Report

on

Launch of the

INDIA NATIONAL PLATFORM ON

PRIVATE SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS (PSS)

March 18, 2016

Viceroy Hall, The Claridges,

New Delhi

Supported by

Organised by
INTRODUCTION:

Private Sustainability Standards (PSS) on non-product-related processes and production methods related to certain safety, health, social, environmental and animal welfare requirements are increasingly being used in global supply chains. Compliance to PSS is becoming increasingly important for access to lucrative and dynamic international markets. It can also be used as an effective tool for achieving certain national sustainable development objectives. Meeting the requirements of the PSS often requires substantial effort, capital and managerial, human, infrastructural and institutional capacity. This is a challenge, particularly for developing countries, due to lack of infrastructure and public finance to help domestic producers implement these standards.

Without a clear strategy and a pro-active supportive and flanking policy of governments, VSS run the risk of reinforcing already existing marginalization of small-scale producers and less developed countries with capacity weaknesses. Enabling conditions for an effective implementation of PSS in developing countries include the establishment of a stimulating policy environment and of relevant capacities. In this regard, government’s commitment within the country is indispensable and cannot be compensated for by external actors such as NGOs, development agencies or international organizations.

From a trade strategy point of view, it is also worth noting that PSS are likely to play a key role in the emerging mega regional trade liberalization agreements like ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)’, including those among developing countries, be it the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) or enhanced trade relations with the ASEAN common market. Furthermore, PSS are one of the last (behind the borders) tools within the context of international trade disciplines that will allow effective protection of consumers and other public interests, including economic development ones.

For India, the Standards Conclaves organized by the Ministry of Commerce in 2014 and 2015, reviewed the importance of technical regulations and private standards and underlined the urgent need for developing and implementing a pro-active national strategy. As regards private standards, it was emphasized that there was a need to explore options and arrive at optimal solutions for overcoming challenges posed by market-driven private standards for boosting exports. The increasing participation of Indian producers and exporters in international supply chains makes a private standard culture and seizing the various opportunities of VSS an indispensable condition for successful business.

The Standards Conclaves 2014 and 2015 emphasized that there was insufficient awareness and understanding of the role of VSS, and even less experience with their implementation. As Indian policymakers and businesses start to use VSS as an instrument to address various
sustainability challenges and increase the participation of Indian companies in international supply chains, it is important that all concerned stakeholders have a sound understanding of how VSS can be integrated into India’s policy frameworks.

The objective of the National Platform is to conduct a dialogue on a regular basis within a core group of public and private stakeholders and build a more institutionalized structure to facilitate and strengthen an informed policy dialogue on how to pro-actively use and maximize the sustainable development benefits and market access opportunities offered by PSS, while dealing with potential challenges and cost of PSS implementation, in particular for small-scale producers.

In this light, the launch of the National Platform was jointly organized by the Quality Council of India, and the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) - an initiative of 5 UN agencies: FAO, ITC, UNCTAD, UNEP and UNIDO - with the understanding that the National Platform is a demand-driven, national public-private partnership initiative.

**OBJECTIVE OF THE LAUNCH**

The objective of the launching event of the National Platform is to bring together all the key public and private Indian stakeholders and some international experts to:

(i) discuss the key opportunities and challenges related to VSS for export and national use;
(ii) identify the key sectors and commodity groups, in which the effective use of VSS is most urgent, commercially promising and developmentally beneficial and that may be at the centre of the preliminary dialogue and work of the National Platform;
(iii) inform on national business initiatives, with which the National Platform could constructively link;
(iv) exchange proposals on the roadmap of and the initial activities to be undertaken by the National Platform.

**INAUGURAL SESSION**

Dr. R.P Singh, Secretary General, QCI in his welcome address expressed his thanks to Ms. Rita Teaotia, Commerce Secretary, for launching the national platform. He greeted Dr. Harsha V Singh and acknowledged his continued guidance during the preparation for this event. He welcomed UNFSS colleagues and all distinguished guests present for the launch.

