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Ready to Drive the Market

Experiences from Road Testing the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information*



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About The One Planet Network Consumer Information Programme

This publication is an output of the Consumer Information Programme of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (known as the One Planet network). The Programme is a global platform supporting the provision of quality information on goods and services, to engage and assist consumers in sustainable consumption. It implements and supports projects; undertakes research; shares good practice and policies; and provides collaboration opportunities. The Programme is led by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU), Germany; the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Indonesia, and Consumers International; and brings together a network of public, private and third sector actors.

More information, and ways to participate, can be found at <http://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/consumer-information-scp/> or contact ciscp@un.org.



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation
and Nuclear Safety



Ministry of Environment and Forestry
Republic of Indonesia



**CONSUMERS
INTERNATIONAL**

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MINISTÈRE
DE LA TRANSITION
ÉCOLOGIQUE
ET SOLIDAIRE

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Brasilprev
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Braskem
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(S Karthikeyan, Utsav Tayade)



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Woolworths
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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Recognitions	4
Contents	5
Introduction	6
1. The Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information	8
2. The road testing exercise	10
3. Key road testing takeaways	12
General applicability	12
Mindset for applying the Guidelines	12
Fundamental Principles.....	13
Aspirational Principles	19
4. Conclusions and outlook	25
Is the Guidelines' content pertinent?	25
Are the Guidelines applicable?	25
What are the main challenges?	26
How to further progress in the field?	26
What did road testers get from being a road tester?	29
What are the next steps?	29
Get involved	29
Annex 1	30
Workshop Series – Communicating Product Sustainability Information	30
References	32

INTRODUCTION

The [Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information](#) (hereafter referred to as the Guidelines), published in 2017 by UN Environment and the International Trade Centre, encourage information providers to communicate credible and reliable sustainability information to consumers. This seminal publication aims at addressing the underlying causes of information overload, consumer confusion and lack of credibility. After the successful launch of the Guidelines (with over 1,500 downloads as of September 2018), the One Planet network Consumer Information Programme embarked on an ambitious road testing process.

This report complements the Guidelines by offering insights into the practical application of the Guidelines' ten principles, based on the outcomes of a global road testing exercise that was held from January to June 2018. The main results of the road testing were also confirmed in eleven in-country workshops¹ during the same period. This document presents results, challenges and lessons learned throughout this process, and is complemented by a number of case studies² around the practical application of the Guidelines' principles by companies and standard-setting organizations: the so-called road testers.

The Guidelines were applied by organizations with a broad range of characteristics in terms of:

- » Geographical scope (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Oceania);
- » Sector (automotive, chemicals, consumer goods, financial services, food and agriculture, garments and textile, manufacturing, retail, sports equipment and accessories, household and personal care, ornamental, and hospitality);
- » Size (from 8 to 100,000 employees);
- » Type of claim (labels, product declarations, marketing campaigns and voluntary standards and certifications).

In total, 31 sustainability claims were analysed during the road testing, from 28 organizations. The following 28 organizations road tested the Guidelines:

Aditya Birla Fashion & Retail Limited, Aditya Birla Retail Limited, Auchan Retail España, Betterfly Tourism, Brasilprev, Braskem, Colgate-Palmolive, Confederation of Indian Industry, Cruelty Free International, dna merch, Ecotourism Kenya, Selo Eureciclo, Florverde Sustainable Flowers, Freemint, Initiative for Compliance and Sustainability, Marine Stewardship Council, Mavic, Mondelēz International, Natrue, Sofea - Sustainable Office European Association, Sustainable Food Systems GmbH and Research Institute of Organic Agriculture – FiBL, Tata Motors, Textile Exchange, TÜV Rheinland, Rainforest Alliance, Woolworths Food Company, WWF-Hong Kong, and Zerya producciones sin residuos S.L.

¹ UN Environment, financially supported by the governments of Germany and France, organized workshops in Brazil, Chile, China, France, Germany, Peru, and Sri Lanka with the objective of communicating the Guidelines' principles and enabling participants to improve the way they communicate sustainability performance to consumers. In addition, sessions dedicated to the Guidelines were also held during workshops organized by the Better by Design Project (BBD) in Peru, Honduras and Nicaragua. Feedback received and insights from the workshops helped to confirm the results presented in this report. More information on the workshops is available in annex 1.

² Case studies are available on the Product Sustainability Information hub on the One Planet network website: <http://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/consumer-information-scp/product-sustainability-information-hub>

The objectives of the road testing were:

- » to understand how feasible it is to apply the Guidelines, including over different sectors and type of claims;
- » to identify eventual gaps and challenges;
- » to make available case studies on their implementation.

The remainder of this document is structured as follows:

- » Section 1 presents a summary of the Guidelines and situates the road testing exercise.
- » Section 2 provides the objectives and methodology of the road testing.
- » Section 3 presents the main findings and aggregated results from the road testing.
- » Section 4 draws conclusions and sheds light on the implications of the results and opportunities for further supporting the application of the Guidelines on the ground.

Case studies on the road testers' experiences are available separately on the [Product Sustainability Information Hub](#) on the One Planet network website.

UN Environment and the International Trade Centre do not endorse any of the products or claims presented in this publication or in the case studies in any way or for any purpose. Quality and quality control are the sole responsibility of the organizations which self-assessed the way they communicate with consumers.

1. THE GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDING PRODUCT SUSTAINABILITY INFORMATION

Consumers, be they individuals, business or government, have a key role to play through the products they buy, how they use them and recycle or discard of them. In a time where many consumers feel confused and no longer trust or know how to act upon the information they receive, ensuring that companies' communications around their products' sustainability performance are reliable, trustworthy and substantiated becomes ever more important.

This importance of providing reliable information has been internationally recognized by the Sustainable Development Goals through target 12.8 and is also the focus of one of the programmes of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (known as the One Planet network). It has also been recently reinforced by member states during the third United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment.

Sustainable consumption and production is about promoting resource and energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, and providing access to basic services, green and decent jobs and a better quality of life for all. Its implementation helps to achieve overall development plans, reduce future economic, environmental and social costs, strengthen economic competitiveness and reduce poverty.



Target 12.8: Promote universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles

UN definition: By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

UNEA's Ministerial Declaration (UNEP/EA.3/HLS.1) enunciates that member states "will encourage sustainable lifestyles and move forward to ensure more sustainable consumption and production patterns, by providing reliable sustainability information to consumers, increasing education and awareness raising, and making it easier to rethink, reuse, recycle, recover and remake any products, materials and/or services and prevent and reduce waste generation."

In addition, the Environment and Health Resolution (UNEP/EA.3/RES.4) "... emphasizes the importance of education, lifelong learning and raising public awareness, notably through measures aimed at providing Product Sustainability Information in order to stress the shared responsibility of all stakeholders including industry and allow informed choices by consumers, notes in this regard the newly launched Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information; and calls upon Member States to strengthen efforts in the areas of education, and together with the private sector, as appropriate, in training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and cooperation with regards to linkages between health and environment".

To strengthen good practices and build international understanding and consensus in this field, UN Environment and the International Trade Centre (ITC), through the One Planet network Consumer Information Programme, led an international, multi-stakeholder process, with inputs from over 125 organizations to develop the Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information. They build on existing efforts in this area, including national guidance on marketing claims and regional initiatives such as the European Product Environmental Footprint. After two years of research and collaboration, the Guidelines were published aiming to:

- » Outline how the private sector can provide quality information to empower sustainable consumption decisions;
- » Serve as a reference for standard and labelling bodies to compare their product sustainability information schemes to the Guidelines;
- » Serve as a reference for governments (including sub-national authorities) to compare their policies to the Guidelines;
- » Serve as an instrument for civil society organizations to check the quality of existing product sustainability information.

The Guidelines function as a navigator for communicating product sustainability information in a credible and efficient way, by including a comprehensive set of high-level principles for users to follow, and guidance on how to apply them. They were developed in response to a call for a practical instrument to counter the proliferation of diverging and/or unchecked product sustainability information tools (UN Environment 2015), which can negatively affect the reputation of credible standards, labels and claims. A key, long-term objective is to generate global consensus by creating a level playing field for developing new, and revising existing, product sustainability information.

Product sustainability information, as regarded in the Guidelines, refers to claims that cover one or multiple sustainability dimensions: economic, environmental and/or social. Claims can take multiple forms such as labels, voluntary standards and certification, product declarations, ratings, marketing claims, foot printing, life-cycle assessments, and other ways of communicating with consumers on environmental, social and economic issues connected to products.

The Guidelines' structure reflects a dual objective: to establish minimum requirements that must be met when providing product sustainability information to consumers (fundamental principles); and to encourage ambition, improvement and sustainability leadership over time (aspirational principles). They aim to be applicable to organizations of all sizes and from all regions.

