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THE HCS APPROACH TOOLKIT

MODULE 7

VERSION 2.0

MAY 2017

THE HCS APPROACH PUTTING NO DEFORESTATION INTO PRACTICE

Assuring the quality of HCS assessments

An outline of the HCS Approach Quality Assurance requirements and the challenges ahead

THE HCS APPROACH TOOLKIT V2.0 MAY 2017

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MODULE 7

Assuring the quality of HCS assessments

An outline of the HCS Approach Quality Assurance requirements and the challenges ahead



MODULE CONTENTS

P4: Introduction

P5: Training for HCS Approach implementation

P7: Peer review of HCS assessments

P8: Transparency and monitoring of HCS forest protection

P10: Conclusion and future challenges for HCS Quality Assurance

By Charlotte Opal,

Chair of the HCS Approach Quality Assurance Working Group, with input from Working Group members.



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INTRODUCTION

The HCS Approach is supported by a dynamic and innovative culture. One of the benefits this brings is the ability to test new tools and incorporate new developments into the methodology. The HCS Approach Steering Group's work on quality assurance is no exception: in just two years it has built a training programme that has raised the capacity of 24 organisations to run HCS assessments, and has developed a peer review process so that companies can benefit from expert appraisal before publishing their assessment results.¹

These new programmes and policies have been led by the **HCSA Quality Assurance Working Group**, which is open to any interested member or observer of the Steering Group. The Quality Assurance Working Group has met in person twice a year since 2014 to advise the broader Steering Group on how to ensure that HCS assessments are conducted according to the HCS Approach toolkit and to a high standard of quality. That all of the progress described in this module has been achieved is thanks to the Working Group's members and contributors.²

¹ At the time of publication, three HCS assessments have undergone the peer review process and have been published. Two more are currently under review.

² Quality Assurance Working Group members and contributors: AidEnvironment, Asia Pulp & Paper, Forest Stewardship Council, Golden Agri-Resources, Greenpeace, HCV Resource Network, National Wildlife Federation, Rainforest Alliance, Scientific Certification Systems, TFT, Wilmar and WWF.

This module explains the HCS Approach Quality Assurance requirements and activities to date. It also outlines the challenges and opportunities ahead, as new technologies allow for near real-time monitoring of HCS forest conservation, and as new partnerships with like-minded organisations emerge. The following pages cover three main areas:

1. Training for HCS Approach implementation.
2. An outline of the peer review programme for HCS assessments.
3. Transparency and monitoring for the implementation of HCS forest protection.

It is important to note that the processes described in this module are referring to the existing procedures and apply to all HCS assessments prior to launch of new quality control system. These procedures will undergo significant changes to accommodate new HCS assessments that follow the combined HCS-HCV Assessment Manual (due to be launched in Sept 2017), and to ensure high quality assessments. HCS assessment team composition and training requirements will need to be revised, and reporting and peer review templates modified, to cover both concepts and streamline requirements for companies. This integration work will occur throughout 2017 and we encourage readers to check www.highcarbonstock.org to make sure that they are using the latest reporting templates and quality review procedures.

TRAINING FOR HCS APPROACH IMPLEMENTATION

There has been rapid adoption of the HCS Approach among companies that are committed to No Deforestation but wish to develop plantations. This is creating a demand for technical experts (practitioners) and organisations that can use the HCS Approach methodology. The Quality Assurance Working Group has therefore developed a training programme to instruct practitioners on key components of the HCS Approach, and on how to lead HCS assessments. Four training sessions have been organised so far:

- August 2015: Bogor, Indonesia (Bahasa Indonesia)
- September 2015: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (English)
- February 2016: webinar (English)
- July 2016: Jakarta, Indonesia (Bahasa Indonesia)

The training programme provides an overview of the quality expectations relating to all HCS assessment elements, including participatory mapping and

respect for community rights. However, the bulk of the training focuses on how to identify HCS forests through image analysis and sampling of forest plots, as well as using the Decision Tree for land use planning (see Module 5b). The initial training sessions included around 16 hours of instruction, but the most recent sessions have been extended by eight hours to incorporate practical case studies into the curriculum.

