



Qualifications and experience for HCV assessors:

Draft Guidance for RSPO

Version 1.3.1

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1. Introduction

RSPO has requested guidance from the HCV Resource Network on suitable criteria for recognising environmental and social experts involved in HCV assessments for RSPO certification, including assessment of New Plantings. The present guidance draws on the 'Good Practice Guidance for HCV Assessments'¹, and was developed in consultation with the HCV Resource Network's Technical Panel, and a team of expert independent reviewers selected by RSPO, to address specific issues concerning RSPO palm oil production.

It is hoped that this guidance will in the first instance assist RSPO to identify a reliable pool of HCV assessors with suitable credentials. In the longer term it is suggested that RSPO use this guidance to recognise qualified HCV assessors through a formal procedure, and that a list of RSPO-recognised HCV assessors is made publicly available.

For assessor recognition by RSPO, it is strongly recommended that the verification of assessor experience and qualifications (see Section 4) is carried out by a credible third party (e.g. using a panel of independent reviewers). Evidence of competence submitted to RSPO (including documentary evidence or summaries of qualifying expertise) should be publicly available (web-based), and the process for recognition by RSPO should include an opportunity for public comment (e.g. 30 days) on HCV practitioners' submissions, so that stakeholders can comment on the accuracy of claims of competence or experience.

It is assumed that HCV assessments are conducted by an inter-disciplinary team comprising:

- **Discipline Specialists** (with expertise in a specific relevant field) *and*
- **Team Leader** (normally a Discipline Specialist in his/her own right).

Requirements for Team Leaders are more demanding than for Discipline Specialists. It is recommended that the RSPO process for recognizing any HCV assessor identifies whether they are qualified to be Team Leaders and/or Discipline Specialists, and also recognises that Discipline Specialists may in time acquire the experience required to become Team Leaders.

Team Leaders and Discipline Specialists involved in HCV assessments for RSPO certification should meet both the General Requirements set out below, and the Additional Requirements specific to their role within the team. There may also be various assistants to one or more discipline specialists in the HCV assessment team, but there are no specific requirements for team assistants.

¹ Good Practice Guidance for HCV Assessments: A practical guide for Practitioners and Auditors' (ProForest 2008)

2. General requirements

2.1. *Personal attributes:*

Most HCV assessors will as a consequence of their work come into contact with variety of stakeholders, including e.g. representatives of industry, local communities, indigenous peoples, government, and other experts. Their ability to demonstrate sound behavioural practices will be paramount to the success of the assessment process. These practices include behaving ethically, working with professional care and diligence, being diplomatic and sensitive to social and cultural issues, and open to improving their interpersonal skills.

2.2. *Competence requirements*

Both Team Leaders and Discipline Specialists are required to demonstrate the following qualifications and abilities:

- Applied conservation/social experience, as demonstrated by:
 - Degree level and/or documented professional background in one of the fields required for HCV identification: biodiversity (e.g. zoology, botany, ecology); ecosystem services (e.g. hydrology, soil science), or social sciences (e.g. rural sociology, social anthropology).
 - Evidence of practical experience and fieldwork relevant to the assessors' role in HCV assessment. Examples may include participation in (and preferably write-up of):
 - Field inventories and surveys of mammals, birds, herpetofauna, plants or other taxa deemed relevant to HCV;
 - Watershed management, hydrology or soil conservation projects;
 - Social assessment (e.g. participatory rural assessment, socio-economic or cultural studies, participatory mapping, conflict resolution).
 - Demonstrated understanding of the 6 categories of HCVs, how they relate to each other, and how they relate to other principles in the RSPO standard, as shown by:
 - Being listed as Participants in the HCV Resource Network, **preferably** registered as Practitioners².
 - Additionally **preferably** demonstrating:
 - Attendance, and subsequent documented understanding, of a RSPO recognised / endorsed training course on HCV and / or biodiversity / social assessment methodology
- OR
- Playing a role in the development of a National Interpretation of HCVs;
- OR

² Anyone may become a Participant in the HCV Resource Network, www.hcvnetwork.org (either online or through the HCV Network Secretariat). Registration is conditional on agreeing with the HCV Resource Network Charter, including its Guiding Principles. N.B. The HCV Resource Network's Practitioners database is an open-access networking tool, and the HCV Resource Network does *not* verify practitioner credentials, or take any responsibility for the competence of practitioners registering their details on the database.