Speaking about the global scenario, Dr Singh said that it is necessary that India follows the worldwide trend and various Private Sustainability Standards (PSS) may be seen as tools for the industry to demonstrate to the regulators its adherence to international Standards amongst
other things. However, often adhering to PSS requires substantial effort, capital, managerial, human, infrastructural and institutional capacity.

He stated realising that PSS are here to stay and influence the global trade there a need was felt to create a mechanism to tackle the challenges and harness the potential of PSS. In view of the above, QCI approached the UNFSS for creating the National Platform. Global markets are changing both because of evolution of supply chains and the lead firms, which control those chains, as well as an increasing emphasis on sustainable and social standards in the major markets of developed nations.

This combination of lead firms and emphasis on environmental and social standards has led to an increased significance of private standards to get access to these markets. In fact, we can also see a growing incorporation of certain private standards into the existing set of public standards emphasized by major economies.

According to Dr Singh, this National Platform would contribute by supporting, strengthening and helping to create a standards-driven culture in those sectors and product groups, especially Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) that have already or will become part of international supply chains. This is his view that would also give the required thrust to the ‘Make in India’ initiative of the Indian Government.

The demand-driven approach of the platform will also help in maintaining dialogue on a regular basis within a core group of public/private stakeholders to maximize the sustainable development benefits and market access opportunities offered by VSS.

He also hoped that the platform will help the Indian industry in understanding the intricacies of the national platform and would go a long way in contributing to the success of the Make in India initiative.

Ms. Lorena Fernanda Jaramillo Castro, UNCTAD, provided specials words of congratulations on behalf of the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi, for launching the National Platform on Private Sustainability Standards. She assured full support of UNFSS to the Indian national platform.

She thanked the governments of Germany, Sweden and Switzerland for their support. In particular, she thanked the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO for financial support of UNFSS activities linked to the Indian national platform.

UNFSS is the prime intergovernmental forum for the discussion of private sustainability standards. This discussion has become particularly strong after the WTO was unable to reach a consensus on a regular review of private standards. While de jure such standards are private, many of these are commercially mandatory or even constitute a license to operate in a
particular market. They are sometimes even mentioned in specific legislation in some countries. This underlines that private standards might in reality not be purely private.

The UN Forum on Sustainability Standards aims at dialogue, exchanging national experience and analyzing meta-governance issues related to using and complying with private standards. The UNFSS is a springboard for the development of a coherent program of public policy and private initiative on making private sustainability standards work for the benefit of all.

Ms. Lorena stated that the main objective of the UNFSS-supported national platforms is to provide a neutral forum for exchange and learning on private sustainability standards in the concerned countries, to link the demand of national stakeholders for information and exchange of experience on private standards with international expertise and to build a more institutionalized structure to strengthen communication.

On behalf of the Steering Committee of the UNFSS, and therefore of all five UN partner organizations of UNFSS, she wished for a fruitful dialogue. She stated that together we can usher into tangible progress, better access to export markets, improved competitiveness and product quality as well as harness the developmental co-benefits of private sustainability standards.

In addition, our work suggests that the challenges created by private sustainability standards cannot be solved through trade policy alone. We believe complementary sectoral policy, the building of technical and institutional capacity -- including standards, metrology, testing and quality assessment infrastructure -- as well as supportive/flanking measures, policy coherence, policy measures that lead to greater internalization of the true social and environmental costs, and the promotion of multi-stakeholder dialogue are also of fundamental importance.

To conclude, the platforms aim to gather and exchange information on key issues and concerns related to private standards from a national perspective and assessing the information needs of decision-makers and other stakeholders. The platforms will identify key areas of research interest and will collaborate with selected national, regional and international organizations to conduct such research.

