's forest/ToF properties;
- d. Evidence of consent of all Participants;
- e. Documentation and records regarding recommended practices for forest/ToF management (i.e. silvicultural systems); taken to correct any such non-compliance;
- f. the implementation of an internal monitoring programme, its review and any preventive and/or corrective actions taken.
- g. Records of the estimated annual overall NCCF production and sales of the Group.

Note: The amount of data that is maintained centrally by the Group entity may vary from case to case. In order to reduce costs of evaluation by the certification body, and subsequent monitoring by NCCF, data should be stored centrally wherever possible.

- 5.2. Group records shall be retained for at least five (5) years and protected against theft, improper use, loss of confidential information, etc.
- 5.3. Group entities shall not issue any kind of certificates or declarations to their participants that could be confused with NCCF certificates. Participant certificates may however be requested from the certification body.

6. Group Size

- 6.1. There is no restriction on the maximum size that a group certificate can cover in terms of number of group members, their individual area property size or total area to brought under certification.
- 6.2. The Group entity shall have sufficient human and technical resources to establish, manage, control, improve, etc. the Group in line with the requirements of this standard.
- 6.3. The Group entity shall specify in their procedures the maximum number of members that can be supported by the management system and the human and technical capacities of the Group entity.

7. Functions

- 7.1 To provide the group entity with a written agreement, including a commitment on conformity with the applicable standard and other applicable requirements of the NFCSS.

Note: The requirement for "written agreement" and participants' "commitment" is also satisfied by the written agreement of the forests/ToF owners/managers' association with the group entity, where the forests/ToF /landowners/managers' association can demonstrate that it has a legal mandate to represent the participants and where its commitment and the terms and conditions of the written agreement are enforceable.

- 7.2 To comply with the applicable standard requirements and other applicable requirements of the NFCSS.

7.3 To provide full co-operation and assistance in responding effectively to all requests from the group entity, certification body or NCCF for relevant data, documentation or other information allowing access to the area and other facilities, regarding formal audits or reviews or otherwise.

7.4 To implement relevant corrective and preventive actions established by the group entity.

7.5 Internal Monitoring Requirements:

- a. The Group entity shall implement a documented monitoring and control system including the regular (at least annual) monitoring visits to the certified area to check and confirm continued compliance with all the requirements of Standard and group membership's requirements.
- b. The group entity is required to have an internal audit programme for group entity and participants based on the sampling
- c. The Group entity shall issue corrective action requests to address non-compliances identified during their visits and monitor their implementation.
- d. The Group entity should visit different members in their annual monitoring than the ones selected for evaluation by the certification body, unless pending corrective actions, complaints or risk factors are requiring a revisit of the same units.
- e. The Group entity shall define criteria to be monitored at each internal audit and according to the group characteristics, risk factors and local circumstances.
- f. The group entity is responsible to develop and operate an annual internal monitoring programme to provide sufficient confidence in the conformity of the group organisation with the applicable standard. The elements of the internal monitoring programme shall include the following:
 - i. Planning, establishing, implementing and maintaining an audit programme including the frequency, methods, responsibilities, planning requirements and reporting, which shall take into consideration the importance of the processes concerned and the results of the previous audits
 - ii. Competence and selection of internal auditor
 - iii. Ensuring that the results of the internal audit are reported and communicated to the group entity and the group participants
 - iv. Maintaining documented information for the implementation of the internal audit and audit results
 - v. Group entity shall evaluate the information about conformity of the participants to the applicable standard that is obtained from publicly available sources and other interested parties
 - vi. At the time of joining the group organization, individual participants shall undertake initial assessment against the applicable standard, either through a self-assessment or an assessment by the group entity. In the case of a self-assessment, the assessment shall be reviewed by the group entity
 - vii. Additional monitoring visits may be scheduled as and when required