2. THE ROAD TESTING EXERCISE

The purpose of the Guidelines' road testing was manifold:

- » To test the practicality of the Guidelines for developing or improving product sustainability information;
- » To identify where most challenges lie for future work of the Consumer Information Programme;
- » To collect good practice case studies and lessons learned in different regions and sectors.

The claims analyzed in this exercise came from a broad range of sectors; as seen in Figure 1 the sectors most represented are: Food and Agriculture (19%), Retail (16%), Manufacturing (13%), and Household and Personal Care (13%).

The participants of this exercise are called road testers because they were the first organizations testing the applicability of the Guidelines to their own claims. Companies (48%) and standard-setting organizations (52%) comprised the participants of the road testing.

In practice, road testers self-assessed their sustainability claims (the way they communicate with consumers about sustainability of their chosen product) against the Guidelines' ten principles. Such claims can refer to either goods or services, including their purchase, use and end of life phases. Four claims referring to services and 27 referring to goods were analyzed in this road testing exercise. Only one claim focused on the end of life phase (reverse logistics), while the remaining 30 claims referred to product purchase or use.

The exercise involved comparing the content and provenance of the claim with the steps and guidance prescribed in the Guidelines through an online questionnaire. The process allowed road testers to test their own claims and reflect on potential improvements, while giving feedback on the Guidelines' utility. This was a self-assessment exercise, therefore there was no external testing, and the objective was not to check if the road testers were making mistakes, but to provide an opportunity for them to enhance their work and to self-evaluate the way they provide consumer information.

As seen in Figure 2, the road testers featured here are headquartered in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Kenya, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom, United States and Hong Kong. 39% of road testers sell their products and/or have operations globally.



Figure 1: Sectors represented in the road testing

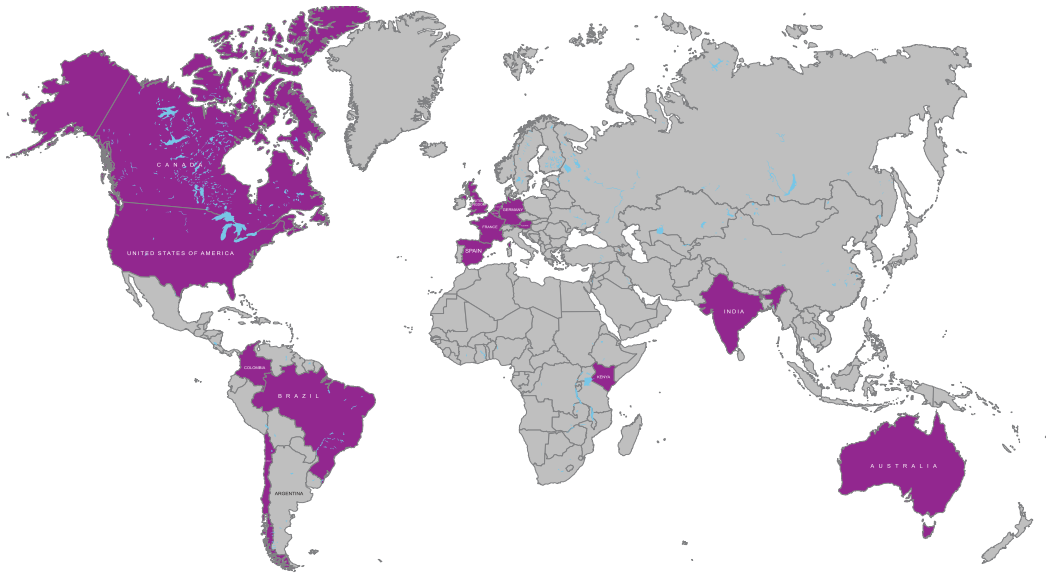


Figure 2: Road testers' headquarters

The exercise was held with more than one batch of road testers, each over the course of three months. All activities were developed online through webinars, phone calls and online questionnaires. One-to-one support was provided to the road testers whenever needed.

The main steps were organized as follows:

- » Selection of one specific product's consumer-facing sustainability information: the "claim" (e.g. a label, voluntary standard, product declaration, rating, marketing claim, or any other way of communicating with consumers)
- » Expression of interest to be a road tester sent to the Consumer Information Programme
- » Attendance of a webinar to learn about the Guidelines and the road testing process, and to connect with other road testers
- » Assessment of the claim via an online questionnaire which guided the road tester through each of the Guidelines' 10 principles
- » Attendance of optional monthly 'Help Desk and Sharing' webinars to ask questions and discuss lessons learned
- » Attendance of final webinar to discuss results

The questionnaire, completed by all road testers, consisted of 5 sections built around the mindset and the 10 principles of the Guidelines, including feedback on whether it was feasible to implement each principle. It was recommended that road testers read the associated sections of the Guidelines publication while completing the questionnaire, for detailed explanations to accompany the questions' content. As the questions covered different aspects of a claim (methodology, stakeholder engagement, communication, etc.), in most cases it was necessary that road testers reached out to other relevant departments in their organization during the exercise. Therefore, it was possible for various persons from the same organization to work on the same questionnaire. An example of a completed template was provided for their reference and for guidance on how they could answer the questions.

It was understood and agreed that the road testers could provide certain information to UN Environment that would be kept confidential. It was agreed that the coordinators of the road testing (UN Environment and the International Trade Centre) would not disclose the information provided in the questionnaire, unless the road tester explicitly agreed to be featured in a case study. The takeaways that follow therefore do not feature individual responses, but focus on aggregated results.

3. KEY ROAD TESTING TAKEAWAYS

The road testing exercise has demonstrated the potential and relevance of the Guidelines. For analysis purposes, the road testers' adherence to each principle is presented here in three degrees: fully adherent, partially adherent or not adherent. The adherence is based on the road testers' own judgment of the degree to which they comply with each principle. The analysis presented here does not represent a quality judgment of the road testers' claims, but instead helps to understand where further guidance and support are needed.

General applicability

"The guidelines are accessible and can be easily applied to existing certification schemes, such as our own Leaping Bunny certification for products and brands which do not test on animals."

— Cruelty Free International

"In our future development we'll be happy to apply the Guidelines to other claims."

— dna merch

Overall, the road testing confirmed that the Guidelines are applicable to companies of all regions and sectors, which can use the Guidelines for the improvement of existing product sustainability information or the development of upcoming claims. Within the companies, the Guidelines were seen as a most useful resource for sustainability, marketing and advertising professionals. The Guidelines have also proven to be applicable to standard-setting and labelling bodies of different sectors. These organizations can compare and possibly adapt or update their schemes based on the Guidelines' principles.

Mindset for applying the Guidelines

The Guidelines present three approaches that should set the scene for their application: life cycle thinking, hotspots analysis approach and mainstreaming sustainability. The results of the road testing showed that more guidance is needed to illustrate how these approaches can directly serve for refinement and improvement of product sustainability claims. Still, it is important to clarify that the mindset is neither a requirement nor an aspiration; it is a framework for applying the Guidelines.

Life cycle thinking is applied by 58% of road testers, amongst which only 18% use the methodology of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA). The remaining road testers argued that this approach is not necessarily available or possible because:

1. they are not currently able to assess the use phase or the end-of-(first) life of the product
2. products/ingredients are traced only at certain phases of the supply chain
3. their communication efforts are explicitly focused only on some of the life cycle stages (especially development and production stages).

Most of the road testers reported they are interested in giving more guidance to consumers on what to do with their products after the use phase and eventually addressing more elements of life cycle thinking in the near future.

Concerning the hotspots analysis approach, the results showed that more guidance is needed in order to clarify the concept and its relevance to communicating product sustainability information. 62% of road testers have not yet undergone a multifaceted strategic hotspots analysis, and 40% were not familiar with the hotspots analysis approach prior to the road testing.