Dr. Harsha V. Singh, Former DDG, WTO, opened his address by congratulating the Government of India, the Quality Council of India and the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) on the launch of India National platform. His address was on Background to Private Sustainability Standards: The New Power Tools. Dr. Harsha V Singh recognized the launch as an important step towards modernisation of India’s trade policy in the key area of standards and in particular the private standard. He congratulated QCI for organising this important event and declared that this initiative is particularly substantive with the guidance and attention of Commerce Secretary.
He stated that these Voluntary sustainability standards are new power tools of trade and they are being validated in several initiatives like transpacific partnership and G7 declaration. **The evolution of the global markets since the 1990s with certain developing countries, including India, becoming global economic entities and growth of regional and global value chains, rise in FDI combined with a growing influence of environmental and social concerns within the value system of citizens, particularly in developed economies. Paradoxically, this resulted in both an increase in competition in global markets and need for greater co-ordination and collaboration amongst firms within any value chain. Private sustainable standards have emerged as an important mechanism from different perspective to address the situation of collaborative competitive global relationship.**

Therefore, for multiple reasons, it is essential to know more about these standards, understand their evolution, and establish systems to equip policy makers as well as business to develop strategies for improving commercial opportunities and meeting social objectives. He gave the example of ITC standards map and said that it can help exporters achieve market access. Dr. Singh categorically stated that these standards are becoming the new power tools of international trade and one cannot expect to meet the challenges of today with yesterday’s tools and expect to be in business tomorrow.

He also suggested that these standards are also helpful in achieving public policy objectives such as those mentioned in “zero defect zero effect” program of the government in line with environmental objectives, product differentiation, product quality and market access.

He also said that the cost of compliance of these standards is substantial and there is a need for additional capacities for which joint roles for the private sector, government and international organisation need to be ascertained. He also emphasised on the need for capacity building through new training institutions with special focus on private sustainability standards, such as the one recently established by QCI and CII.

He stated that these issues could be managed only through a wide-ranging platform to facilitate interactions with firms, including lead firms, to manage private sustainable standards in different market segments, and even climb up the value chain. Such efforts could form the basis for developing international partnerships with like-minded stakeholders across different nations and to begin initiatives to simplify and enhance the possibility of greater conformance amongst private sustainable standards. In this context, it may be fortuitous that this initiative is taking place at the time when the US and EU are struggling to devise methods for determining greater basis for conformance amongst their diverse standards. The methods they evolve may be useful in other contexts also, and the international expertise linked to UNFSS would be a useful contributor in this regard. The UNFSS and QCI already have examples from agriculture that could help with such efforts.
Dr. Harsha V. Singh concluded by saying that UNFSS national platform in India is an appropriate forum for empowering firms and policy makers in harnessing the opportunities and tackling the opportunities of these standards. The platform will thus enable the country in multiple ways to empower and manage these power tools with inclusiveness and confidence.

Finally, he congratulated QCI, UNFSS, the government and CII who have all worked to bring this to reality with special reference to the leadership of Dr. R.P. Singh and team work of Mr. Arpit Bhutani and Dr. Manish Pande.

Ms. Rita Teaotia, Secretary, Department of Commerce, Government of India, inaugurated the UNFSS supported national platform in India. She stated that India must aspire to build its own private standards capacity and quality to ensure and safeguard market access. Secretary Commerce said that private standards are at times influenced by importing country government and are a reality of trade and India has no option but to address them. Over the last 10 to 20 years, private standards have emerged as an important mode of market governance in many developed countries.

She informed that private standards raise a number of issues due to the nature of their ownership and their development process, which is seldom sufficiently participatory, transparent and based on scientific evidence. As a result, some standard requirements and indicators may not be suitable to all producers, especially for those who are outside the area where the standard was originally developed. Complying with some private standards and demonstrating compliance requires substantial capital, time and skills. This problem is particularly acute for developing countries due to the lack of infrastructure and public finance to help domestic producers implement these standards. Private standards can also be considered as disguised trade barriers.

