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1. **Document purpose and scope**

This document was developed by RTRS so that auditors and certification bodies may have and follow this guide when planning any consultation to stakeholders, and before/after the audit process.

It is important to point out that, at the moment of planning an audit and of allotting time, auditors must leave a written explanation of how time allotted to third-party consultation has been included in the calculation of days.

Scope of the Guide: audit processes related to the RTRS Responsible Soy Production Standard and Group and Multi-site Standard.

2. **Introduction**

Stakeholders: this word was first used in 1984 by R.F. Freeman, who defined the term as "A group or context, or parties involved that must be taken into account in the strategic planning of a business".

In a standard business, we may consider the following Stakeholders:

Stakeholders may also be all those persons or organizations that may be positively and negatively affected by an activity.

They may also be considered as: Individuals or organizations (governmental and non-governmental) on a local, regional or national level, who have a stake in the management of natural resources, in products or services, and who represent a wide variety of legal, social, environmental and economic perspectives.

There are many definitions of stakeholders, and there are different words that are used for identifying them; **what they all have in common is that they are individuals or groups that affect or that are affected by a specific activity, and this impact may be positive or negative**.

Consultation to stakeholders - Advantages

- Company:

    – Gets to know needs of neighbors and of other stakeholders.

- Strengthens decision-making mechanisms.

- Improves image & performance.

- Stakeholders:

  - Chance for participating in the business management.

  - Improvement of their conditions

  - They feel "leveraged".

Disadvantages

- They may generate expectations that are not too realistic.

- It is not easy to meet contradictory expectations.

- Demanding in terms of timing and may be costly.

- "Lots of conversation" without any problem-solving.

3. Scope of the document

i. Creating a guide that enables helping auditors throughout the process of Identification of Stakeholders of the organization that applies for certification of RTRS Production Standard.

ii. Suggesting methods for obtaining stakeholders input and good practices for information gathering in the audit process.

I. Guide for the Stakeholder indetification

A- Be aware beforehand of the organization that is applying for certification

1- Read management / operational plans.

2- Discuss organization stakeholders with managers

3- Be aware of potential conflict related to management of natural resources on a local or regional level (e.g. water, soil, native vegetation areas).

4- Sources of Information

There are many sources of information that allow us to identify and categorize the parties directly or indirectly affected by the business activity.

The following different sources may be consulted:

4.1. Internet: Internet may supply a lot of information about: geographic area where the business applying for certification is located. This supplies information about natural resources that may be a source of conflict with other parties or be shared with other parties. Internet is also a frequent source of information about the business, whether there have been issues in the area, issues with local communities, legal issues. Internet is one of the sources we should resort to for information collection about the business so as to be able to start identifying parties possibly affected by this activity, whether positively or negatively.

4.2 Mandatory RTS Public Consultation. RTRS requires that a public consultation is performed for the production standard certifications. This is done through a public announcement of the audit, at least in the RTRS webpage www.responsiblesoy.org as well as in the CB webpage. This public consultation is a communication channel that allows us to know beforehand the opinions, and possible complaints and grievances regarding the activities of a business in an area to be certified. It is important that the CB keep records of information received during this period and that it take it into account when planning the timing of the audit and in identifying those stakeholders who should be interviewed.

4.3 List of stakeholders identified by the business. The business applying for certification must have identified any stakeholders in its field of activity. It is important that, prior to planning the audit, the CB request that list so as to be aware of the parties identified, the relevant contacts from each group, so as to include all these in the audit planning.

4.4 Using local media, or asking local organizations for help by disseminating information on the audit process and the available resources for getting into contact with the CB, and be able to submit comments about the organization.

4.5 Likewise, public billboards can be used for informing on the process and mechanism available for communicating information about the business.

4.6 Other sources of information may be:

- Local Authorities

- Unions

- NGOs

- Local Inhabitants

- Other Organizations (education, research, religious)

- Neighbors

- Suppliers

- Partners

- Employees

- Employee families, when living on the farm or in the property

- Local Communities

- Peers

- Indigenous Groups

B- Identification of Stakeholders

The starting process for identifying stakeholders is asking the following questions:

1- What type of activity is being considered?

   If we consider a shareholder-based corporation, shareholders would be affected by the organization's performance, yet, in organizations that have no shareholders, these become irrelevant stakeholders.

2- Which are the groups that are affected by the organization's activities? Which ones are positively affected? Which ones may be negatively affected?

