
SRP Standard Revision Terms of Reference



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About the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP)

The Sustainable Rice Platform e.V. (SRP) is a global multi-stakeholder alliance comprising over 100 institutional members from public, private, research, civil society and the financial sector. Co-convened by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and private sector partners, SRP works with its members and partners to transform the global rice sector by improving smallholder livelihoods, reducing the social, environmental and climate footprint of rice production, and by offering the global rice market an assured supply of sustainably produced rice.

Contact details

E-mail: info@sustainablerice.org

Web: www.sustainablerice.org

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1. Background

SRP is a global multi-stakeholder alliance launched in 2011 by UN Environment Programme and the International Rice Research Institute, comprising over 100 institutional stakeholders, including public and private sector stakeholders, research, financial institutions and NGOs. SRP promotes resource-use efficiency and climate change resilience in rice systems (both on-farm and throughout value chains) and pursues voluntary market transformation initiatives by developing sustainable production standards, indicators, incentive mechanisms, and outreach mechanisms to boost wide-scale adoption of sustainable best practices throughout rice value chains. SRP's goal is to minimize environmental impacts of rice production and consumption while enhancing smallholder incomes and contributing to food security.

The SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation offers a normative framework that can serve as a basis for supporting claims to sustainability performance in rice supply chains. Throughout the previous development and revision processes, stakeholders have emphasized the importance of keeping the SRP Standard as a concise and inclusive tool for practitioners to drive wide-scale adoption of climate-smart sustainable best practice among rice smallholders. SRP released the SRP Standard (Version 2.0) in January 2019, with 41 requirements structured under eight major themes. Version 2.1 was launched in January 2020, and slightly modified as Version 2.2 in August 2023.

The SRP Standard is complemented by the SRP Performance Indicators for Sustainable Rice Cultivation, which enable quantitative measurement and assessment of sustainability impacts of best-practice adoption at farm level. Using this tool, implementation partners and researchers can collect benchmark data and communicate field-level outcomes in a consistent way. Version 1.0 of the SRP Performance Indicators was released in April 2015 and revised in 2018. The current version 2.1 was launched in January 2020.

These Terms of Reference set out the need and objectives for a substantive revision of the SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation v 2.2 through an open consultative process. The revision process is defined in the SRP Standard-Setting Procedure, which is designed to follow ISEAL Alliance best-practice protocols.

Sustainability challenges in the global rice sector

Rice is integral to global food systems. Worldwide, 3.5 billion people consume rice and 144 million family farmers produce rice on approximately 160 million hectares. Some 90 percent of rice farmers live near or below the poverty line - many are women.

Globally, 144 million smallholder rice farmers rely on rice production for food and household income; nearly 95 percent of Asian rice is traded and consumed domestically. Production is highly fragmented, dominated by flows of South-South bulk trade with a smaller number of relatively well-coordinated South-North and North-North supply chains. In addition, rice is a strategic staple crop of extreme public and political importance.

However, despite its critical importance to livelihoods, national economies and global food security, rice production remains highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including flooding, drought, salinization, sea-level rise and increased temperatures.

Rice smallholders, especially women, bear the brunt of the health and economic risks of production as they are inadequately equipped to safeguard their livelihood against climate change impacts and market risks. If we do not act now, today's children will live in a severely degraded environment and many of them will remain within the poverty trap in rice.

As our global population grows, so does demand for rice. The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) estimates that rice production must increase by at least 25 percent in the next 25 years to meet future global demand. Meeting this growing demand sustainably poses an enormous challenge in a world with finite resources. Annual water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions of rice top the charts among food crops. Rice cultivation uses approximately 40 percent of the world's irrigated water, and accounts for 10 percent of global methane emissions.

Sustainable rice production requires economically viable, environmentally sound and socially beneficial farming systems across diverse social and production contexts. But it is possible to develop an overarching framework encompassing proven approaches and climate-smart best practices that can be generally applied, to offer a path for producers, value chain actors and governments to drive transformative change across the sector. Achieving such an ambition requires change not only at farm level; collaboration and a shared vision are required among all value chain actors and the support of governments, the financial sector, research, civil society and international development community.

The SRP Standard- principles and development

In 2015, following a multi-stakeholder consultation process, SRP launched the world's first Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation, together with a set of Performance Indicators to evaluate impact of best-practice adoption. These tools - aimed squarely at rice smallholders - were based on proven science backed by the International Rice Research Institute, and together offer an objective framework for defining and measuring the sustainability of any rice system. The Standard was designed to offer a compact, cost-effective and impactful framework for improvement while minimizing the compliance burden for resource-poor smallholders. Selection of control points took into account the limitations of voluntary standards as a tool for effecting change, as well as potential unintended consequences. Recognizing the diversity of production contexts in rice, the Standard aimed to offer directional, non-prescriptive guidelines across 8 themes with 41 requirements. The scope of the Standard is limited to on-farm activities.