She stated that there has been some discussions at the WTO level but no significant progress has been achieved as the issue of definition of private standard itself has not been settled. Since private standards have labour and environment standards, we have to guard against such issues being mainstreamed outside private standards. However, since the private standards are here to stay, there is a need to create a hub to deal with them.

She gave useful insight about the governance of private standards stating that governments do not usually get involved with private standards having its hands full dealing with regulations of importing countries besides domestic regulation. She stated that it is ideal that an autonomous organization like QCI takes the lead to create such a platform, explore options and arrive at optimal solutions for overcoming challenges posed by market-driven private standards for boosting exports. More so important because India aims to be the manufacturing hub under its
‘Make in India’ initiative. It is important that Indian industry meets global standards acceptable in the world market for this initiative to succeed.

Indian policy makers and businesses need to look at this platform as an instrument to address various challenges and increase the participation of Indian companies in international supply chains. QCI has expertise in providing internationally acceptable ways to demonstrate compliance to International Standards development of regulatory and voluntary frameworks relying on its accreditation services for third party certification / inspection bodies and laboratories which, I am happy to note, have earned international equivalences at par with European or American accreditation bodies.

She informed that at the Standards Conclave in 2014, organized by the Department of Commerce, it was recommended that QCI should therefore act as hub of dealing with private standards in India and guide various stakeholders on how to meet the challenges posed by them.

Ms. Teaotia recorded her happiness to note that the QCI and United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) have agreed to collaborate on setting up a National Platform on Private Sustainability Standards (PSS). She hoped that PSS platform would also promote the interest of the Indian industry in terms of information and capacity building needs to make a contribution to the success of Government’s ‘Make in India’ initiative.

She also emphasised on the fact that this platform should not only enable Indian industry to cater to the requirements of the world but also address the need for the world to meet the requirements of India.

She applauded the effort of QCI in developing capacity on Private Sustainability Standards in India and stated that this platform is the right forum to address issues relating to these standards.

She wished the platform all the success.

Dr. Manish Pande delivered the vote of thanks to the dignitaries on the dais and participants.
TECHNICAL SESSION

5. Opening remarks by Chairman of the Session – Dr. Harsha V. Singh

Dr. Harsha V Singh introduced all the panellists of the session and gave them stipulated time limit to conclude their addresses.

6. Key Challenges and Opportunities Related to Harnessing PSS – Mr. Anil Jauhri, CEO, NABCB

Mr. Jauhri explained about the international trade scenario of standards on how many products are under regulation on grounds of health, safety, environment etc under WTO TBT/SPS agreements. He stated that technical regulations based on international standards – or stricter – challenge for a developing economy like India. He said that new entrant to these barriers is private standards which have no government oversight. However, still WTO has not been able to agree on a definition of private sustainability standards.

He said that private standards are standards designed and owned by non-governmental entities, which could be either for profit or not for profit. Private standards developed by coalitions of private sector actors are frequently referred to as private voluntary standards. He very effectively mentioned that it is uncertain whether WTO is the right forum to discuss this issue, as SPS Committee of WTO has not been able to give definition of private standards up until now.

He emphasised that private standards are here to stay and there are variety of factors contributing to their growth – retailers covering risk, consumer preference, and absence of regulations. However, these standards should not just be seen as a challenge but also as an opportunity since it often leads to consumer welfare, compliance assured business and market access and as they are stringent than domestic regulation so effective compliance of laws.

Mr. Jauhri said there needs to be a platform to address issues relating to private sustainability’s standards and currently government institutions are not very well equipped to deal with these standards. He explained how QCI is very strategically placed between the government and industry to house this platform and also because Standards Conclave 2014 has nominated QCI as the focal point on private standards – to engage with private standards bodies and provide a voice for Indian stakeholders.

