



NETWORK FOR CERTIFICATION AND CONSERVATION OF FORESTS (NCCF)

ToF Group Management Certification Standard

NCCF-STD-GM-ToF 02/2022

Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF)

Registered Office: EPCH House, Pocket 6&7, Sector C, LSC,
Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110070, India | Fax: +91-11-26135518 & 19
E-mail : info@nccf.in | Website : www.nccf.in

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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 ST 1002:2018 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. Group organisation shall determine Scope of Group Management System including boundaries and applicability of Group Management system, as per the ToF STD applicability at Group level. The scope shall be made available as documented information.
- 3.4. The entity shall comply with the applicable and relevant legal obligations.
- 3.5. The entity shall operate an annual internal monitoring programme that provides for the evaluation of the participants' conformity with the certification requirements.

¹ FM/ToF Certification Standard as applicable

- 3.6. The Group entity shall define training needs and implement training activities and/or communication strategies relevant to the implementation of the applicable NCCF standards.
- 3.7. The Group entity shall operate a review of conformity with the ToF standard. The review shall cover:
- a. the results of the internal monitoring programme and the certification body's evaluations and surveillance;
 - b. corrective and preventive measures if required;
 - c. the evaluation of the effectiveness of corrective actions taken.
 - d. the status of actions from previous management reviews.
 - e. the changes in external and internal issues.
 - f. opportunities for continual improvement.
 - g. outputs of the review include decisions related to continual improvement opportunities and any need for changes to the group management system.
- 3.8. The Group entity shall provide for a public policy of commitment on behalf of the whole group organisation to comply with the applicable requirements of the ToF standards and shall also include commitment
- a. to integrate the group certification requirements in the group management system;
 - b. to continuously improve the group management system
 - c. to continuously support the improvement of the sustainable management of the land by the participants.

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. **Group Management plan and Procedures**
- a. 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 applicable ToF Standard and shall be updated from time to time based on any recent changes.
 - b. The entity shall establish written “Group management plan” primarily focusing on
 - i. “introduction of changes in group management system (procedures)
 - ii. the ToF management planning requirements (Theme B of ToF standard)

- iii. implementation of other requirements of the ToF where the group entity is responsible.
- 4.3. Group entity shall establish written procedures for the acceptance of new participants of the group organisation. These acceptance procedures shall cover at least the verification of the applicant's information about contact details, clear identification of their property and its/their size(s).
- 4.4. Group entity to establish written procedures for the suspension and exclusion of participants who do not correct/close nonconformities. Group participants excluded from any certification group based on nonconformities cannot be accepted within 12 months after exclusion.
- 4.5. 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.
- 4.6. Group organisation shall plan, implement and control processes needed to meet the requirement of ToF and group certification standard. It shall be done by:
 - a. Defining the necessary processes and establishing criteria for those
 - b. Implementing control of processes in accordance with the criteria
 - c. Keeping documented information to the extent necessary to have confidence that the processes have been carried out as planned
- 4.7. Group entity staff and participants shall demonstrate knowledge of the Group's procedures and the applicable NCCF Standard.
- 4.8. 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.
- 4.9. 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/exclusion of members from the Group and shall also have provision to ensure participants excluded from the group based on non-conformity to ToF Standard, cannot apply for group membership within 12 months after exclusion
 - 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

- 4.10. The Group Entity shall provide participants with a document confirming participation in the group certification.
- 4.11. The Group Entity shall provide all participants with information and guidance required for the effective implementation of the sustainable management as per ToF standard and other applicable requirements of the NCCF standard.
- 4.12. 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 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 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
 - f. Communications raising awareness regarding:
 - i. the group management policy;
 - ii. the requirements of the applicable standard;
 - iii. group participants' contribution to the effectiveness of the group management system, including the benefits of improved group performance;
 - iv. the implications of not conforming with the group management system requirements.

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.

- 4.13. 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 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.

- 4.14. The Group Entity shall identify the affected stakeholders that are relevant for the group management system and the relevant expectations of these affected stakeholders.
- 4.15. The group entity shall determine and include in the Group Management Plan internal and external communications relevant to the group management system. This includes:
 - a. what to communicate;
 - b. when to communicate;
 - c. with whom to communicate;
 - d. how to communicate.

5. Group Records

- 5.1. The group entity shall maintain up-to-date records about the group entity and participants' conformity with the requirements of the ToF standard, and other applicable requirements of the certification system, 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 ToF property and its/their size(s). Group entity shall also ensure verification of the participant's information about contact details, clear identification of their property, legal records and its/their size(s) as part of acceptance process into Group organisation.
 - 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 ToF properties;
 - d. Evidence of consent of all Participants;
 - e. Documentation and records regarding recommended practices for 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.
 - h. Documented information as the evidence of nature of Non-conformities and subsequent corrective actions taken and its results.