8. Selection of Participants for Audit Program

8.1. Sampling for Group Certification

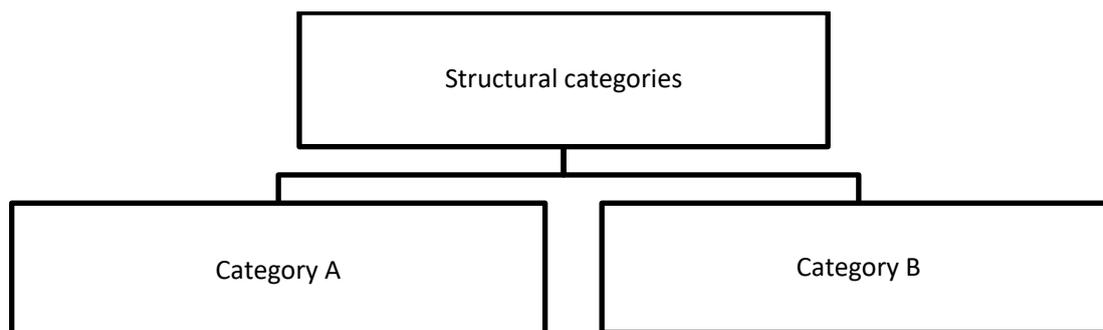
The sample sites for the audit will be selected from the different categories depending on size of management unit and type of ownership covered under group certification. Based on these two categories are defined as:

i. Category A: Management units owned by government

For example: State Forest Department/State Forest Corporation as the group entity taking legal representation of different administrative forest divisions or circles for certification purpose. Here, administrative divisions and circles will be the participants.

ii. Category B: Management units owned by farmers

For example: A group entity representing conglomeration management units owned by individuals, farmers and community.



8.2. Selection of sample size

8.2.1 The sample size shall be calculated separately for each category.

8.2.2 The sample size is calculated using Table 1 for all sets of 'like' management units:

Table 1. Sample Category and number of management units to be evaluated

Sample category	Size Class (ha)- (X)	Main evaluation	Surveillance	Re-evaluation
Category A Management Units	>15,000	$S = X$	$S = 0.7 * X$	$S = 0.7 * X$
	1,000-15,000	$S = 0.4 * X$	$S = 0.2 * X$	$S = 0.3 * X$
Category B Management Units	100-1,000	$S = 0.8 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.6 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.6 * \sqrt{X}$
	Less than 100	$S = 0.6 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.3 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.4 * \sqrt{X}$

- S is the number of management units to be sampled and evaluated. This number is calculated from above Table 1. (in case of decimal number it is rounded to the the upper whole number)
- X is the total number of the management units in the group.

For example: In Category B, where the area of management unit of each farmer is 2 ha or less and total no.of farmers for group certification is 190. The no. of sample management units will be 9. ($S = 0.6 * \sqrt{190}$; $S = 0.6 * 13.78$; $S = 8.27$)

8.2.3 Each LMU/FMU within the group shall have been visited on-site by the certification body at least once in a certificate cycle.

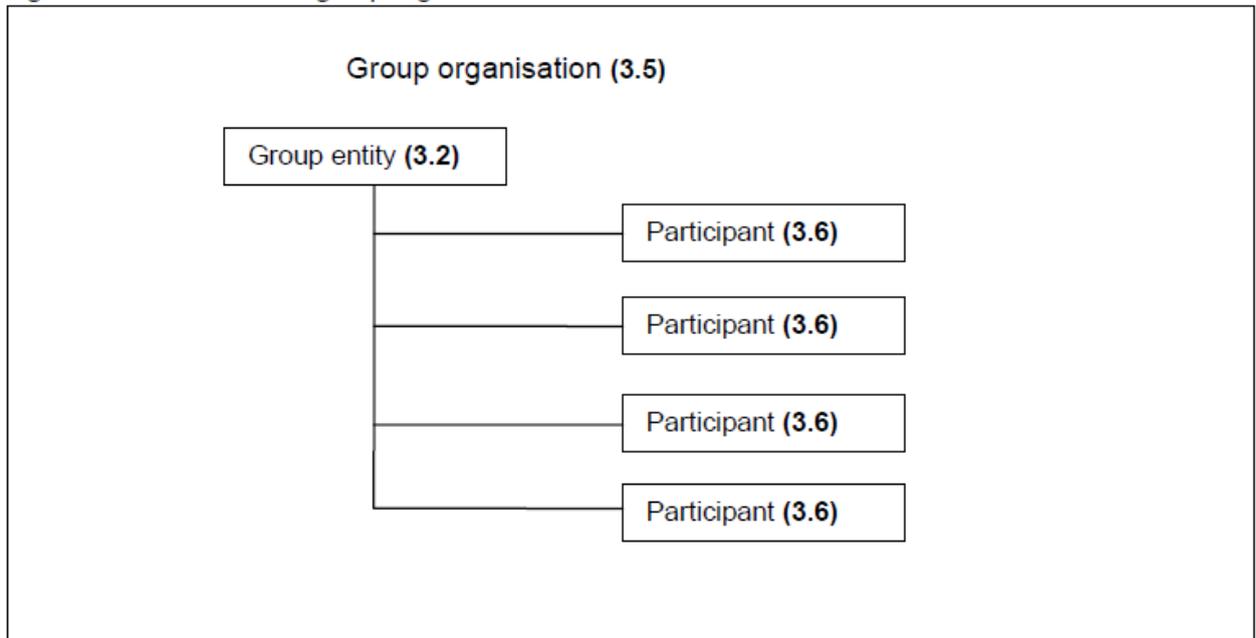
8.2.4 Also, at least 25% of the samples shall be selected randomly from the calculated units.