He emphasized that QCI has been involved in some of the best practice cases relating to private sustainability standards. For instance, Global GAP has signed an MoU with QCI to set up a National Technical Working Group wherein national interpretation for Fruits and
Vegetables was prepared and was accepted by Global GAP. Similarly, QCI has launched IndGAP, which provides options to address both domestic and export market. Finally, in case of Forest certification, Ministry of Forest, Government of India, wanted to create a national system – matter dragging on for over 8 years – QCI offered to set up system – QCI MoU with FSC for capacity building.

He said the way forward should be on information dissemination, participation on behalf of Indian stakeholders, creating national interpretations or local frameworks if benchmarking possible and building capacity of the industry to meet private standards.

7. Objectives and Institutionalisation of the National PSS platform in India -- joint presentation by Dr. Manish Pande, Joint Director, QCI and Arpit Bhutani, UNFSS India Focal Point

Mr. Bhutani started the joint presentation by emphasising that PSS are de-facto mandatory and compliance to them is often an uphill task for the industry because of several factors like being alien concept, complex interpretation, costly and no interoperability. He also showed a graph based on a study on standards from 1970 to 2012, where it was shown that Private Sustainability Standards have the highest proliferation amongst all standards.

Mr. Bhutani presented a graph on the basis of study conducted by OECD on Private Sustainability standards for past 30 years and showed that even though third party audits have increased, many of these standards are still not transparent. He also spoke about how Transpacific partnership, G7 declaration of responsible supply chains, UN Sustainable Development Goals and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership would lead to further proliferation of these standards and would inhibit market access. He stated that Gold and Platinum standards in Mega Regionals would set in motions higher standards that would keep moving upwards and standards by reference in TPP and TTIP will validate a dynamic increase in sustainability standards. This would have significant impact on countries outside this sphere especially for developing countries like India, China and Brazil. The impact of these standards would not just be on north-south trade but also south-south trade.

Mr. Bhutani also gave a brief background on UNFSS, on how it was launched in 2013 with over 200 delegates who attended the meeting from 50 UN member countries, representing governments, the private sector, academe and civil society.

He informed the audience that UNFSS promotes unbiased and credible policy dialogue that guides and benefits from analytical, empirical and capacity-building activities on private sustainability standards. UNFSS is structured to promote “ownership” by developing countries.
and assure the “demand-driven nature” of UNFSS activities. It is the only inter-governmental (and multi-stakeholder) forum that deals with generic and strategic issues of PSS in a consistent and pro-active way. UNFSS capitalizes on the strengths and specialization of each of the five UN organizations that partner on UNFSS and is one of the few examples of UN acting as ONE.

Mr. Bhutani explained that creation of UNFSS-supported national platforms was due to consultative process of providing for the following and the aim is to provide for a neutral forum for exchange and learning on private sustainability standards, link the demand of national stakeholders for information and exchange of experience on private standards with international expertise and build a more institutionalized structure to strengthen communication. As part of UNFSS’s mandate national platforms are designed to be demand-driven and similar ones are being planned in Brazil, Mexico and China.

Thereafter, Dr. Manish Pande spoke about best practice cases of Quality Council of India (QCI) and objectives and deliverables of the national platform.

Dr. Pande explained about the QCI. He informed that the QCI was established as the National Accreditation Body on recommendations of expert missions of the European Union after consultations among the Inter-Ministerial Task Force, the Committee of Secretaries and the Group of Ministers in 1996. It is an autonomous body jointly set up by the Ministry of Commerce, FICCI, CII & ASSOCHAM. It was set up in 1997. He outlined the organisational structure of the QCI and explained the major Schemes that have been designed and run by the QCI.