   Natural ecosystems, as well as agricultural areas, generate products and services that have an impact on the life of Groups with a legitimate interest inn the activities or resources of the region should be found.

3- Request the business a list of Stakeholders identified in an area or areas in which it is operating.

C- Classification of Stakeholders

1- Are they positively or negatively affected?

2- What group do stakeholders belong to? The internal group or the external group of an organization?

3- Do they work for the organization? With the organization? Share activities or resources with the organization? Are they suppliers? Etc.

4- Are these Stakeholders permanent or temporary?

It is important to identify if the impact of these stakeholders is temporary or permanent.

5 – It is important to determine if the impact is direct or indirect.

For example, as to the family of workers belonging to the organization's internal group, if they live on the farm, their situation may vary according to whether they live on a permanent or on a temporary basis, and to whether they are indirectly affected by the business activities. The use of shared natural resources is also a good example of indirect impact.

D- Set up Priorities for the Sampling

1- In any audit process, it is important that, once stakeholders are identified, priorities may be set, that is, that a sample of stakeholders to be interviewed is selected.

2- The organization's employees must always be included in the sampling for interviews, both those on the payroll and outsourced employees. Hence, they must not be considered in this additional sampling, as employees must always be interviewed by auditors.

3- This sampling may be done regarding the different variables. The best thing is to stratify the group according to risk and representation. Groups under highest risk are those related to compliance with RTRS Production Standard Requirements. Likewise, in this sampling complaints received during the consultation process, information on possible existing conflict with local communities in the area must be taken into account.

4- The ideal situation is obtaining a representative sampling of stakeholders who are affected by the organization and obtain a balance of the group.

5- Other factors may be considered during priority setting:

- ✓ Proximity
- ✓ Pre-existing Rights
- ✓ Dependence

✓ Poverty

✓ Local Awareness

✓ Culture/Relations

✓ Deficit of Power

E- Identifying relevant contact persons of each identified group

1- Once different stakeholders are identified and mapped, it is important to identify the legitimate representatives of each group.

2- A legitimate representative is the person who represents and is representative of the group that will be interviewed. It is the person the company has had contact with, for example, somebody with the role of a spokesperson. Let's suppose that the applicant company cooperates with a school, and that the contact person is the school headmaster. This should be considered the legitimate representative, but this does not imply that the auditor may not interview a larger group of people, but he/she should bear in mind that it is important to identify who the contact person is, if any. At times, in the case of indigenous communities, the spokesperson is the chief of the tribe or community, so, in such cases, he/she should be considered the legitimate representative.

II. Information Gathering and Management

A – Information Gathering Methods

There are many methods for gathering information. What is advisable, and ideal, is using a combination of methods that permit to obtain the highest possible amount of information, from the largest number of people, in the most efficient cost-timing relation. What should be considered is that the method or combination of methods to be used must really be effective to meet the information collection purposes. No single method should be used exclusively, and it is extremely important to understand if a method or combination of methods being used is effective or not. For instance, if there is no participation of the stakeholder you wish to contact, then, you should analyze why you are not getting a response and you will have to alternate methods so as to find a combination of methods that really work. Following, you will see some methods and alternatives for information gathering:

1- Requesting Information on the applicant business. Before the audit process, and once the relevant stakeholders are identified, the CB may contact stakeholders through phone calls, email surveys or letter, explaining the reasons for the consultation and requesting information on the business to be audited.

2- Public meetings: set date and time for an open and public meeting by sending invitations to stakeholders in the area. This is an option, but may not work well in practice. In general,

stakeholders do not participate in this type of meetings. Auditors must search for and implement channels of communication with stakeholders that are effective and work well. The CB should evaluate is Public Meetings are a really effective method, and, additionally, should always be used with other consultation methods.

3- Interviews: interviews of stakeholders is one of the most important and essential methods for proving compliance with the RTRS Standard requirements. These interviews may be individual or group interviews

4- Observation: during the audit process, auditors' observation play a crucial role during information gathering and when figuring out the functioning of the organization under assessment.

5- Surveys: The CB may draft surveys and send them to stakeholders considered as relevant and necessary as sources of information. At times, due to geographic distance or when specific answers are required, a structured survey may be one of the tools to be used.

6- E-mail: E-mails may also be considered as a consultation tool. This method is not frequently effective in terms of the input received in the case of generic email addresses such as info@...