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 entity shall maintain updated documented information relevant to the group management system and the conformance with requirements of ToF Standard, which should be:
 - a. Available and suitable for use, where and when it is needed
 - b. Adequately protected against loss of confidentiality, improper use or loss of integrity
- 5.3. Group records shall be retained for at least five (5) years and protected against theft, improper use, loss of confidential information, etc.

- 5.4. 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 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 and responsibilities of participants

Group Entity shall define functions and responsibilities of the participants.

- 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 certification system. Group participants excluded from certification group cannot apply for group membership within 12 months after exclusion.
Note: The requirement for “written agreement” and participants’ “commitment” is also satisfied by the written agreement of the ToF owners/managers’ association with the group entity, where the 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 certification standard and other applicable requirements of the certification system as well as with requirements of the management system.
- 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. If the group members were/are also certified under other relevant/similar certification (like NCCF SFM Certification):

- a. the group entity shall be informed of the previous group participation and existing certification under similar scheme by the group members.
- b. the group entity shall be informed of the nonconformities from the other group certification.
- c. the group entity shall address nonconformities reported from group members which were identified under other relevant/similar certification than the particular group certification and ensure implementation with all group members.

8. Performance Evaluation

8.1. Monitoring, Analysis and Evaluation

- a. Group Organisation shall have internal monitoring programme, on-going activity throughout the year, inclusive of following:
 - i. Scope of monitoring and measurement,
 - ii. Methods as applicable to ensure valid results,
 - iii. Frequency or time-schedule for monitoring and as well as analysis and evaluation,
 - iv. Documented information about the process, results and corrective actions as evidence
- b. Group entity shall evaluate group management performance and effectiveness of group management system concerning implementation of ToF standard requirement.
- c. Monitoring and control systems including monitoring visits to the certified area shall assist to check and confirm continued compliance with all the requirements of Standard, management plan and group membership's requirements.

8.2. Internal Audit Requirement

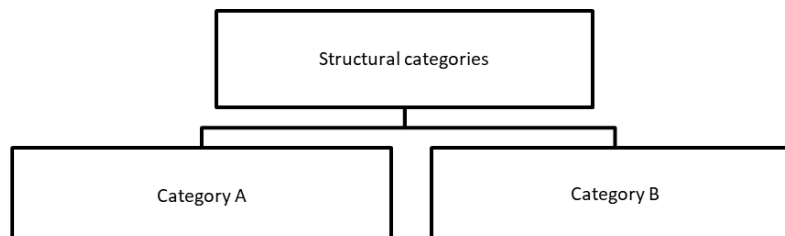
- a. Group entity shall conduct an annual internal audit programme to ensure group management system is effectively implemented and maintained. It (internal audit) shall cover the group entity and all group participants. The group entity shall be audited annually. The participants may be selected on a sample basis.
- b. The Group entity shall issue corrective action requests to the participants to address non-compliances identified during their internal audit and monitor their implementation.
- c. The Group entity should visit different members in their annual internal audit 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.
- d. The Group entity shall define criteria to be monitored at each internal audit and according to the group characteristics, risk factors and local circumstances.
- e. The group entity is responsible to develop and operate an annual internal audit programme to provide sufficient confidence in the conformity of the group organisation with the applicable standard. The elements of the internal audit 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 to ensure the objectivity and impartiality of the audit process
 - 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

8.3. Selection of Participants for Audit Program

a. Sampling for Group Certification: The sample sites for the audit will be selected from the different categories depending on the 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.



b. Selection of Sample Size:

- i. The sample size shall be calculated separately for each category.
- ii. 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 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. ($S=0.6*\sqrt{190}$; $S=0.6*13.78$; $S=8.27$)

c. Selection of Participants as sample sites

- At least 25% of the sample should be selected at random from calculated units.
- A risk-based procedure for the selection of the participants, based on ToF formations (selection from each available formation), any other special feature, complaints received, information on compliance etc. shall be taken into account to select the representative samples.

9. Improvement

9.1. Non conformity and corrective Action

- Group organisation shall react and take appropriate corrective actions to address the Non-conformity and shall be prepared to deal with consequences as well.
- Group organisation shall evaluate the need for action to eliminate the causes of the nonconformity, in order that it does not recur or occur elsewhere, by:
 - reviewing the nonconformity;
 - determining the causes of the nonconformity;
 - determining if similar nonconformities exist, or could potentially occur.
- Group organisation shall implement any action needed and review the effectiveness of any corrective action taken. It shall also make changes to the group management system, if necessary.