QCI has designed a number of Schemes for various stakeholders that include the Intergovernmental agencies such as FAO, international donor agencies such as Solidaridad, IPEN, various departments of Government of India and also the Indian industry. Some of the important Schemes and activities achieved by QCI include designing voluntary product certification scheme for AYUSH products as early as Oct, 2009, and Yoga Professional Certification launched on 21 June 2015 for the Ministry of AYUSH. Designing schemes such as India HACCP, INDGAP, BasicGAP for the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), third party conformity assessment system for Oil and Gas for Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board, voluntary certification Scheme for medicinal plants which has been launched in Apr, 2011 for the National Medicinal Plants Board, Quality Mark Scheme for the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MFPI), Ready Mix Concrete Plant Certification Scheme (RMCPCS) on the behest of the RMC Manufacturer’s Association. Lead Safe Paints for EU funded project for the IPEN and the TRUSTEA for the Tea Board of India and Solidaridad. The range of Scheme that are designed and operationalised by QCI establishes strongly its credential to host the national platform.
He then elaborated in detail the process of formulation of voluntary Scheme by the process of Multistakeholder Committees which are at times named as Steering Committee that steers the Scheme in terms of formulation, which is supported by two committees namely the technical committee that helps in putting together a technical standard and a certification committee that defines the certification process and certification bodies’ requirements with respect to the Scheme. The same was illustrated with the help of the below slide:

He further outlined the tasks that this platform will handle including national interpretation of Private Standards, Product Category prioritisation, key developments in Private Standards, market research, best practices in relevant sectors. These were appropriately illustrated in the below slide:
The presenters thanked Dr. Harsha V Singh, Dr. Ulrich Hoffmann, UNFSS colleagues, Dr. R.P. Singh, Secretary General and Mr. Anil Jauhri, QCI for their guidance and support on the run up to the launch. They thanked DIPP and SECO for their contribution and support to the platform.

8. Industry Perspective: Challenges and Value of Private Standards

(i) Agri-food - Mr. P.C Anil

Mr. P.C. Anil spoke about how private sustainability standards can create trade opportunities as well as act as a trade barrier. He said that private standards are voluntary by definition but not always in reality. He explained about the whole chain assurance system, and there are approximately 400 private food schemes and key components are pre-farm and post farm, traceability, documentation, residue monitoring. He gave examples of standards existing at firm level, national level and international level. At the firm level private firms set their own standards for products they sell and can be based on national/ regional/international standards or exceed
those. These standards include administration schemes, specific certifications and other requirements.

At the national level, national retailers associations and/or producers set these standards. They establish specific standards for products they produce or sell and can be based on national/ regional/ international standards or exceed those.

At the international level, standards are based on food safety, social responsibilities, environmental demands, labour requirements, etc. These standards can be pre-farm gate (growers and farmers), post-farm gate (food packing and processing) and for retailers.

He said that reasons for the rise of these standards are food safety concerns, corporate social responsibility, reputation risks, vertical integration between supplies and retailers. They also help in achieving market access, increasing efficiency, consumer welfare, supply chain modernization, improving hygienic etc. On the other hand, he also pointed out that at times these standards are a big challenge because of proliferation of different schemes, lack of harmonization, no equivalence, expensive to adopt and low price premiums.

Finally, he concluded by saying that market for products certified to private standards has expanded rapidly, these standards have their own advantages and disadvantages; harmonization and equivalence is the need of the hour and national platform on PSS will provide an opportunity to create clearer paths.

(ii) Forestry – Dr. T.R Manoharan, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), National Representative India

Dr. Manoharan explained about the principles of FSC and those 188 million hectares of forestland that is FSC certified. He stated that FSC has 10 principles to protect forests -- compliance with laws, workers’ rights and employment conditions, indigenous people’s rights, community relations, benefits from forest, environmental values and impacts, management planning, monitoring and assessment, high conservation values and implementation of management activities.

He also explained that FSC provides for setting standards for responsible forest management and valuing ecosystem services, an accreditation system to monitor adherence to FSC standards and a product labelling system that rewards responsible forest managers. He also briefed about FSC Global Strategy 2015-2020 which wants FSC share of global forest-based trade to reach 20%. Dr. Manoharan emphasised that UNFSS should focus on forestry as one of its priority areas considering the effect on climate change, socio-economic factors and environment.
He enumerated that challenges of FSC in the Indian context is the lack of adequate financial incentives, especially so for small holders and SMEs. He highlighted procedural delays and difficulties in coordinating with different Ministries/Government institutions on engagement and utilisation of voluntary forest certification to promote responsible trade and investment. **The lack of awareness on the benefits of voluntary certification.** He highlighted the risk associated with sourcing forest products in some categories/areas.