The Standard and Performance Indicators together offer utility as a normative basis for policymaking, for benchmarking and research, and as a basis for sustainable sourcing for private sector supply chains.

Following pilot implementation in 8 countries, feedback was incorporated, and the SRP Standard was revised in 2020 as version 2.0, then 2.1 and version 2.2, the current version, effective as of August 2023. At time of publication of version 2.0, the next review was scheduled for 2022, subsequently rescheduled to 2024.

2. Need for revision

Revision of the current version 2.2 of the SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation will be undertaken with the following objectives:

- Integrate latest scientific advances and best-practice recommendations.
- Address any identified ambiguities / inconsistencies in language and scoring.
- Rectify perceived shortcomings identified by stakeholders including Conformity Assessment Bodies and Producers.
- Improve consistency of auditability.
- Strengthen the focus on social factors, including gender and women's empowerment.
- Ensure alignment with any updated regulatory issues, e.g. on chemical use, carbon, and due diligence.
- Provide a modular structure for partners to align with specific themes within the Standard (e.g. climate, water, ecosystem services).
- Improve accessibility.
- Simplify and strengthen data collection.

The proposed revision reflects a growing demand from diverse stakeholders, and the need for a production standard for rice cultivation to facilitate market-based sustainability solutions. The Standard also aims to serve as a tool to inform national policymaking that incentivizes and rewards adoption of climate-smart, sustainable best practices while supporting national targets and international obligations under the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

SRP will consult with other voluntary sustainability standards in the agrifood and natural resources sector as well as the ISEAL Alliance to ensure incorporation/adoption of the latest thinking on effective approaches to governance of standards. This will include other voluntary sustainability standards, national rice standards in major producing countries, brand and retailer standards such as the Unilever Sustainable Agriculture Code, and ecosystem service standards such as Gold Standard.

All other relevant standards will be invited to contribute to the consultation as part of the SRP Standard revision process.

3. Objectives

The objective of this revision of the SRP Standard is to ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance. In particular, the revision will:

- Improve the effectiveness and applicability of the Standard to smallholder rice farmers.
- Enhance alignment and support for the evolving policy and regulatory environment.
- Strengthen the Standard's coverage of gender and women's empowerment.
- Incorporate the views and experiences of all relevant stakeholder groups.

- Encourage wider stakeholder participation, acceptance, and recognition of the Standard.
- Ensure the Standard is consistent with other SRP normative guidance.
- Structure the Standard to facilitate flexibility for future modular incorporation of carbon benefits and other ecosystem services, e.g., in implementation of optional add-on modules in the SRP Assurance Scheme.

The objectives of these Terms of Reference are to:

- Ensure the revised SRP Standard v 2.2 meets the expressed objectives for revision.
- Ensure the revision process is inclusive, robust and transparent to affected stakeholders.
- Ensure that the revision process complies with international best practices for standard setting, as articulated in the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards.

4. Specific guidance

The revision of the SRP Standard will be undertaken in compliance with the SRP Standard Setting Procedure and the ISEAL Standard Setting Code version 6.0.

The SRP Technical Committee (TC) is mandated to provide additional guidance to ensure that all SRP partners, donors, investors and members are included in the consultation process and that all relevant sources of technical knowledge within the rice supply chain are consulted. The TC will also focus on involving relevant stakeholders that were under-represented in earlier Standard development processes.

5. Intellectual property rights

Multi-stakeholder governance is at the core of the SRP System. This means SRP seeks to ensure all stakeholders of the SRP System have an equal voice and an equal opportunity to influence decisions and outcomes in respect to operation and management of the SRP System. Moreover, the alliance strives to provide an open platform for collective co-creation of public domain tools to benefit smallholder rice farmers. Collective ownership of such assets is thus foundational in order to encourage open discourse and sharing in a pre-competitive arena.

Nevertheless, legal protection over intellectual property is required to uphold the brand value of SRP, particularly in relation to the Assurance Scheme, Training Scheme and related use of logos. Contributors to the revision process agree to abide by the SRP Policy on Intellectual Property Rights, which may be amended from time to time by resolution of the Board.

Intellectual property includes patents, copyright and trademarks over intellectual assets, including inventions, improvements, data, processes, technologies, discoveries, project concept notes and proposals, reports, training materials and curricula, logos and other intellectual property ("Proprietary Information") that are conceived of or made by SRP

members and/or Secretariat staff under the auspices of, and using the name of SRP as the primary convening source or lead organization.

All SRP-branded publications shall be the sole intellectual property of SRP e.V. and shall be published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA) licence¹. This licence allows third parties to freely remix, amend and build upon SRP materials (including training curricula) on a non-commercial basis, provided SRP is duly credited and that the new creation is also licensed under identical terms and placed in the public domain. Attribution shall be given to all co-authors and contributors in order of contribution.