The Guidelines advocate that a product-related sustainability claim eventually becomes an integrated part of the entire decision-making for the development and marketing of new or improved products. When asked about whether the claim helps mainstreaming

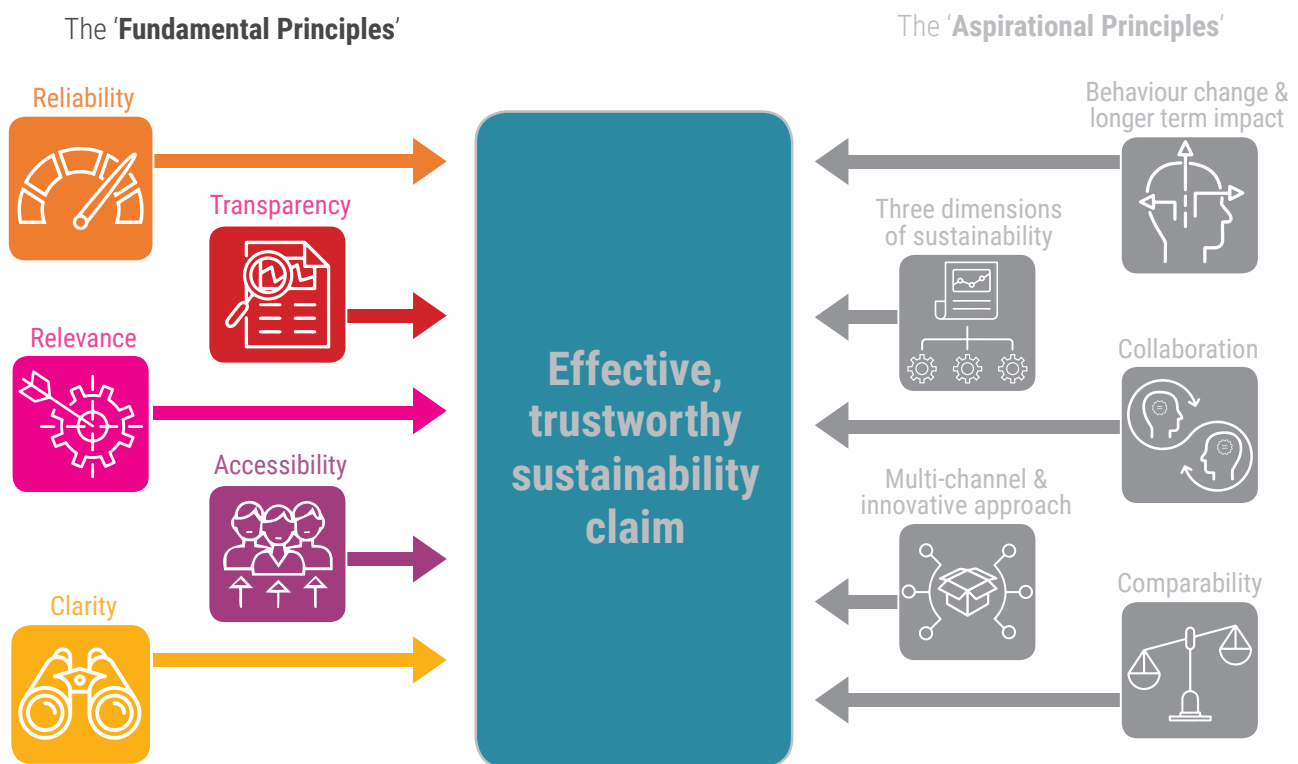
sustainability at a broader scale in the organization, 81% answered positively. This means that for the significant majority of road testers their product sustainability claims are linked to brand names and/or influence new or improved products. This might be explained by the fact that sustainability claims usually are a key asset for brands and therefore part of the wider decision-making process (Schultz and Block, 2015; Horlings, 2009).

However, as regarded in the Guidelines, although mainstreaming sustainability at a higher level within the organisation should be encouraged, it is essential that the communications enable consumers to distinguish between product sustainability and brand sustainability, and to not transfer brand-related claims to the product (unless this is substantiated) or vice versa.

There were no significant differences between the percentages of road testers (companies or standard-setting organizations) with respect to applying these three mindset approaches.

Fundamental Principles

The Guidelines request their users to comply with five fundamental principles, which seek to build and reinforce each other. As expected, evidence was found that the fundamental principles are indeed more feasible to apply than the aspirational principles.





Build your claims on a reliable basis

- Ensure that the message conveyed follows and reflects the evidence you have (what has been measured or evaluated)
- Be sure, or obtain confirmation from the experts who provide the evidence, that their methods and data are state of the art
- Be aware of exclusions, limitations and assumptions that were used in building the evidence for the claim – and communicate them

PRINCIPLE 1: RELIABILITY

87% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 1 Reliability, as shown in Figure 3. This means that the aspects assessed match the aspects that are communicated, and selected methods, standards and data are endorsed or applied by governments, NGOs or competitors; or provided or backed by reliable scientific institutions.

The road testers who scored partially on this principle (10%) argued that although they are sure about the reliability of their claims, their methods still need to be validated by a scientific body and/or approved by regulatory authorities. These road testers argued they are currently negotiating with independent auditors, or starting to work closely with local scientific institutions to provide sufficient scientific evidence to back up their claims.

One company analysed a claim that was still under development. During the process of completing the questionnaire, the organization recognised there was not yet sufficient evidence to make this claim reliable and therefore decided to not go further with the communication strategy.

As seen in Figure 4, the majority of road testers' claims had been third-party verified, meaning that the information and data behind the claim has been evaluated as being true and correct by an external body. Competence of verifiers is defined by knowledge of relevant sector, product and product-related sustainability aspects (Wolf et al., 2012). Third-party verification is not a requirement of the Guidelines, but is considered the most reliable option and especially recommended for comparative assertions.

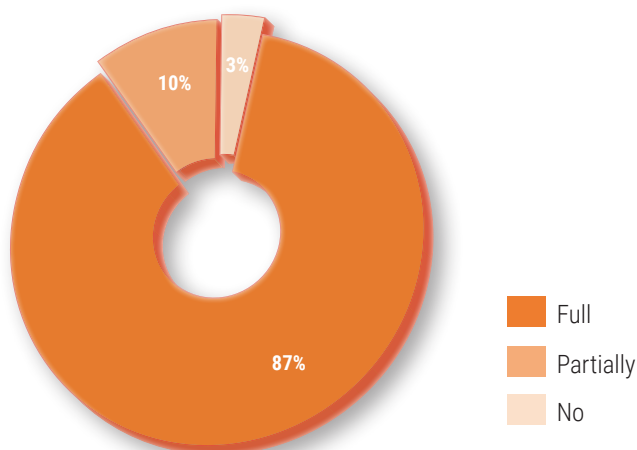


Figure 3: Adherence to Reliability

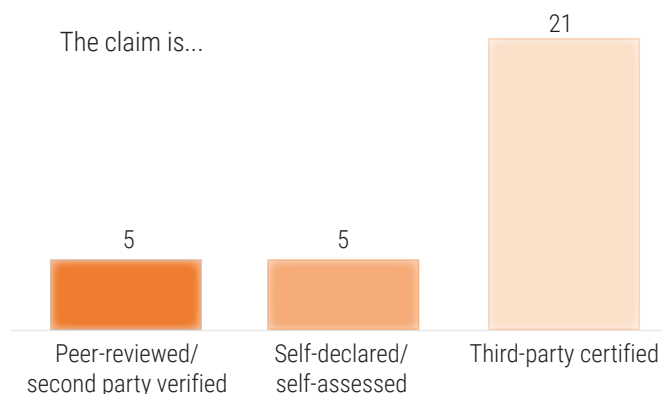


Figure 4: Verification methods of the claims

PRINCIPLE 2: RELEVANCE

97% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 2 Relevance, as seen in Figure 5. This means that their sustainability claims provide information on the relevant aspects (processes, materials used in production; or impacts linked to the intended use and end of life of the product), which contribute significantly to the sustainability profile of their products.

At the same time, 17 road testers recognized there might exist other sustainability aspects on which their products may be performing poorly, as shown in Figure 6. This was explained by the fact that their claims do not consider all issues regarding sustainability, but rather focus on some specific aspects. This challenge was raised especially by standard-setting organizations that work with single-issue claims (as opposed to multi-issue criteria claims), such as carbon footprint, energy, conflict-free mineral sourcing, child-labour free or animal welfare labels.

This result reinforces the importance of strengthening the understanding of the hotspots analysis approach to guarantee that the claims deal with relevant aspects that contribute significantly to the overall sustainability profile of the products. As regarded in the Guidelines, the claim must avoid burden shifting, i.e. not enhancing one aspect where the product is performing well (or has improved) while masking other aspects where the product is performing poorly (or has deteriorated).

85% of road testers confirmed that the product performance on which the claim is based exceeds regulatory requirements of the countries in which the product is produced and consumed. The remaining 15% are standard-setting organizations, with a global approach, who explained that they could not give a straightforward answer. Considering that regulatory requirements vary nationally, their answer would depend on the production region of the respective company applying their standard - although in the vast majority of cases the requirements of the standards do exceed legislative requirements.