- Participation as a team member on at least one HCV assessment in the region;
- Ability to develop appropriate management/monitoring decisions, to maintain or enhance the HCVs present, shown through:
 - Evidence of practical experience with implementing biodiversity management, ecosystem service management, or social development projects
- Some experience within the country of assessment, or at least within the region.

3. Role-specific Requirements

3.1. Team Leader:

The Team Leader is required to demonstrate the following qualifications and abilities, in addition to the requirements relevant to his/her discipline specialism:

- Demonstrated understanding of the HCVs and experience as a team member in at least three HCV assessments
- Appropriate background in applied conservation (environmental or social disciplines), shown by:
 - Relevant academic qualification: Master's-level degree or higher in an appropriate subject *and* at least 3 years professional experience including field and project work,

OR

- At least 6 years professional experience in a technical capacity involving applied research and fieldwork in a relevant discipline (e.g. biodiversity assessment, applied conservation, ecosystem service management, or social development projects).
- Experience of relevant project work within the palm oil sector (preferably) or within plantation agriculture or forestry.
- Demonstrated ability to synthesise a variety of data from desk research and field assessments
 - Documented leading role (e.g. first authorship) in biodiversity assessment, socio-economic reporting, or similar relevant project work.
- Ability to reach workable consensus on management decisions (in the case of HCV verification assessments, ability to understand the impact of management decisions on HCVs and for various stakeholders).
 - Evidence of practical experience in land use management decisions involving social, environmental and economic stakeholders
- Local experience within the country of the assessment is strongly desired, but not an absolute requirement.

3.2. Discipline Specialists:

Discipline Specialists (according to their role) are required to demonstrate the following experience and abilities:

Social Expert:

- Knowledge and practical field experience within the local context

- Experience of relevant project work within the palm oil sector (preferably) or within plantation agriculture or forestry.
- Fluency (spoken and written) in the national language of the country of assessment; **preferably** will also speak one or more relevant local languages or dialects.
- Ability to conduct field assessment independently of the HCV assessment team.
- Knowledge of and practical experience in the use and application of participatory methods or Participatory Rural Assessment techniques

Biodiversity/ecology Expert:

- Practical experience in applied conservation biology, in the local context of the region/country where the assessment is carried out
- Understanding of landscape conservation approach, in the local context of the region/country where the assessment is carried out
- Specialisation in tropical ecology in the local context of the region/country where the assessment is carried out
- An understanding of GIS techniques and interpretation of remotely sensed data is recommended.

GIS Expert:

- Practical experience in the use of GIS and remote sensing techniques for conservation biology and community land use issues.
- Qualifications or relevant experience in landscape ecology are recommended.
- Ability to incorporate results in real time and to advise team in the field on GIS methodology, especially spatial aspects of HCV assessment in the field, is especially recommended.
- Experience in environmental services in national and local regulations.

It is highly recommended that all Discipline Specialists have some local experience within the country of assessment.

4. Verification

The evaluation of assessor and team leader competence is necessary to provide some degree of assurance to the credibility of the assessment outcome. Evaluation may be undertaken in one or more of the following ways, and should be carried out by a credible third party (e.g. using a panel of independent reviewers). Evidence of competence submitted to RSPO (including documentary evidence or summaries of qualifying expertise) should be publicly available (web-based), and the process for recognition by RSPO should include an opportunity for public comment (e.g. 30 days) on HCV practitioners' submissions, so that stakeholders can comment on the accuracy of claims of competence or experience.

Such evidence may include:

- Documentary review - analysis of records of the assessor's education, training, employment and experience, e.g. educational or professional certificates, credible professional references, peer reviewed publications, first-authored socio-economic or environmental assessment reports, etc.
- Feedback on the assessors performance, gained through:

- questionnaires, personal references, testimonials, complaints, performance evaluation, peer review
- interviews in order to evaluate personal behaviours and communication skills, to verify information and test knowledge and to acquire additional information
- observation to evaluate personal behaviour and the ability to apply knowledge and skills
- Oral or written tests of knowledge and skills