6. Scope and geographical application

The SRP Standard applies to all farm-level processes in rice production, up to and including any postharvest processes under the farmer's direct control. The Standard can be applied by individual farmers, smallholder farmer groups, as well as larger farms. The Standard has a focus on ensuring relevance, practicality, and impact, especially for smallholder farmers in developing countries.

If applied by a smallholder farmer group, the Standard requires an Internal Management System (IMS) to support farmers in implementing the Standard, measuring results, assessing compliance and identifying measures for continuous improvement.

It is important to protect the integrity and core requirements of the SRP Standard while maximizing its relevance and practical applicability within diverse national contexts – including production systems, agroecological environments, socio-ecological circumstances, and legal and regulatory frameworks. While the Standard offers normative guidance, practitioners may need locally-relevant guidance on appropriate best practice recommendations that support the requirements of the Standard. National Interpretation Guidelines may therefore be developed to serve as a bridge between the global standard and local field application. The required process for developing National Interpretation Guidelines and securing SRP recognition is described in a separate document.

7. Social, environmental, and economic outcomes

The SRP Theory of Change includes three main pathways around its three strategic pillars: (1) Develop sustainable rice value chains; (2) Create government and business partnerships for scale; and (3) Serve as a knowledge hub.

The SRP Standard and Performance Indicators (PIs) provide the essential elements required for the first pathway. Through training, technical support, incentive mechanisms and farmer outreach programs, rice farmers and other stakeholders can be equipped with tools, incentives and capacity to adopt sustainable, climate smart, resource-efficient best practices at scale. This leads to improved livelihoods and food security, enhanced social

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outcomes (gender, social equity and inclusive growth) as well as improved environmental outcomes for rice farmers and their communities.

8. Risks and mitigations

SRP has identified a number of actual or potential unintended negative consequences that might arise from use of the SRP Standard in diverse scenarios. These include the following as a non-exhaustive list, together with proposed mitigation measures.

- *Increased costs for farmers.* This will be mitigated by upscaling adoption, capacity building and marketing outreach, support tools to boost direct benefits to small farmers to support compliance and verification costs, and linking farmers to development initiatives, donors and sponsors.
- *Deforestation to expand growing area.* This will be mitigated by advocacy for better law enforcement, stringent attention to compliance with Standard requirements, and increasing public awareness.
- *Potential conflict between verified and non-verified farmers.* This will be mitigated by making the SRP Standard as accessible as possible in all relevant locations and contexts.
- *Worker discrimination.* This will be mitigated by raising awareness and emphasis in Standard scoring.
- *Fraudulent compliance claims.* This will be mitigated by boosting awareness and use of the SRP Assurance Scheme which stipulates permitted and prohibited types of claim, required procedures, monitoring and shadow audits. Other processes including effective traceability and Chain of Custody requirements provide stringent scrutiny of claims to ensure they can be substantiated or challenged.
- *Miscommunication regarding SRP National Interpretation Guidelines (NIGs).* NIGs are developed for localization of the SRP Standard. This will be mitigated by open communication and discussion with local stakeholders, led by the respective National Chapter or National Working Group, in accordance with the Protocol for Development of National Interpretation Guidelines for the SRP.
- *Effectiveness of SRP training on the SRP Standard.* The quality of training delivered by SRP authorized trainers will be upheld through effective monitoring, refresher courses and by strengthening the in-house qualification process for Conformity Assessment Bodies.

9. Stakeholder engagement

SRP will follow an open, inclusive and transparent stakeholder consultations through the revision process to ensure inclusive and meaningful engagement as set out in the SRP Standard-Setting Procedure. SRP seeks to engage all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the SRP Standard continues to meet its stated objectives.

SRP has already completed a stakeholder mapping exercise and, following the SRP Stakeholder Engagement Plan, will monitor the revision process to ensure balanced and effective participation of stakeholder constituencies against target participation goals.

10. Phases of the revision process

The revision process will follow SRP's Standard Setting Procedure. SRP will set out and publicize the rules and schedule for transition of the following normative documents:

1. SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation from Version 2.2 to 3.0.
2. SRP Performance Indicators for Sustainable Rice Cultivation from version 2.1 to 3.0.

Reference Documents

[ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards](#)

[SRP Policy on Intellectual Property v 1.0](#)

[SRP Standard Setting and Revision Procedure v 2.0](#)

[SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation v 2.2](#)

[SRP Performance Indicators for Sustainable Rice Cultivation v 2.1](#)

[SRP Assurance Scheme v 2.0](#)

[Protocol for Development of SRP National/Regional Interpretation Guidelines](#)