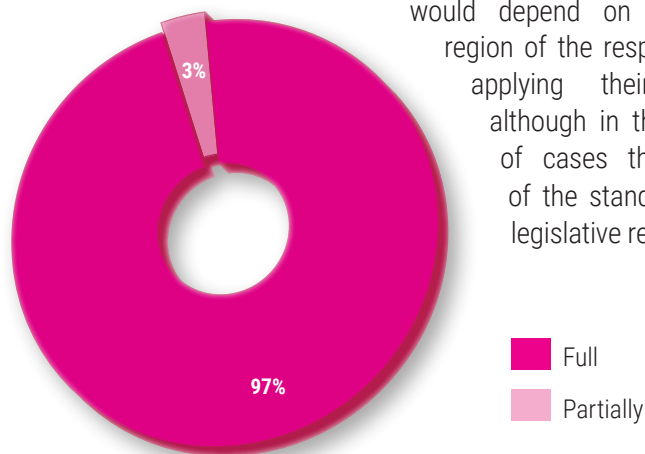


Figure 5: Adherence to Relevance

Are there any other important sustainability aspects on which the product is/might be performing poorly

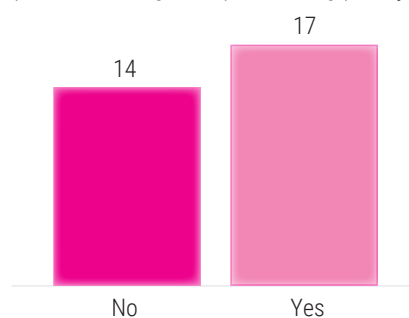
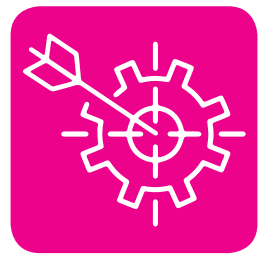


Figure 6: Performance in other sustainability aspects



Talk about major improvements – in areas that matter

- Highlight product characteristics or innovations that really make a difference to the overall sustainability performance of the product
- Make sure that the subject of the claim is in an area that is integral to the product, i.e. its function, materials or performance
- Check legal requirements before making a claim, so that your product is significantly better than what is already required by law.

“The approach of applying those guidelines at each new claim is very helpful to write a consistent and complete story. It needs to be a quicker process but very helpful for all sustainability communication.”

—Mavic



Make the information useful for the consumer

- Avoid vague, ambiguous and broad "general environmental/social benefit" claims
- Share information that helps consumers understand their role in improving product performance and the impact of their consumption
- Provide simple guidance on how consumers can alter or improve their consumption behaviour

PRINCIPLE 3: CLARITY

81% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 3 Clarity, as shown in Figure 7. The results showed that visual methods of communication (symbols, pictograms, images) are very often used by the road testers. All participants explicitly expressed preoccupation to guarantee that imagery is used in a way that is not likely to be misinterpreted. The standard-setting organizations reported that strict usage rules accompany their label/seal and suppliers are audited to ensure they adhere to these, therefore assuring that their logos remain consistent and cannot be modified.

As seen in Figure 8, 90% of road testers reported that additional details are available online to support a better understanding of the claim. At the same time, 32% affirmed that there is still room to make the connection between the claim and the products even more clear to avoid consumers thinking that the claim is also valid for similar products from the same brand, or is related to the product instead of the package only.

One company recognized this principle was not met because of the use of the term "ecofriendly", which is a broad, general sustainability benefit claim and very difficult to substantiate. The Guidelines advise that these general terms should be avoided, such as "environmentally friendly", "eco-friendly", "eco", "good for the environment", "sustainable", "green", "carbon friendly", "natural", "non-toxic", "ecologically safe", "pollutant free", "clean" "zero emissions", "an ethically correct choice".

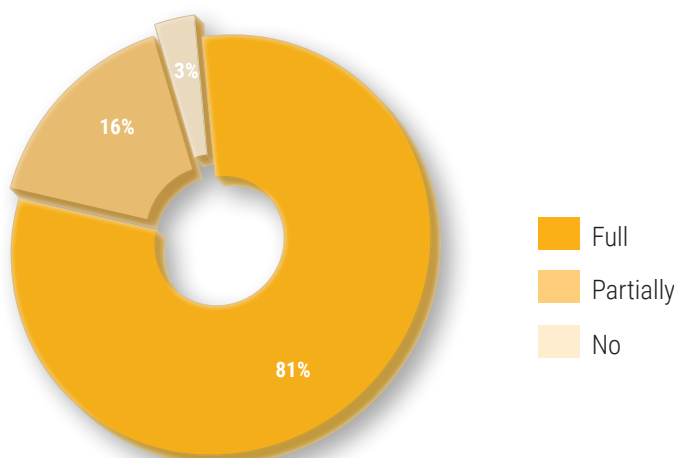


Figure 7: Adherence to Clarity

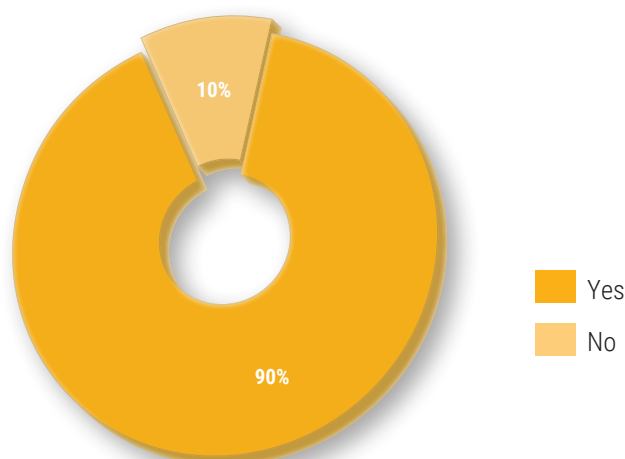


Figure 8: Additional details available

"The biggest challenge is making a complex subject as sustainability, simple enough to be easily and clearly communicated. We will definitely use this framework when issuing new claims."

— Selo Eureciclo

PRINCIPLE 4 TRANSPARENCY

64% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 4 Transparency, as seen in Figure 9. Satisfy the consumer's appetite for information and do not hide is at the heart of this principle. In light of this, the road testers reflected on whether consumers could trace the information/data behind the claim, and whether a list of the bodies/ stakeholders involved in the claim development process was made available.

Road testers who scored partially on this principle (23%) justified that making information more transparent is not easy, mainly due to limited space on-pack to instruct consumers on how they can learn more about the claim. However, the potential that new technologies bring for progress in this area was highly recognized, especially with the use of dedicated weblinks, barcodes and QR-codes, for instance. The Guidelines do not ask that all information is included on package, but instead that information providers need to strike a balance between providing too much information on the product or at point of sale, and providing sufficient information elsewhere for consumers to research and make decisions (e.g. on the company website).

Road testers who did not meet this principle (13%) reported that this was mainly because of limitations on the side of the organizations to make strategic and confidential information available. It is important to clarify, however, that the Guidelines anticipate that information subject to confidentiality may be accessible only to competent bodies that can verify the claim, not necessarily open to consumers/ the general public.

Except for 4 claims that were developed internally and did not involve external bodies in the development process, all the others participants reported that a list of stakeholders involved is available at least online (if not on the product itself). All the standard-setting organizations responded that their websites provide information on development and revision processes, including lists of involved stakeholders, usually according to external requirements such as provided by ISEAL.³

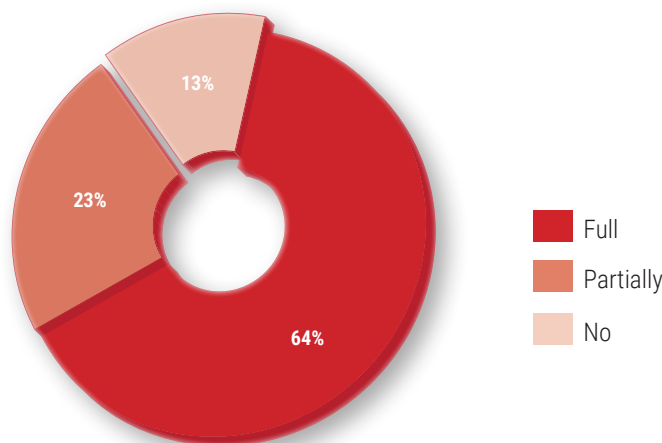


Figure 9: Adherence to Transparency

³ ISEAL is the global association for sustainability standards. ISEAL's Credibility Principles were formulated by a diverse group of more than 400 stakeholders and represent the core values on which effective sustainability standards are built. The principles aim to identify the fundamental qualities that make standards most likely to achieve positive impacts (ISEAL, 2013). The principles were among the guidance documents assessed that fed into the development of the Guidelines.