The training programme for HCS practitioners is likely to undergo significant changes over the next few years. 'Refresher' modules will be made available for individuals who have already attended a session to ensure that they stay up to date on methodological changes. The HCS Approach Steering Group is also exploring ways in which future training may be integrated with the programme offered by the HCV Resource Network's HCV Assessor Licensing Scheme.

Registered practitioners, Registered Practitioner Organisations and team qualifications

The Working Group has developed requirements covering the composition and qualifications needed within HCS assessment teams. Participants who complete the training become registered practitioners, while an organisation that sends at least one project manager and one geographic information system (GIS) specialist/image analyst to a training session can become a Registered Practitioner Organisation and lead HCS assessments. Plantation companies may also become Registered Practitioner Organisations and conduct their own HCS assessments, or they can use a technical specialist organisation. To date, 24 organisations are registered. The full list is available at www.highcarbonstock.org.

Only Registered Practitioner Organisations can lead HCS assessments. For each HCS assessment team, the team leader and one GIS specialist, at a minimum, must be registered practitioners. The team must also have expertise in conservation, forestry and community engagement/participatory mapping. The full requirements for HCS assessment teams are available on the HCS Approach website.



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PEER REVIEW OF HCS ASSESSMENTS



Once completed, an HCS assessment must be reviewed to make sure that it followed the HCS toolkit methodology. While the HCS Approach Steering Group has not ruled out the possibility of third party verification, the long-term goal is to have the HCS Approach incorporated into relevant certification system standards (e.g. RSPO and FSC), and to collaborate with other initiatives, such as the HCV Resource Network, in order to ensure good quality.

In the interim, the Quality Assurance Working Group has developed a quality review system based on peer reviews of the assessment and transparency of data, maps and key information from HCS assessment reports. Further group discussion is needed to secure agreement on the types of consumer-facing claims allowed when the HCS Approach is applied in the absence of an existing certification scheme (such as RSPO or FSC).

It is important to note that the Peer Review Panel **does not formally approve** the HCS assessment. Instead, it provides an independent review of the assessment's quality and alignment with the HCS Approach toolkit, as well as suggestions for improvement, before the company publishes the results. If the Panel finds major problems, these can be corrected prior to publication.

Figure 1 shows the six basic steps in the Quality Review Process.

