

Q&A summary of TFA Jurisdictional Exchange Network virtual meeting on “How to make credible claims about jurisdictional progress”

1. What are some actions companies can take to engage effectively with districts? Such that districts are willing to commit and implement expectations.

Thanks for the question, being actively involved in the process is definitely the first step. Company needs to better understand what exist and the gaps in the district. So, the most important thing is the company and the district work together to define joint targets and action plan (like a compact in VSA language) then allocate joint resource for implementation managed by multistakeholders governance. For example, in Aceh Tamiang one of our member - we are collaborating with IDH to support the district and companies to develop multi-stakeholders entity (Center of Excellence on Sustainable Agriculture) which will implement joint action plan through joint investment. They then plan to monitor progress and report results together.

2. How do we reconcile the long-term horizon of impact of jurisdictional approach, with the high-level pressure to "perform" on the private sector?

Practically, a lot of companies will still look for high levels of performance for enterprises within their supply chains but recognise that their ability to deliver on longer-term sustainability commitments requires investment in the jurisdictions from which they source. That investment needs to be about improvement over time and strengthening the enabling conditions (like an engaged local government) to create more durable change. Durable change takes time which is why the conversation about how to incentivise continuing improvement over the long-term is so interesting.

3. Can you elaborate on the principle of proportionality? Perhaps provide an example

Proportionality is about ensuring that claims or communications don't overstate the level of engagement or progress. Essentially, the claim needs to be proportional to the amount of progress. It wouldn't be credible to say we're a responsible sourcing company because we're participating in setting up a jurisdictional initiative, if that's the only thing they're doing. It also wouldn't work for a company to say we're sourcing responsibly if they only source a small percentage of their supply from regions or enterprises that are on a credible improvement pathway.

4. Could you share initial thoughts on approaching the issue of "how much to verify"?

This is going to be one of the tricky issues to unpack because the intensity of verification depends in part on the end use of the data or practices being verified and on what stakeholders (e.g. buying companies) feel is a sufficient level of assurance. We started by considering a complex approach where the intensity of verification would be determined on an issue by issue basis and be commensurate with the level of risk posed by that issue in that place – but that seemed too complex. The basic logic might still hold though – that the intensity of verification should be based on a combination of the quality of the monitoring data, the end use of the data (e.g. internal or widely communicated), and the risk profile.

5. What is the claim that you are aiming for? “Unilever is sustainable via activity XYZ...” Or what? What is the aim here and what metrics are you suggesting?

The draft guide that ISEAL is consulting on should be thought of like an umbrella framework under which there are more detailed frameworks like LandScale and IDH VSA. Our guidance doesn't prescribe specific metrics, only guides how to determine which metrics might be appropriate. LandScale in particular has done a lot of work on specific metrics, as have regional frameworks like LTKL or Mato Grosso. Similarly for claims, we're trying to categorise the full range of claims that a sourcing company, financing institution or jurisdictional entity might want to make – more as a way to have a consistent conversation about what types of monitoring and verification need to support those claims.

6. What if government disagrees with or disputes the private / NGO assessment as flawed, wrong, “foreign” etc.

One of the strengths of these jurisdictional initiatives is that almost all of them have local and even regional governments as a critical or lead actor in the initiative. The process is being built from the ground up by engaging local stakeholders. The frameworks that are being developed, like LandScale, are primarily about providing the jurisdictions with a common methodology for communicating their progress, where the jurisdictions get to decide in part which are the issues that are relevant in their context and against which they want to report.