Satisfy the consumer's appetite for information, and do not hide

- Allow consumers to evaluate the information that underpins the claim
- Provide comprehensible information
- Adapt the information supply to the consumer's interest and product-related needs: from general, easy-to-understand to detailed and complex where appropriate
- Do not make a claim when the underlying information is considered confidential

"The use of a global standard where all companies and products use the same basic framework and criteria will be very helpful. This will ensure that we do not miss anything as we develop claims and also try to use one basic set of principles."

– Colgate-Palmolive



Let the information get to the consumer, not the other way around

- Make the claim clearly visible for consumers (e.g. front of pack, appropriate font size, graphics/logo)
- Provide the information when and where the consumer needs it
- Avoid any barriers (e.g. technical) and use several communication methods, so that different information seeking habits are respected and satisfied
- Tackle constraints like limited space with direct links to online resources

"The Guidelines have offered us a clear learning on how to communicate the sustainability attributes of our products to consumers and the exercise was a turning point for a deep reflection on such communication."

— Auchan Retail España

PRINCIPLE 5: ACCESSIBILITY

Despite recognizing the challenge of restricted space that is often available on packaging, 84% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 5 Accessibility, as shown in Figure 10. This means that they consider their claims to be readily accessible to all stakeholders interested.

Road testers who scored partially on this principle (16%) recognized the importance of improvements related to the content made available to consumers on websites, greater performance in the digital media, and the strengthening of partnerships with retailers to include more information at the points of sale.

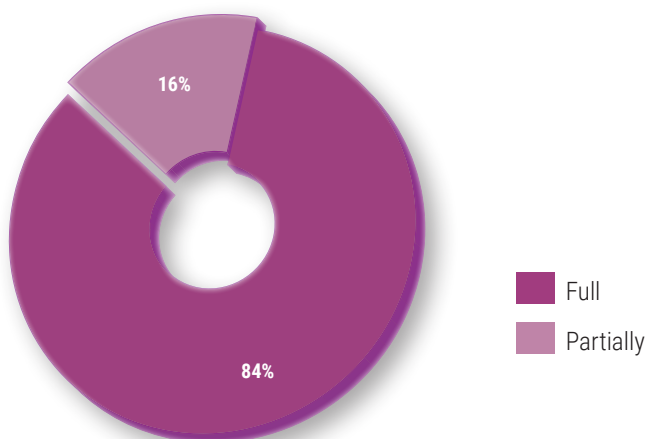


Figure 10: Adherence to Accessibility

Reflecting upon whether consumers are able to find the information using established communicating channels available in their region (on a scale of 0-5), the majority of the road testers are confident that consumers are provided with information where and when they need it, as shown in Figure 11 below.

The most common means of communication used by road testers are (from the most used to the least): **on-pack, websites, points of sale, social media, leaflets, QR codes.**

Are consumers able to find the information using customary means of communication in their region?

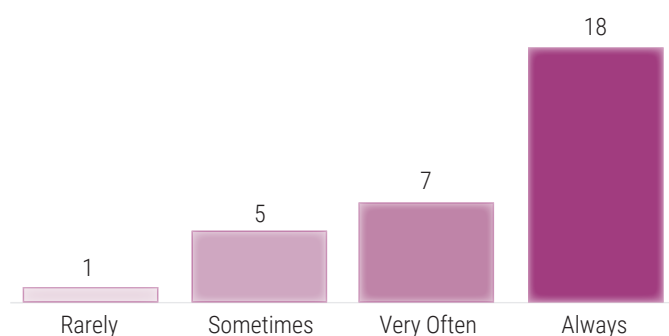
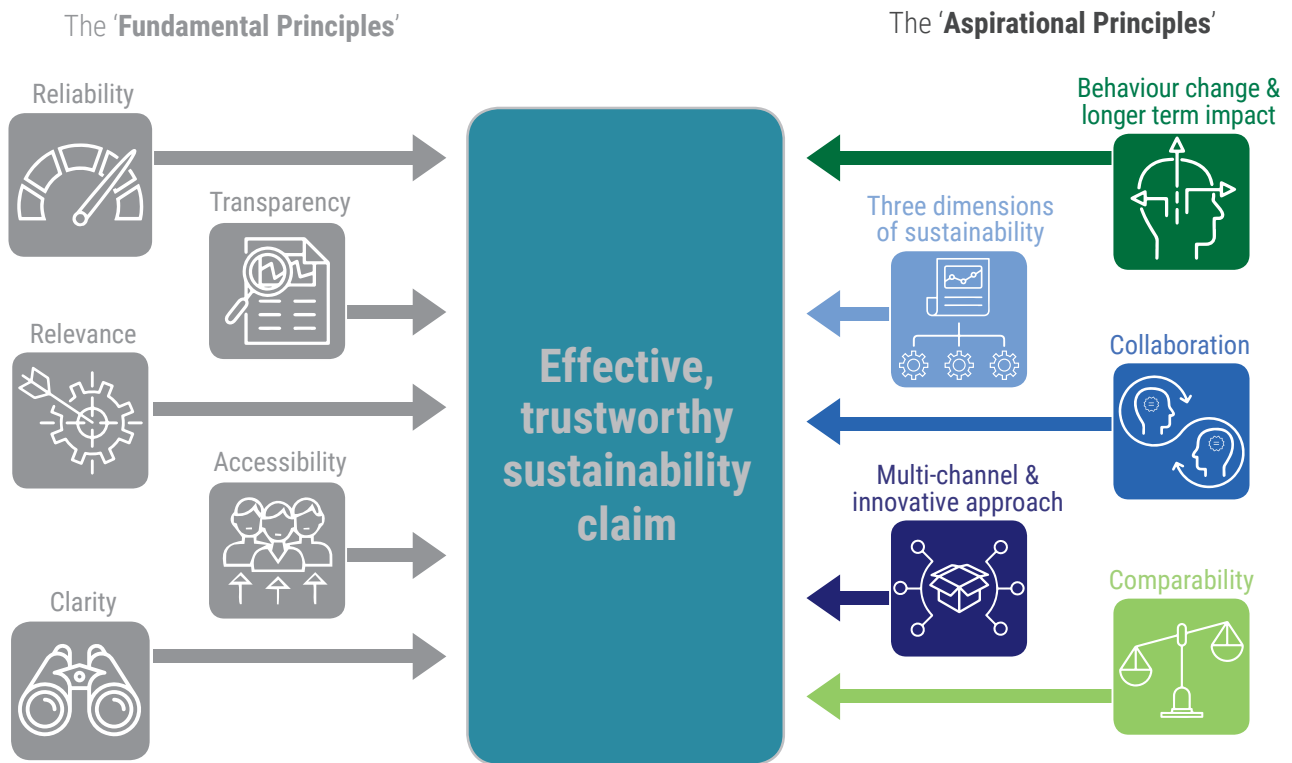


Figure 11: Use of established communicating channels

Aspirational Principles

The following aspirational principles are not compulsory to implement by the users of the Guidelines, but organizations should ultimately aspire to do so. They are for information providers to go beyond the fundamental principles and to continuously improve the ways in which they communicate to consumers.





Show the complete picture of product sustainability

- Inform the consumer of the improved performance of your product in all three sustainability dimensions and make sure all relevant aspects of sustainability are considered
- Make your sustainability claim tangible and specify how your product performs better in all sustainability dimensions

"We will seriously consider communicating the three sustainability dimensions and study the sustainability standards. We would also explore a closer link with sustainable consumption since our LCMP label focuses on the production side only."

— WWF-Hong Kong

PRINCIPLE 6: THREE DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

45% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 6 Three Dimensions of Sustainability, although even within this group the primary dimension covered is the environmental. As seen in Figure 12, a few road testers (7%) reported partial adherence to this principle since they are actively improving the incorporation of the social dimension of sustainability into their claim.

Addressing the three dimensions of sustainability in the claim proved to be one of the greatest challenges for road testers. The majority of them concentrate attention on environmental issues and therefore do not assess and communicate aspects of more than one dimension, i.e. social and economic.

Some companies reported that the support of certification schemes might help meet this principle in the future, if the schemes themselves are based upon the three pillars of sustainability. However, as the Guidelines observe, the maturity of available tools and methodologies to assess social, economic and environmental impacts varies— with the highest level of capability currently in the environmental dimension (Fontes et al., 2018). Considering there are still no internationally recognized standards or labels that cover all three aspects of the full life cycle, the Guidelines suggest that companies look at combining standards and methodologies to address gaps.

In general, all road testers recognized that this principle requires substantial time and investment during the product development process and is rather challenging to fully meet.