He also mentioned the opportunities that can be associated with FSC in terms of creating new markets in India through effective public-private partnerships in forestry, including agro forestry and farm forestry. **Assisting in capacity building to increase the availability of local auditors. To provide linkages with Climate Change Programmes (including potential funding opportunity to developing countries).** **Assisting in market access and benefits to small holders and SMEs.**

In the end he emphasised that UNFSS national platform in India is uniquely placed to engage these issues and would give fair opportunity to all stakeholders to give their views.

(iii) Textile – Ms. Jyotsana Belliappa

According to Ms. Jyotsana, Private Sustainable Standards (PSS) are urgently needed in a developing country like India. Social responsibility of a business is the impacts of its decisions and activities on social, **economic and environment in which** it operates. PSS lays down the expectation of the various stakeholders on safety, health, social and environmental welfare.

PSS becomes hugely significant in the Indian textiles and clothing (T&C) industry that contributes to 17% of country’s export earnings. Readymade garment business (Domestic and Export) generated approx. INR 294 crores in 2016. Having robust and functional PSS becomes critical to an equitable growth in an industry, which provides direct employment to over 35 million people, and 50 million in allied services.

A robust platform will provide guidance to manage a diverse supply chain, especially in a global environment, which is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA). It will help Business houses operating in India to identify potential Brand risks and manage them. This will require collaboration of different stakeholders in the industry thus increasing transparency and reducing duplication of efforts of different departments, laws etc.

She said that there is a need for collaboration of different stakeholders in the industry thus increasing transparency and reducing duplication of efforts of different departments and UNFSS national platform is the appropriate national platform to do that.
9. Open house session – Panel of experts including Mr. Anil Jauhri, Dr. Harsha V. Singh and Ms. Lorena Fernanda Jaramillo Castro

In the last round, representatives from Global Organic Textile Standards and Better Cotton Initiative questioned on how to get more involved in the platform. Dr. Harsha V Singh replied by stating that it is a demand-driven platform and all stakeholders are welcome.

Meanwhile, SECO representative to India Mr. Suresh Kennitt asked Ms. Lorena how UNFSS would ensure equal participation of all five agencies in the UNFSS. Ms. Lorena replied to that by stating that UNFSS’ focal point along with QCI will ensure that all partner agencies’ inputs are sought to strengthen the initiative.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. QCI to strengthen the platform by having regular interaction between various standard bodies (SSBs) in India and the key proponents of Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS)/Private Sustainability Standards (PSS)

2. To generate information to tackle the lack of awareness about the contribution of VSS/PSS to both domestic and international trade.

3. There is a need to engage PSS on regular basis in stakeholder consultations/review on preparations of various bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements.

4. PSS make use of the incentives provided by the government (including financial incentives) to achieve technical/quality objectives associated with domestic/international trade.

5. It is important to have an assessment of such incentives and explore the ways to efficiently make use of those incentives to achieve India's trade policy objectives.
About Quality Council of India

QCI was set up jointly by the Government of India and the Indian Industry represented by the three premier industry associations i.e. Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), to establish and operate national accreditation structure and promote quality through National Quality Campaign.

Quality Council of India (QCI) is registered as a non-profit society with its own Memorandum of Association and is governed by a Council of 38 members with equal representations of government, industry and consumers. The Council is playing a pivotal role at the national level in propagating, adoption and adherence to quality standards in all important spheres of activities including education, healthcare, environment protection, governance, social sectors, infrastructure sector and such other areas of organized activities that have significant bearing in improving the quality of life and well-being of the citizens of India.

For more information about this initiative please contact manish.pande@qcin.org