9. Chain of Custody

- 9.1. The Group Entity shall have in place a documented system for tracking and tracing of certified products produced by the participants from certified area.
- 9.2. The Group Entity should take measures to ensure that non-certified material is not being mixed with NCCF certified material.
- 9.3. The Group Entity shall ensure that all uses of the NCCF and PEFC Trademark are approved by the certification body in advance.
- 9.4. Tracking and traceability systems should as per the PEFC Chain of Custody requirements.

Annex 1

Figure 1: Definition of the group organisation



Annex 2: Terms and Definitions

For the purposes of this document the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC Guide 2:1996 apply together with the following definitions.

Affected Stakeholder

A stakeholder who might experience a direct change in living and/or working conditions caused by activities of the group organisation.

Note 1: Affected stakeholders include neighbouring communities, indigenous people, workers, etc. However, having an interest in the subject matter of the standard (e.g. NGOs, scientific community, civil society) is not equal to being affected.

Note 2: A stakeholder who might be a user of the standard is likely to become a certified entity, e.g. an entity in case of a forest management/ToF standard, or a wood processing enterprise in the case of a chain of custody standard.

Audit

Systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled.

Certified Area

The forest/ToF area covered by a **group certificate** representing the sum of forest/ToF areas of the **participants**.

Documented Information

Information required to be controlled and maintained by an organisation using any format and media, from any source.

Group Entity

A Group entity/individual represents the **participants**, with overall responsibility for ensuring the conformity of forest/ToF management in the **certified area** to the sustainable forest management/ToF standard and other applicable requirements of the forest/ToF certification scheme.

Note: The relationship between the terms “group organisation”, “group entity” and “participant” is shown in Figure 1.

The Group entity applies for the group certificate and finally holds the certificate.

Group Certificate

A document confirming that the **group organisation** complies with the requirements of the sustainable forest/ToF management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest/ToF certification scheme.

Group Certification

Certification of the group organisation under one group forest/ToF certificate.

Group Organisation

A group of **participants** represented by the **group entity** for the purposes of implementation of the sustainable forest management/ToF standard and its certification.

Note 1: The term “group organisation” is equivalent to the term “region” or other terms chosen by the relevant forest/ToF certification scheme and complying with the content of this definition.

Note 2: The relationship between the terms “group organisation”, “group entity” and “participant” is shown in Figure 1.

Participant/ Group Members

These are a forest/ToF and/or landowner/manager covered by the **group certificate**, who has the legal right to manage the forest/ToF in a clearly defined area, and the ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management/ToF standard in that area and laid by group entity.

Eligibility: NCCF group certification standard does not allow a group member to be part of more than one group entity certification or individual forest management/ToF certification.

Note 1: The term “ability to implement the requirements of the management standard” requires the entity to have a long-term legal right to manage the forest/ToF and would disqualify one-off contractors from becoming participants in group certification.

Note 2: The relationship between the terms “group organisation”, “group entity” and “participant” is shown in Figure 1.

Document confirming participation in group certification

A document issued to an individual **participant** that refers to the **group certificate** and that confirms the **participant/member** as being covered by the scope of the **group certification**.

Note: This document may be for instance a sub-certificate or a confirmation of participation.

Landscape Level Requirements

Requirements of the applicable standard that are implemented at the level of the group entity in a management group (e.g. protection of high conservation values).

Forest/ToF Owner/Manager

Person, group of people or legal entity having the legal or tenure right, or executing traditional or customary tenure rights, to manage the forest/ToF in a clearly defined certified area, and the ability to implement the requirements of the sustainable forest management/ToF standard in this area.