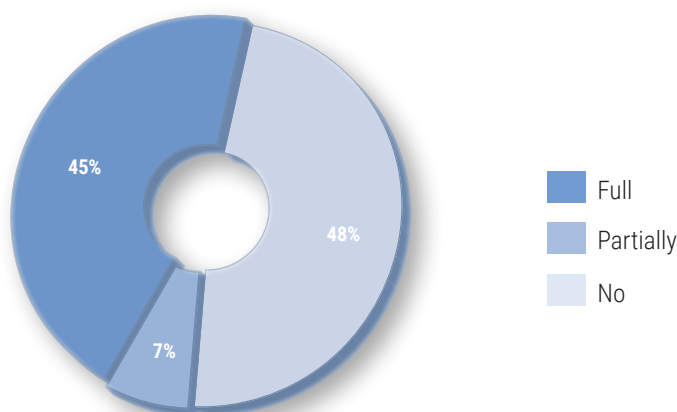


Figure 12: Adherence to Three Dimensions of Sustainability

PRINCIPLE 7: BEHAVIOUR CHANGE AND LONGER TERM IMPACTS

As shown in Figure 13, only 29% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 7 Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impacts, going beyond simply informing consumers to actively encouraging them to adopt more sustainable consumption patterns.

The most cited challenges by the remaining 71% of road testers were:

- » There is still uncertainty if consumption of more sustainable products really leads to more sustainable choices overall;
- » Strategic monitoring of changes in behaviour of customers is demanding and onerous;
- » For the retail sector this can be even more challenging, since the retail environment is already overwhelmed with many other messages competing for consumers' attention;
- » A considerable number of standard-setting organizations argued that this principle is challenging for them to meet as they do not directly target individual consumers, but see their role more in a business to business model, serving their clients (which are companies that apply their standard/ certification).⁴

It was noted that the adherence to this principle might also depend on the type of the claim analysed. For instance, communication and marketing campaigns might be better positioned to generate an engagement process than labels or voluntary certifications, since the former usually employ a wider set of instruments to support the sustainability knowledge of consumers.

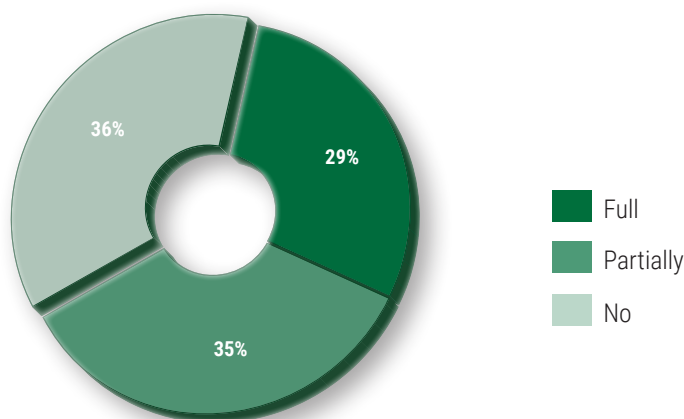
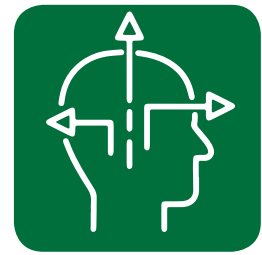


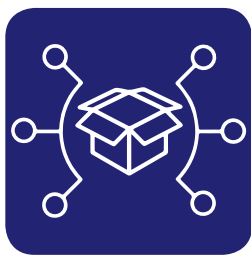
Figure 13: Adherence to Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impacts

⁴ It is important to clarify, however, that as per the Guidelines, a consumer can be an individual person, as well as business or government purchasing, using and/or disposing of a product (good or service). A clearer explanation of this might be needed in future application of the Guidelines.



From information to action

- Encourage consumers to act during the purchase, re/use and disposal of products in order to reduce adverse effects on the environment or society
- Implement engagement processes that secure longer-term relationships with consumers to better understand their behaviour and information needs – for your own improvement and to develop educational content for sustainability, based around their lives and society
- Embed the sustainability information into a wider context and support the sustainability knowledge of consumers



Engage with consumers in diverse ways

- Address consumers where they need the information
- Creatively remind and inspire consumers how they can act more sustainably – don't bore them
- Use a combination of different communication approaches

"After completing this template, we see the need to involve all teams who manage social media, online as well as our in-store customer communications, to understand how we can help customers to act sustainably during the purchase, use, and disposal of our products. We will be looking to incorporate the principles in the Guidelines into Woolworths' procedures in the future."

– Woolworths Group Limited

PRINCIPLE 8: MULTI-CHANNEL AND INNOVATIVE APPROACH

Figure 14 shows that 42% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 8 Multi-Channel and Innovative Approach. Still, 58% of road testers recognized that there is room to improve the way they use approaches to communicate with consumers. The most cited plan for improvements was a better use of social media, including creating Twitter and Instagram accounts.

This principle was found to be more challenging for standard-setters. 72% of them shared the desire of developing additional multi-channel and innovative activities to better engage consumers.

65% of companies already use a variety of touch points to communicate their claims such as on-pack, website, and social media (notably Facebook). 42% of them also use print and TV advertising, promotions in collaboration with retailers, and participation in promotional events.

All road testers declared consumers have the possibility to interact directly with them via (from the most used to the least):

- » contact form on the website
- » social media channels
- » company service mailbox
- » phone
- » customer satisfaction surveys
- » on site (at the stores or hotels, for instance)
- » live chat

45% of standard-setting organizations added that consumers could interact with them during public consultations for the development and revision of certification programmes.

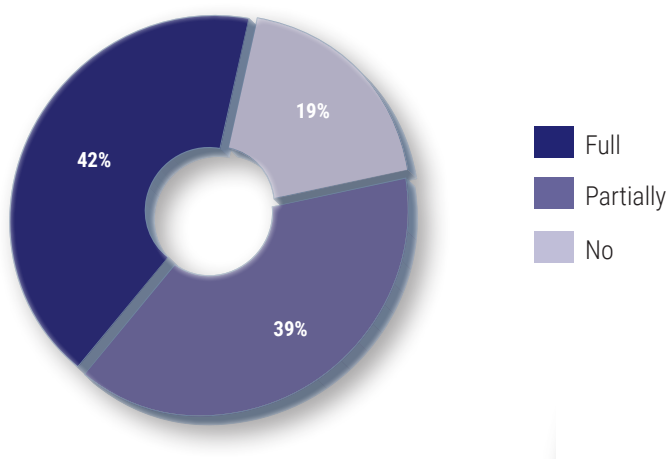


Figure 14: Adherence to Multi-Channel and Innovative Approach

PRINCIPLE 9: COLLABORATION

As seen in Figure 15, 52% of road testers affirmed their claims fully comply with principle 9 Collaboration, having involved relevant stakeholders (partners) during the development of the claims, aiming at building an open and inclusive process.

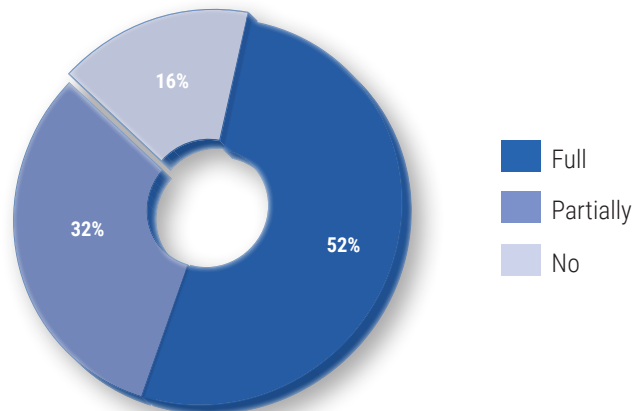


Figure 15: Adherence to Collaboration

However, there was a significant difference between the percentage of companies and of standard-setters meeting this principle (Figure 16). All standard-setters reported to work with others to increase acceptance and credibility of their schemes. At the same time, this principle was regarded as a major challenge especially for small and medium companies that usually do not have the capacity to conduct large stakeholder engagement processes.