B - Scope of the Information Gathering

It is very important that auditors and CBs only gather and consider information that is related to the requirements to be identified in the RTRS standard. The scope of information to be taken into account in an audit process is limited to the requirements of the standard, and to the organization's management plans and their appropriate implementation.

C – Good Practices for Information Gathering in an Audit Process

1- Confidentiality: Confidentiality between parties in an interview process of any kind is one of the key factors for an information gathering process to be successful. Interviews must be confidential. The representatives of the applicant organization must not be present in any process of interview or consultation, so that interviewed parties feel free enough to voice their feelings and rest assured that information is confidential. The names of the interviewed parties may form part of the auditor's annotations and as a memo, but names of any interviewed party in the process may not be included in the audit report or public reports.

2- Interviews: Interviews are an essential part in any auditor's work. The way in which they are prepared and conducted is key to be able to get relevant information in an audit process. The following are some important considerations:

2.1. Get prepared: Once you have identified the stakeholders and that you have sampled future interviewed parties in the audit process or before the audit process, prepare some questions; Think what would be important to determine in the process, what information

you wish to obtain from these persons. For group interviews, consider power relations, for example, do not include a manager and his/her reports in the same interview.

2.2. Introduction: in any interview, it is important that you introduce yourself and explain the reasons for the interview. Be clear.

2.3. Ask one question at a time

2.4. Take your time to listen to the person being interviewed. Don't interrupt.

2.5. Ask if your question is clear

2.6. At the end of each answer, all the answers that are not too clear or long, briefly repeat what your interlocutor has said so as that it remains clear that you have understood his/her answer or to give him/her the chance to correct what you have understood.

2.7. Adapt yourself to your interlocutor: imagine that, in an audit process, you may come across people from different walks of life, different education, different culture, background, etc. It is important that auditors always adapt themselves and their questions to their different interlocutors.

2.8. Always start with open questions, and with questions whose answers may be familiar to your interlocutor, for example, by asking about their chores, about their work hours, by asking if they live there with their family, etc. Always make interlocutors feel at ease. Encourage conversation: "what do you think…?, "what if…?, "what do you do when…?

2.9. Try not to make questions that are too lengthy. Do not try to guide answers; always try to make objective and easy to understand questions.

2.10.　　　Always start with open questions.

2.11.　　　If you take notes, do not hide them Be transparent in your notes so that your interlocutor is not afraid of what you are writing down.

2.12.　　　Always be respectful towards your interlocutor.

2.13.　　　Always thank him/her: always remember to thank interlocutors for their time, at the end of the interview.

D. Information Management and Decision-Making

1. Audit Objective

   1.1. General: Search for **objective evidence** of compliance of standard under evaluation.

   1.2. Specific

1.2.1. Compliance with specific indicators.

1.2.2. Compliance with standard as a whole

1.2.3. Practicality of organization management plans

1.2.4. Implementation of Organization Management Plan

1.3. Objective Evidence: Information supplied by stakeholders cannot be considered as objective evidence until its accuracy is proved (crossed-checked). Auditors must confront and compare sources of information and information before making a decision.

2. Decision-making

2.1. At the end of the consultation, accurately check the information you have noted down during the consultation; report on the terms of confidentiality of information, next steps, and explain to your interlocutor if the audit process can approach the concerns that have been presented. Always remember the audit scope.

2.2. Verify if you have enough information: Is the sampling enough? Is it necessary to interview more people? Other groups?

2.3. Balance your sources of information; always try to achieve a balance.

2.4. Decide on the importance you give to the different sources of information. Not all sources of information have the same importance, nor are they that objective. It is important to bear this in mind during the decision-making process.

