



WWF Standards Assessment Tool (WWF SAT) Methodological Overview

WWF Switzerland & Germany | 07 2026

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Overview and Purpose

This document provides a structured overview of the methodology behind the WWF Standards Assessment Tool (WWF SAT), explaining what the tool does, how it is structured, and how it was developed. It does not reproduce the indicators themselves; the full indicator set is made available as a separate download. The document is intended as an explanatory introduction rather than a complete or final reference, as several elements and indicator formulations remain under development and may evolve.

The WWF SAT is a formalised methodology for evaluating and comparing voluntary sustainability standards and certification schemes. It examines both the substantive requirements a scheme places on certified operations and the governance, rules and procedures that underpin the scheme itself. The result is a structured understanding of a scheme's strengths and weaknesses, which WWF uses to identify areas for improvement and to support schemes in refining and strengthening their systems over time.

The tool builds on the approach of the **WWF Certification Assessment Tool** (CAT) and its successor, the WWF Certification Benchmarking Tool (CBT). While the methodology is applicable across sectors, the current SAT indicator set focuses primarily on terrestrial commodity sectors, particularly agriculture and forestry, while also incorporating elements relevant to other contexts, such as mining, supply chain management, and cross-cutting environmental and social issues.

How the Methodology was developed

Based on the foundations of the earlier CAT and CBT, the WWF SAT was developed jointly by WWF Switzerland and WWF Germany. It reflects evolving expectations across the standards landscape, particularly in the areas of climate, biodiversity and freshwater, forestry, and social and governance criteria, and captures the combined perspective and work of both offices, with input from thematic experts across the WWF network.

The indicators were updated through a structured, multi-stage process:

1. **Definition of indicators to update:** Existing indicator sets were reviewed by in-house experts and mapped against the major evolving frameworks in the sustainability space — for example, the new SBTi Net-Zero Standard, the SBTN Land targets, and the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) — taking account of the rising ambitions reflected in those frameworks.
2. **Expert proposals (WWF Germany & Switzerland):** Selected experts from WWF Switzerland and WWF Germany developed proposed indicator updates, checking each against the specific framework(s) to which it would map.
3. **Feedback and validation:** A focused feedback and validation round was conducted with selected international thematic experts from across the WWF network and external experts, including ASI (Assurance Services International) and SECO (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs).
4. **Update round:** The indicators were revised accordingly, with additional operational guidance added where helpful.
5. **Launch and feedback phase:** Fine-tuning and launch are accompanied by a planned two- to three-year review phase, during which WWF welcomes continued feedback on the indicator set.

Structure of the Indicator Framework

The SAT indicator set is organised in two main parts:

- **Part I** focuses on system-level requirements, such as governance, standard-setting, certification and accreditation.
- **Part II** focuses on performance requirements for producers and supply-chain actors, covering areas such as legality, labour rights, biodiversity, water, climate, agriculture, forestry, mining, traceability and waste.

In total, the framework comprises more than 220 indicators, providing a comprehensive basis for analysing voluntary sustainability standards.

Analytical Objective

Taken together, the indicators are designed to assess whether a standard provides:

- credible governance structures;
- transparent and inclusive standard-setting processes;
- robust certification and accreditation systems;
- meaningful environmental and social safeguards.

The aim is not simply to verify that policies or procedures exist, but to evaluate whether a scheme sets clear expectations, allocates accountability, protects rights, manages risks, and enables continuous improvement toward credible sustainability outcomes.

Coverage Approach

Each indicator is assessed against three levels of coverage:

- **Fully included:** the scheme clearly and publicly addresses the full intent of the indicator through binding requirements, procedures or governance arrangements.
- **Partially included:** the issue is addressed only in part, indirectly, or without sufficient clarity, scope or assurance.
- **Not included:** there is no adequate evidence that the indicator is addressed.
- **Not applicable:** this rating is used where an indicator is not relevant to the scope or sector of the assessed scheme.

The detailed scoring criteria applied to each individual indicator are not reproduced in this overview.

Thematic Coverage

The sections below summarise what each thematic area assesses and the principal external frameworks that informed its design.

Part I – System-level

Governance, Standard-Setting & Assurance

How is the standard governed, verified, and held accountable?

Examines whether the scheme has inclusive and transparent governance with balanced voting rights, financial disclosure, and whistle-blower protection; provides accessible complaints and dispute resolution procedures at governance, certification, and accreditation level; follows a credible theory of change with public monitoring and evaluation of outcomes; develops and revises standards through inclusive, evidence-based processes; certifies producers through independent, competent audit bodies; and maintains chain-of-custody systems that prevent contamination with non-certified material and ensure credible product claims.