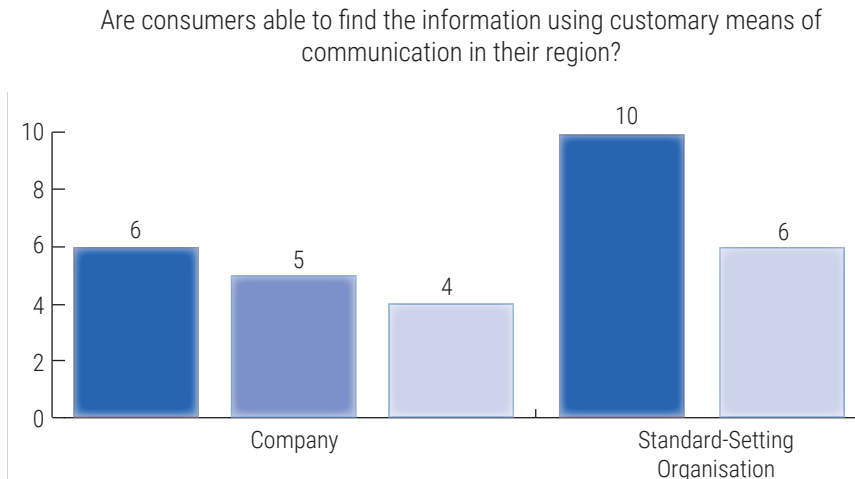
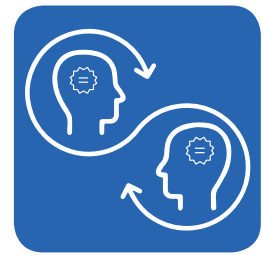


Figure 16: Adherence to Collaboration per type of organizations

The results showed that the involvement of partners is more common in the methodological development process than in the development of logos or additional communication strategies. These latter phases are usually completed by internal teams.

63% of road testers explained that they considered existing voluntary sustainability standards to review their criteria and/or potential application to their own needs⁵. This

⁵ The voluntary standards mentioned by the road testers were: ITC's Standards Map, ISO 14040, ISO 14064, Green Key, Green Globe standards, SA8000, GOTS, Oekotex, Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA), Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI), Blue Angel, Life Cycle Assessment, GRI Standards, GHG



Work with others to increase acceptance and credibility

- Involve a wider group of actors (e.g. value chain partners, trade association members, NGOs) to jointly develop the basis for your sustainability claims
- Let other stakeholders participate and thereby improve the overall public acceptance and trust of your claims by consumers
- Inspire behaviour change through an inclusive language: let the consumer feel s/he is not alone but part of a (large) group or movement

"The expectation is to involve more consumers in the development of new solutions and the Guidelines will certainly be a reference for this work."

— Brasilprev Seguros e Previdência S/A

shows road testers' intention to build on existing efforts to help build trust, consistency and understanding of the claim.

Some standard-setting organisations explicitly recognised the potential for duplication of efforts in the voluntary sustainability standards space, since a number of them develop or produce standards on similar topics and within the same sector. This result reinforces the need of collaborative approaches that can ultimately increase acceptance and credibility of product sustainability information among consumers and other stakeholders, while eventually leading to harmonization.



Help consumers choose between similar products

- Use product comparisons only where it really helps the consumer to make sustainable choices
- Make sure that product comparisons are based on very strict and objective rules relevant to the specific product, such as product category rules
- Participate in relevant government-led or third party initiatives, or industry/sector collaborative approaches, to develop constructive comparability

PRINCIPLE 10: COMPARABILITY

As seen in Figure 17, only 19% of road testers analyzed a comparison claim, such as a rating label or a product performance compared to the use of old technologies/processes (for instance, the comparison of natural dyes with petrochemical dyes or conventional diesel with hybrid diesel buses). The Guidelines recognize that comparing similar products based on their sustainability performance and communicating this to consumers is a complex issue and not necessarily feasible for all product categories.

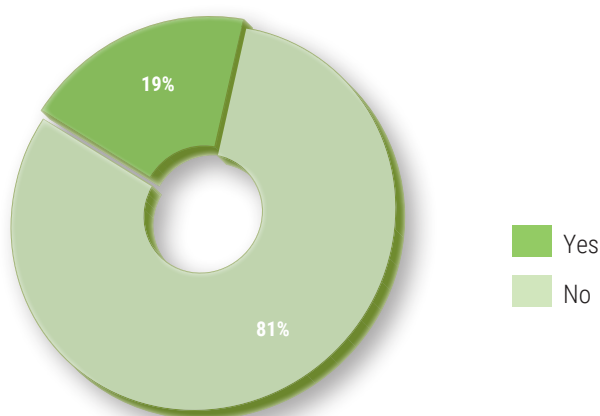


Figure 17: Adherence to Comparability

As stated in the Guidelines, government plays a key role in initiating policies, programmes or third party schemes that provide agreed benchmarks and methodologies for meaningful product comparisons. In line with this, all road testers that made comparison claims reported having participated in government or third-party led initiatives on which they could base product comparison.

Protocol, and the Sustainable Apparel Coalition Higg Index.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

This report summarized the results that were collected during the road testing exercise and confirmed through the series of workshops organized around the Guidelines. These results are of high importance for driving the Guidelines' implementation; they will inform future projects and activities led by the Consumer Information for Sustainable Consumption and Production Programme and its partners.

Is the Guidelines' content pertinent?

The road testing confirmed the overall pertinence of the two categories of principles propounded by the Guidelines (fundamental and aspirational principles). However, the results showed that challenges and strengths in applying the different principles might vary over types of organizations and claims (i.e. regarding challenges and strengths in meeting different principles). For instance:

- » Single-issue certification schemes found the aspirational principle 6 (Three Dimensions of Sustainability) hard to apply since these organizations explicitly focus on specific sustainability issues and therefore overall sustainability is not claimed.
- » Standard-setters found principle 7 (Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impact) hard to apply since they usually do not have direct interaction with individual end consumers (as opposed to their business clients).
- » Companies that analysed self-assessed claims found the more difficult questions were around rigor and credibility (principle 1 Reliability and principle 2 Relevance).
- » Small and medium companies faced greatest challenges when applying principle 8 (Multi-Channel and Innovative Approach) and principle 9 (Collaboration), as these principles require organizations to use various complementing communication channels, and to involve wider stakeholder groups to jointly develop the basis for the claims, which are activities that usually demand additional resources and planning.

Are the Guidelines applicable?

The road testing exercise showed that the principles are easy to comprehend and have the potential to help organizations improve the communication tools they employ. The application of the Guidelines can indeed make claims more objective, consistent and clear for consumers.

At the same time, it was identified that the application of the Guidelines would benefit from more tailored examples and information boxes on how different organizations could apply each principle and review their work against the guiding questions, depending on the type of:

- » **Tools** (labels, product declarations, ratings, marketing claims, communication campaigns, life cycle assessment, etc.)
- » **Organization** (companies or standard-setters)
- » **Approach** (single or multi-issue)
- » **Status** (existing or under development)

This categorization would allow organizations to better translate the Guidelines to their own specificities, and this could be put into practice by providing landing pages with examples for each different category and adapting the road testing questionnaire to each of them.

What are the main challenges?

Availability of space on pack, complexity of sustainability information and the lack of harmonized approaches and definitions were described as the main challenges for organizations to excel when communicating about their products' sustainability performance.

- » **Availability of space on pack**

The competition with other messages concerning safety, nutrition, health, and performance was regarded as a great challenge. These other messages are in many cases mandatory and need to be placed upon products and communicated online and in store.

- » **Complexity of sustainability information**

Road testers affirmed they invest a lot of efforts on studies and data analysis to understand the sustainability performance precisely to back up their claims, but they acknowledged the difficulty in communicating technical terms (e.g., the difference between bio-based materials and biodegradable materials) for the general public, without oversaturating or confusing consumers. Communicating sustainability performance in a simple way is still a great challenge.

- » **Lack of harmonized approaches**

Standard-setting organizations indicated that standards are very diverse and the market might be potentially confusing for consumers, even with good information provision. For this reason, most standard-setting organizations agree they should increase collaboration with the brands that have a consumer-oriented approach, as well as make an extra effort to work towards greater harmonization between the various standard schemes.

How to further progress in the field?

Based on the results and insights from the road testing exercise, the following actions were recognized as crucial in order to further progress in the field of product sustainability information, as well as to advance the implementation of the Guidelines and improve users' experience.

1. Provide additional guidance on implementation of certain approaches and principles
2. Provide further instructions on how the Guidelines can be applied by different type of organizations and claims
3. Enhance collaborations and create synergies
4. Work on policy level

1) Provide additional guidance on implementation of the following approaches and principles

- » **Hotspots analysis approach**

The results showed that it is essential to provide further guidance on the hotspots analysis approach since the majority of road testers were not familiar with this approach prior to the road testing. More specifically, more guidance is needed in order to clarify what hotspots analysis means and its relevance to communicating product sustainability information. The consideration of this approach can guarantee that the claims deal with relevant aspects that contribute significantly to the overall sustainability profile of the product.

» **Principle 4 (Transparency)**

The potential that new technologies can bring for progress in this principle should be recognized and further discussed, considering that data-enabled technologies provide information to consumers first hand in real time, while also addressing the challenge of limited space on pack. The real time data available through these new technologies could also be used to back up and harmonize ecolabels. The first step could be to map efforts that are already happening in this sphere, as well as collecting case studies from companies that are using data-enabled technologies for communicating product sustainability information.