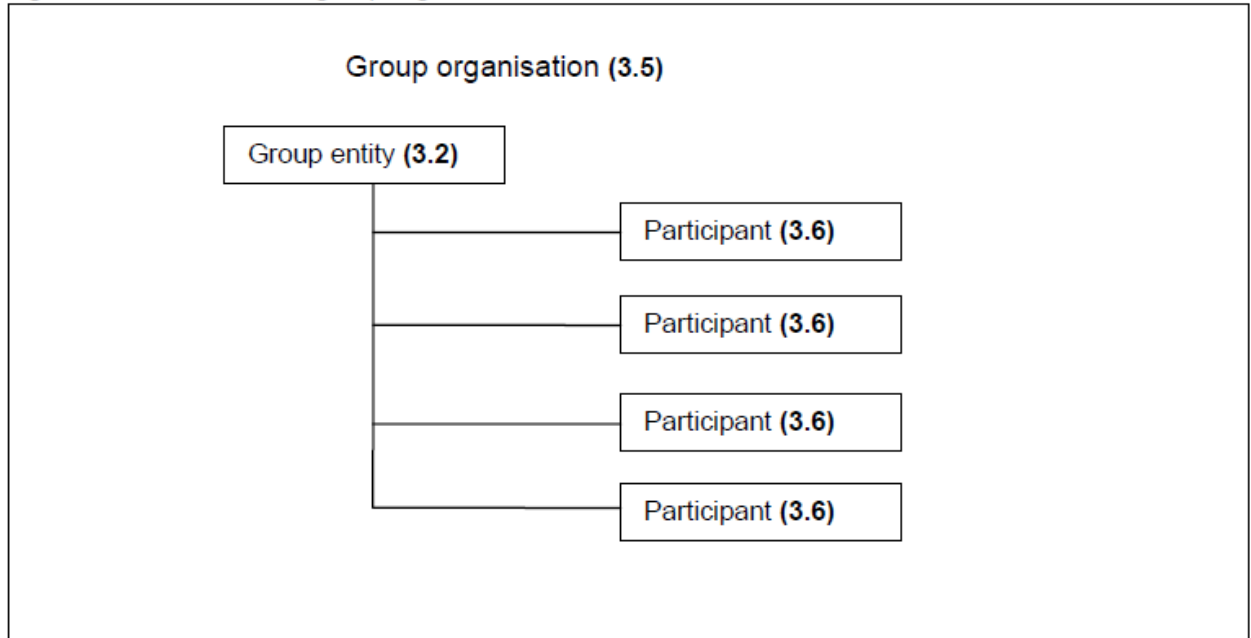
- 9.2. Continual Improvement :** Group organisation shall ensure continual improvement regarding suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of sustainable management of ToF and group management system.

10. Chain of Custody

- The Group entity shall have certified PEFC chain of custody system in place if a group entity also acts as a trader of tree based material not covered by group certificate.
- The Group Entity shall have in place a documented system for tracking and tracing of certified products produced by the participants from certified area.
- The Group Entity should take measures to ensure that non-certified material is not being mixed with NCCF certified material.
- The Group Entity shall ensure that all uses of the NCCF and PEFC Trademark are approved by the certification body in advance.

Annex 1: Group Organization

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 ToF area covered by a **group certificate** representing the sum of 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.

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.

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

Group Entity

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

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

Group Certificate

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

Group Certification

Certification of the group organisation under one group ToF certificate.

Group Management Plan

Documented information specifying objectives, actions and control arrangements. It covers planned changes of the group management system and requirements of the sustainable management as per ToF standard which are covered on group level.

Group Management System

Set of interrelated or interacting elements of an organisation to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the sustainable management as per ToF standard.

Group Organisation

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

Note 1: *The term “group organisation” is equivalent to the term “region” or other terms chosen by the relevant 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.*

Internal 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, undertaken by the group organisation itself (first party audit).

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).

Monitoring

Determining the status of a system, a process or an activity.

Participant/ Group Members

These are ToF and/or landowner/manager/farmers/vendors 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 ToF standard in that area and laid by group entity.

Policy

Intentions and direction of an organisation, as formally expressed by its manager/owner or the group entity.

Stakeholder

A person, group, community or organisation with an interest in the subject of the requirements of the standard.

ToF Owner/Manager

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