Inspiring frameworks: ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems, ISO 17065, ISO 17011, UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).

Part II – Performance

Social: Legality, Community Relations & Workers' Rights

Does the standard ensure that producers operate lawfully, respect community rights, and treat workers fairly?

Covers legal land tenure, anti-corruption, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for indigenous and local communities, including grievance mechanisms; prohibition of forced and child labour, living wages, freedom of association, safe workplaces, and protection from discrimination; and food security for workers and nearby communities.

Inspiring frameworks: UNGPs, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO Core Labour Conventions (ILO 29/105/132/138/182/183), FPIC Principles, ETI Base Code, Global Living Wage Coalition, WHO WASH.

Biodiversity

Does the standard protect nature?

Assesses whether producers identify and maintain biodiversity values, prohibit deforestation and ecosystem conversion after 31 December 2020, protect rare and endangered species, manage pesticide use responsibly, and maintain or restore natural habitats.

Inspiring frameworks: EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), IUCN Red List, CITES, High Conservation Value (HCV) Framework, Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions, Accountability Framework Initiative, EU Directive 2009/128.

Freshwater

Does the standard protect water?

Covers respect for formal and customary water rights, sustainable abstraction limits, water quality and effluent management, catchment-level collaboration, and protection of freshwater ecosystems and endangered aquatic species.

Inspiring frameworks: Science Based Targets for Nature (SBTN) Freshwater Guidance, CEO Water Mandate, EU Water Framework Directive.

Climate

Does the standard drive emissions reductions?

Assesses transparent emission profiles for certified materials, a net-zero-aligned pathway with interim benchmarks, treatment of land-use-change and agricultural-land-management emissions, and carbon removal and climate resilience practices.

Inspiring frameworks: SBTi, GHG Protocol Product Standard, IPCC AR6, ISO 14067, EU Product Environmental Footprint (PEF).

Agriculture & Forestry

Does the standard support good land management?

For agriculture: soil health (erosion, compaction, salinity, contamination), integrated pest management, crop rotation, and genetic diversity. For forestry: sustainable harvest levels, site-appropriate management, monitoring and adaptive regeneration, prohibition of genetically modified trees, and greenhouse gas and climate resilience considerations.

Inspiring frameworks: FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, FAO Agroecology Principles, EU Directive 2009/128.

Mining

Does the standard manage the specific risks of extractive operations?

Assesses identification of biodiversity risks, management of artisanal and small-scale mining impacts, closure and post-closure planning, financial provisions for rehabilitation, restoration of native vegetation, prohibition of tailings disposal into aquatic habitats and recognised tailings dam safety standards.

Inspiring frameworks: *Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA), ICMM Tailings Management, OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals.*

Supply Chain Management & Waste

Does the standard drive responsibility throughout the value chain?

Examines commitments to sourcing certified material, accurate traceability, and circular and local processing models; and, for waste: reuse and recycling, safe disposal of unavoidable waste, prevention of plastic contamination, and tracking and minimising food loss.

Inspiring frameworks: *OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct, Food Loss and Waste Protocol, EU Waste Framework Directive.*

The frameworks referenced as inspiring frameworks throughout this document serve as points of orientation for the thematic scope of the SAT. Their inclusion does not imply full alignment between the SAT and any individual framework, nor does it indicate that standards assessed under the SAT meet the requirements of those frameworks in their entirety.

WWF SAT & relevant frameworks

To contextualise the indicators within the broader landscape of relevant frameworks, a mapping against key external frameworks was carried out. It shows where the WWF SAT indicators overlap thematically with requirements in those frameworks, making the connections between the WWF SAT and the wider regulatory and voluntary landscape visible to users.



The mapping was conducted against the following frameworks, drawing on the most current and publicly available versions or drafts of each at the time of assessment:

- SBTi Net-Zero Standard
- GHG Protocol Land Sector & Removals Standard
- SBTN Land Targets
- SBTN Freshwater Targets
- SBTN Biodiversity Targets
- SBTN Oceans Targets
- Accountability Framework Initiative (AFi) Operational Guidance
- EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)
- ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998/2022)
- ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems

For each SAT indicator, each framework was reviewed and compared against the WWF SAT indicator set to identify thematic overlap and comparable requirements. The mapping does not constitute a conformity assessment or gap analysis. A high degree of alignment between a WWF SAT indicator and a framework requirement does not mean that a standard scoring well on that indicator is automatically compliant with the respective framework.

The mapping should therefore be read as an orientation tool, not as a substitute for a dedicated compliance review against any individual framework.

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