» **Principle 6 (Three Dimensions of Sustainability)**

Considering the recognition that this principle requires substantial time and investment in the product development process, more work should be done to further collaboration amongst existing certification schemes that could work complementarily to address gaps. Considering there are still no internationally recognized standards or labels that cover all three aspects of the full life cycle, the Guidelines suggest that companies look at combining standards and methodologies to ensure all three dimensions of sustainability are taken into account.

» **Principle 7 (Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impact)**

Further guidance should be provided on how to monitor changes in behaviour of consumers. This process is regarded as demanding and onerous, especially for small and medium sized organizations. Partnerships with universities and research institutes that work in behavioural science should be accelerated in order to provide organizations with practical insights on how to perform in this issue. In addition, work should be done with standard-setting organizations to develop new insights on how to communicate added value of their standards directly to consumers.

» **Principle 9 (Collaboration)**

It was recognised as a crucial next step to involve consumers in the development of the claims. This should be done in order to both motivate and educate consumers to look at the information that has been provided, as well as to understand what they are most interested about. The results also pointed out the necessity of additional advice on how small and medium sized organizations could use their limited resources and capacity to involve relevant stakeholders (partners) during the development of the claims, ultimately aiming at building an open and inclusive process.

» **Principle 10 (Comparability)**

The results showed that developing comparative claims is challenging and the application of common metrics is crucial to allow organizations to make meaningful product comparisons in a way that supports the consumer to make sustainable choices. Definition of comparable methods and criteria for higher number of product categories could stimulate the coherent implementation of this principle. Multi-stakeholder initiatives can help increase methodological harmonization, specificity, and relevance needed for product comparisons.

2) Provide further instructions on how the Guidelines can be applied by different types of organizations and claims

Promote good practices from various **types of organizations** (companies and standard-setters) and **information tools** (e.g. labels, product declarations, ratings, marketing claims, communication campaigns, life cycle assessments), also considering that **single-issue or**

multi-issue claims and **existing or upcoming claims** might face different challenges when applying the Guidelines.

Give more practical advice for other corporate areas such as **marketing, procurement** and **product development**. This would be of most benefit to organizations as they move to improve their product sustainability information.

3) Enhance collaborations and create synergies

- » Build partnerships with a focus on a **replication effect**. It will have more impact to engage with key 'influencers' or multipliers (e.g. business or trade associations) than to approach individual companies on a bilateral basis.
- » Promote activities to **strengthen collaboration with retailers** considering their role in promoting more sustainable goods in a visible and appealing way to end consumers.
- » Collaborate for **country and sector level awareness raising** and identification of national and sectoral specificities to increase the visibility of the Guidelines and create discussions on different levels.

4) Work on policy level

- » Provide examples of how countries are applying the Guidelines and make them a more **concrete tool for governments**.
- » Link to **national processes and instruments**, although recognizing that consumer information is an issue that needs international consensus.
- » Engage with **national marketing surveillance** authorities and regulators responsible for overseeing consumer marketing and claims on a national level. The Guidelines can be articulated in the context of other national consumer information guides or regulation (e.g. green claims guides), or serve to update these.
- » Continue to lift the Guidelines to a **more political and strategic global sphere** (and potentially using them as a policy instrument), for which the involvement of governments will be crucial.

What did road testers get from being a road tester?

In general, the process was received as useful by all road testers. Quotes collected during the road testing have been included throughout this report. The most frequently cited benefits for applying the Guidelines were related to:

- » Opportunity to assess their performance against common, international guidance on how to best communicate with consumers about their own goods, services and standards;
- » Gain insights on how they could improve their claims, especially new ideas on further engagement of relevant stakeholders, including consumers;
- » Initiate a concrete partnership with the coordinators of the exercise (UN Environment and International Trade Centre);
- » Provide inputs into a global emerging tool on product sustainability information.

What are the next steps?

Considering the results of the road testing exercise, the implementation phase of the Guidelines will focus on encouraging more organizations to align their product sustainability communications with the Guidelines, as well as enhancing collaborations and creating synergies with local organizations for replication. Also, the implementation phase has the ambition to establish an international community of good practice to push, promote and modernize the discipline, under the umbrella of the Consumer Information Programme. In addition, the implementation phase intends to involve governments, so that the Guidelines ultimately become a base for national legislation (especially around SDG 12.8). The more binding the principles become (on a national level), the more likely they will be used. The case studies will be published in the Product Sustainability Information Hub in due course: <http://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/consumer-information-scp/product-sustainability-information-hub>

Get involved

In the Consumer Information Programme, we aim for collective impact and collaboration. Organizations interested to learn more about the project, to share ideas and join the network are invited to contact ciscp@un.org.

For more information: <http://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/consumer-information-scp>

ANNEX 1

Workshop Series – Communicating Product Sustainability Information

Feedback received and insights from the workshops listed below also helped to confirm the results presented in this report. These workshops made it possible to promote cutting-edge discussions, capacity building and knowledge and skills acquisitions to the participants on the content of the Guidelines.

- » Workshop Communicating Product Sustainability in São Paulo, Brazil on 7th December 2017 (organized by UN Environment, UN Global Compact Brazil Network and Akatu Institute)
- » Workshop Communicating Product Sustainability in Berlin, Germany on 20th March 2018 (organized by UN Environment and the German Ministry of Environment, supported by the consultancy Adelphi and the German business association Econsense)
- » Workshop Communicating Product Sustainability in Beijing, China on 11th June 2018 (organized by UN Environment and China Chain Store & Franchise Association, supported by China Quality Certification Center)
- » Workshop Communicating Product Sustainability in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 13th June 2018 (organized by UN Environment and the National Cleaner Production Centre in Sri Lanka)
- » Workshop Communicating Product Sustainability in Paris, France on 19th June 2018 (organized by UN Environment and the Ministry for an Ecological and Solidary Transition, supported by UN Global Compact France Network and Entreprises pour l'Environnement - EpE)
- » Workshop Communicating Product Sustainability in Lima, Peru on 2nd July 2018 (organized by UN Environment and the Ministry of Environment of Peru, supported by UN Global Compact Peru Network and the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru)
- » Workshop Communicating Product Sustainability in Santiago, Chile on 6th July 2018 (organized by UN Environment and the Ministry of Environment of Chile, supported by UN Global Compact Chile Network)
- » Section on the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information*, including an exercise with regional retailers and policy makers, in Lima, Peru on 19-24th November 2017 (developed as part of the Better by Design Project. The project is implemented by a consortium composed of WRAP, 3Keel, adelphi, University of Toulouse, Thema 1, LAC Footprint Initiative, World Resources Forum, CONADES, CICOMER, Cleaner Production Center of Nicaragua (CP+L – Nicaragua) and Grupo GEA)

- » Section on the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information*, including an exercise with regional retailers and producers, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras on 12th March 2018 (developed as part of the Better by Design Project. The project is implemented by a consortium composed of WRAP, 3Keel, adelphi, University of Toulouse, Thema 1, LAC Footprint Initiative, World Resources Forum, CONADES, CICOMER, Cleaner Production Center of Nicaragua (CP+L – Nicaragua) and Grupo GEA)
- » Section on the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information*, including an exercise with regional retailers and producers, in Managua, Nicaragua on 14th March 2018 (developed as part of the Better by Design Project. The project is implemented by a consortium composed of WRAP, 3Keel, adelphi, University of Toulouse, Thema 1, LAC Footprint Initiative, World Resources Forum, CONADES, CICOMER, Cleaner Production Center of Nicaragua (CP+L – Nicaragua) and Grupo GEA)
- » Section on the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information*, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras on 26th April 2018 (developed by CICOMER (Honduras) and LAC Footprint Initiative and financed by the Government of Japan for the Investment and Exports Foundation (FIDE) of Honduras)

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The [Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information](#) (hereafter referred to as the Guidelines), published in 2017 by UN Environment and the International Trade Centre, encourage information providers to communicate credible and reliable sustainability information to consumers. This seminal publication aims at addressing the underlying causes of information overload, consumer confusion and lack of credibility. After the successful launch of the Guidelines (with over 1,500 downloads as of September 2018), the One Planet network Consumer Information Programme embarked on an ambitious road testing process.

This report complements the Guidelines by offering insights into the practical application of the Guidelines' ten principles, based on the outcomes of a global road testing exercise that was held from January to June 2018. The main results of the road testing were also confirmed in eleven in-country workshops during the same period. This document presents results, challenges and lessons learned throughout this process, and is complemented by a number of case studies around the practical application of the Guidelines' principles by companies and standard-setting organizations: the so-called road testers.