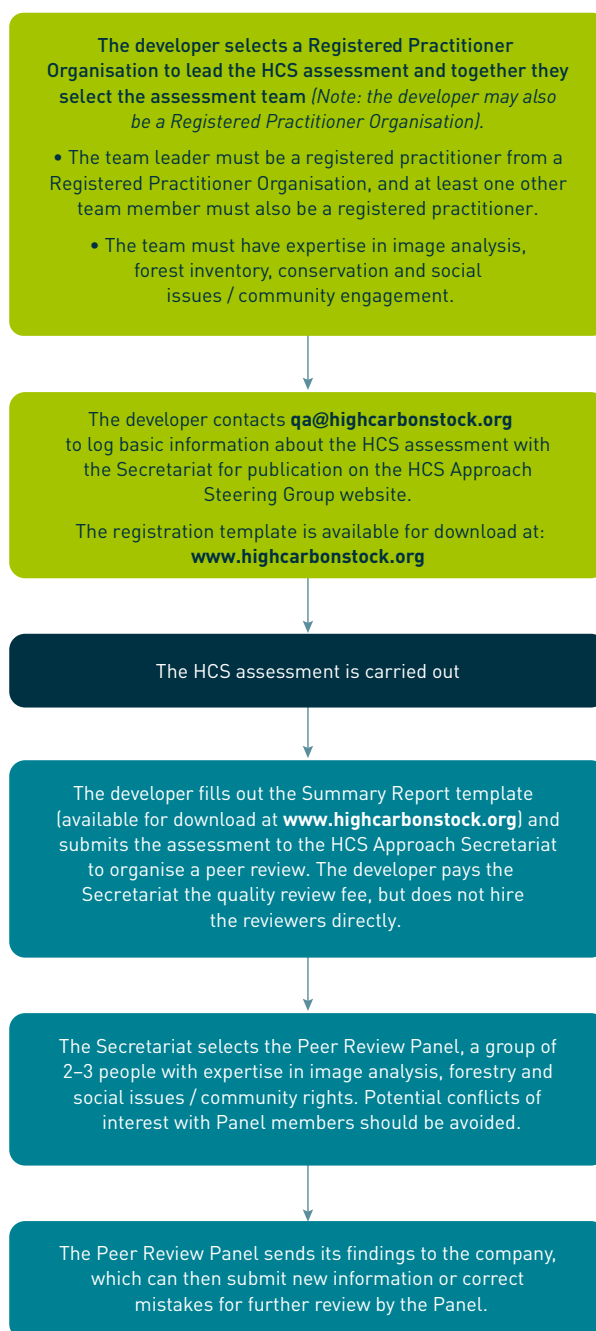


Figure 1: Steps in the Quality Review Process

TRANSPARENCY AND MONITORING OF HCS FOREST PROTECTION

To date, the Quality Assurance Working Group has focused on training organisations and developing the Quality Review Process for the HCS assessment itself. However, the process of achieving No Deforestation through the HCS Approach is not automatically completed when an Integrated Conservation and Land Use Plan (ICLUP) is finalised with local communities and government. The Working Group and the HCS Approach Steering Group are considering how to ensure that the resulting conservation and land use plan is actually put into practice so that forests stay protected and community rights continue to be respected. This section outlines the latest considerations and the questions that remain to be answered.

Transparency

Transparency of data and information is key to ensuring the quality of HCS assessments. As assessments are completed, the summary report, peer review report, and all other key information are uploaded to the HCS Approach Steering Group website. HCS Approach Steering Group members are also required to provide maps – including plantations, land cover, HCS forest, and HCV areas – to the HCS Approach Secretariat and the Global Forest Watch database maintained by the World Resources Institute.

“Transparency of data and information is key to ensuring the quality of HCS assessments.”

REGISTERED HCS ASSESSMENTS

The following HCS Assessments have been registered with the HCS Approach Steering Group. To view the assessment or progress of the Peer Review Process, click on the assessment number in the completed and ongoing assessments.

COMPLETED FOR REVIEW ASSESSMENTS

Country	Region/County	Product	HCS Assessment Status	Report
1	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	Completed	Summary Report
2	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	Completed	Summary Report
3	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	Completed	Summary Report

ONGOING FOR REVIEW ASSESSMENTS

Country	Region/County	Product	HCS Assessment Status	Report
1	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	In Progress	Summary Report
2	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	In Progress	Summary Report
3	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	In Progress	Summary Report

PENDING SUBMISSION FOR HCS REVIEW

Country	Region/County	Product	HCS Assessment Status	Report
1	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	Pending	Summary Report
2	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	Pending	Summary Report
3	Kenya, Kilimanjaro Region, Kilimanjaro District	Timber	Pending	Summary Report

The full and latest list of registered HCS assessments, including all final peer review and summary reports can be found at www.highcarbonstock.org.

Land cover change and HCS forest monitoring

A group of people, including a man in a striped shirt and a man in a patterned shirt, are sitting on a wooden bench outdoors, looking at a large map spread out on the bench. They are surrounded by lush greenery and a small wooden structure in the background.

In collaboration with the HCV Resource Network, the Quality Assurance Working Group is discussing how best to use the available information to monitor the protection of HCV areas and HCS forests. The key questions are:

- The Quality Assurance Working Group is also discussing how information from local stakeholders can be incorporated into the monitoring of ICLUP implementation, in particular the social considerations. Stakeholders could access and potentially upload information about possible problems with communities or land use change within conservation areas.

MODULE 7 ASSURING THE QUALITY OF HCS ASSESSMENTS

CONCLUSION

FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR HCS QUALITY ASSURANCE

The rapid development of the training programme and peer review process go some way towards securing the quality of HCS assessments. There are, however, several clear challenges ahead for the HCS Approach Steering Group, especially regarding the implementation of the conservation and land use plan. Fortunately, this work can be streamlined thanks to the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the HCV Resource Network, which makes provision for the integration of training programmes, reporting templates, and the quality assurance process. This will reduce costs for companies and confusion for stakeholders.

Future priorities for the Quality Assurance Working Group include governance-related issues, including the development of a grievance process. Operational activities are also in focus, such as the development of a checklist and further guidance on the precise activities companies need to undertake at each step of the HCS assessment. Through innovative approaches, and by benefitting from the experience of others, the Group will continue working to improve the quality of review processes while keeping costs down.





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