



## Paving the way to FSS compliance

The Food Security Standard (FSS) takes up the Human Right to Adequate Food as a new building block for existing sustainability standards. In Zambia, one of the most food insecure countries of the world, the FSS was tested in the context of smallholder cotton farming. In this situation of food insecurity, it was expected, that compliance could not be achieved. Nevertheless, it was important to assess the applicability of the FSS instruments and explore the question of whether and how the FSS instruments could be used in sustainability certifications carried out in such contexts and how to pave the way towards compliance. A Food Security Sensitive Management is proposed as an option to promote and assess the efforts of actors in the supply chain.

The aim of the Food Security Standard (FSS) Project is to provide a practical instrument that can be incorporated in sustainability certification systems to demonstrate that the Right to Food is respected in the production of agricultural commodities. An essential step to achieve this goal is to test the Food Security Standard in different contexts: on plantations, on small farms and in regions with higher and lower food insecurity levels. According to the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2018, Zambia falls into the GHI category of “alarming severity” and ranks 115th out of 119 assessed countries.

Carrying out a test under severe food insecurity conditions in view to audit the fulfilment of the Food Security Standard, is not an easy task. For the purpose of the FSS Project however, it was important to test the applicability of the FSS in a food insecure context, to identify the limits and to discuss the relevance of the FSS tools in such situations.

The test was carried out in cooperation with the sustainability standard “Cotton made in Africa” (CmiA) and the verified company Alliance Gineries Ltd. The CmiA standard encompasses social, environmental and economic criteria and is designed to improve the living conditions of African smallholder farmers and to promote environmentally

friendly cotton production. Alliance Gineries receives cotton from around 40,000 smallholders countrywide under an outgrower scheme. As a CmiA verified company, Alliance Gineries trains the farmers not only on good agricultural practices, but also on the social, environmental and economic aspects covered by CmiA criteria. Alliance Gineries agreed to test the auditability of the

FSS within a regular CmiA farm level verification. The verification field visits took place in several regions of Zambia. The FSS was tested within the field visits of small farmer groups located in the Central and Southern provinces.



Auditor interviewing cotton farmers in Zambia.

What was foreseeable has been confirmed during the verification process: All farmers interviewed are confronted with at least temporary food insecure situations. They have to reduce their usual food intake from three to two or even to one daily meal for several weeks or even months throughout the year. Through the compliance with the CmiA requirements, Alliance Ginneries has a positive impact on farming practices and livelihoods through trainings and good cotton purchasing practices. Cotton is also an important income source for the farmers. The revenues are used to cover household expenditures such as school fees and materials, medical treatments, etc. However, despite all the improvements achieved through the implementation of the CmiA standard, the food situation remains precarious. This is driven by several factors. One factor often mentioned by the farmers is the irregular rainfall pattern in the last two to three seasons. Other factors identified by consulted experts are the reliance on few food crops (especially on maize), poor road infrastructure, insufficient storage capacity, extremely low levels of mechanization and limited energy supply and social services such as health and social security systems.

Addressing the complexity of food insecurity of smallholders is a challenge. Cotton ginneries can play an important promoting role, but their capacities are limited when it comes to provide solutions to structural problems. Also, production shortfalls due to recurring droughts or irregular rainfalls can hardly be addressed by a cotton ginnery.

The test showed that given these multiple challenges, the audited farmers would not be currently in the position to comply with the FSS. Moreover, the pathway to compliance is expected to be long and difficult. Not being able to get FSS certified within sustainability certification could bring disadvantages for the smallholder farmers, such as the exclusion from lucrative and increasingly demanding European markets. This has to be avoided. Further disadvantages for food insecure small farmers would only worsen their precarious situation. The question is how to deal with this challenge?

All governments are committed to the Right to Food and to the Sustainable Development Goals of

the United Nations. Additionally, the European Union became the first region worldwide to call on its governments to develop specific National Action Plans to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. All actors involved in agricultural value chains, including the private sector in consumer countries, can and must commit themselves to overcoming hunger and to protect the Human Right to Food. This should be done in a credible and comprehensible way. The FSS can support the efforts of companies by providing an approach to facilitate the assessment and monitoring of their impacts on the local food security. The idea is to support sustainability-certified smallholder farmer schemes (organized in groups via cooperatives or companies like ginneries or mills) in setting up a Food Security Sensitive Management (FoSSeM).

The FoSSeM should enable all actors along those value chains, whose base are agricultural products provided by food insecure smallholders, to uptake and proof their responsibility for the Human Right to adequate Food. The responsibilities and action pathways for each actor along the value chain need to be defined, criteria have to be identified how these can be assessed and monitored. This is a highly complex and difficult endeavour since overcoming food insecurity requires state action. At the same time, missing governmental initiatives should not relieve private actors from their responsibility to be a driver of change. The question of how much the involved actors of the private sector can contribute to increase smallholders' food security, how to avoid "green washing" on social issues and how compliance with the FSS could be progressively achieved, needs further investigation and stakeholder discussions.

## FSS | PROJECT

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