2.5. Reporting
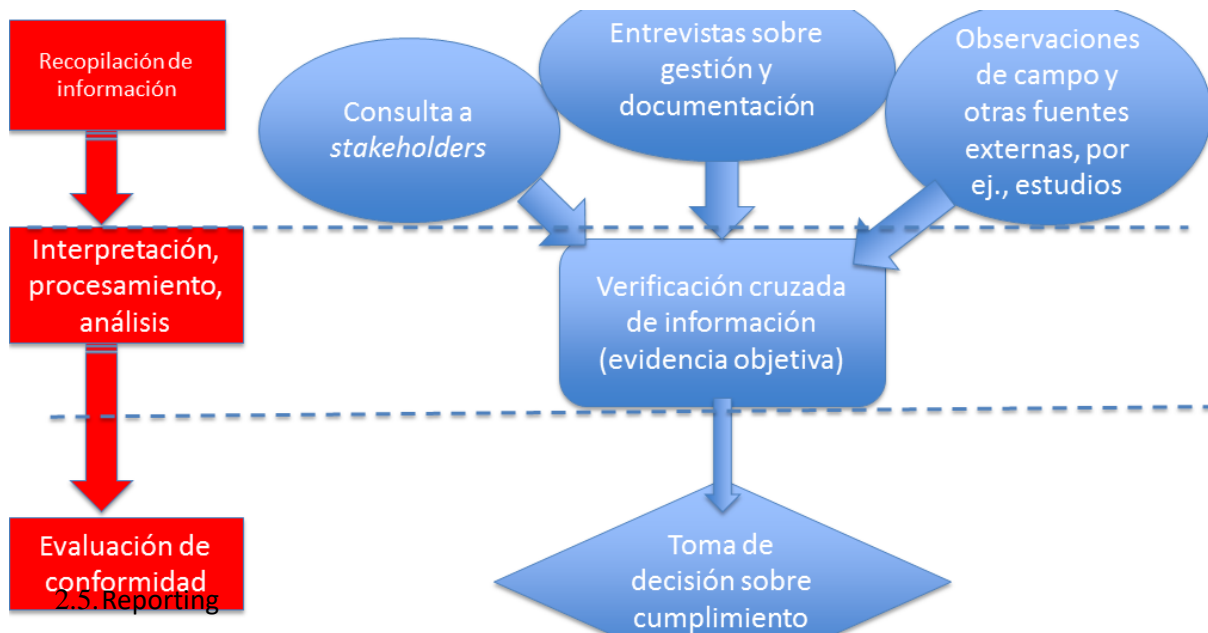
2.5.1. Information obtained in the audit process must be mirrored in the reports, bearing in mind the Terms of Confidentiality.

2.5.2. Reports must supply a description of how the consultation process was performed. Ideally, information gathering methods and consulted methods should be mentioned here, as well as a description on a criteria level of how the business meets the RTRS requirements.

2.5.3. Reports are also used for:

2.5.3.1.   Communicating assessment results to stakeholders

2.5.3.2.   Decisions regarding compliance

2.5.3.3.   How concerns have been approached

III. Remember that:

1- All the stakeholders have the chance to participate; the process should be open and transparent.

2- The scope must be clear from the very first day of the audit.

3- All the problems and findings must be documented and recorded.

4- Be assured that stakeholders accept your interpretations and comments.

5- Avoid generating unrealistic expectations. You have the role of an auditor, you are the auditor, and your work is to collect information for verifying compliance. You may not solve, mediate or be accountable for conflict settlement.

6- Work with facilitators or translator, whenever necessary.

7- Inform your interlocutor about the next steps.

IV. Summary: Steps for a Consultation Process

Stakeholder Identification and Public Consultation Process	
1- Awareness of Organization	Management plans, geographic location, potential conflicts in the region. Use different sources of information: List of stakeholders identified by the organization: Internet, local media, RTRS Public Consultation.
2- Identify Stakeholders	Who are those affected by the organization? Both positively and negatively? Who are natural resources shared with? Etc..
3- Classify Stakeholders	Stratifying, according to organization's activities (temporary, permanent, other)
4- Set up Priorities	Parties affected or with greater impact on and with the activities, greater risk, greater potential of conflict according to RTRS Standard Requirements
5- Identify legitimate representatives of each Group	Who is the contact person with the organization? In the case of indigenous groups, the person usually authorized to be the spokesperson is the chief.
Good Practices for Information Gathering in the process and during interviews	
1- Information Gathering Methods	Information request sent to the organization, Public Meetings, interviews and observation
2- Scope of Information Gathering	RTRS Production Standard Requirements, organization management plans
3- Good Practices for Information Gathering	Confidentiality. Ask one thing at a time. Give enough time for answers; adapt to interlocutors, open questions, etc.
Information Management and Decision-Making	
1- Audit Objectives	General, specific objectives and always bearing in mind that objective evidence of compliance is what we are looking for
2- Decision-making	Balance sources of information; verify if there is enough information for decision making, decide level of importance of different sources of information
3- Reports	They must mirror the results of the info obtained during audit; confidentiality, and helps in communicating results to stakeholders.