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## DEVELOPING CRITERIA, INDICATORS & VERIFIERS

*This is one of a series of papers produced by the Natural Resource and Ethical Trade Programme (NRET) of the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich. The papers cover key themes relevant to the implementation of codes of practice in the fresh produce industry, with a focus on developing countries. They draw on findings from a 3-year NRET research project which looked at how the impact of codes on workers and smallholders could be improved. Themes covered are: the case for national codes; developing multi-stakeholder institutions; integrated social & environmental auditing; managing codes in the smallholder sector; building awareness and support for codes; and developing criteria, indicators and verifiers. For copies of the papers, please contact NRET at the Natural Resources Institute, Chatham Maritime, Kent ME4 4TB, U.K., email: nret@gre.ac.uk, or download from the Internet at: <http://www.nri.org/NRET/nret.htm>*

### Who is this paper for?

Individuals in supermarkets, European code bodies and growers' associations who are responsible for developing codes and/or putting them into practice.

### Purpose of the paper

To provide practical guidance on how to develop social and environmental criteria, indicators and verifiers (CIVs) for codes of practice.

Please see **Theme Paper 3: What are Criteria, Indicators & Verifiers?** for definitions and an explanation of the need for good criteria, indicators and verifiers.

### Executive Summary

Who should develop CIVs?

You need a team with: strong interpersonal skills, social sensitivity and diplomacy; knowledge of regional/ethnic languages or dialects; familiarity with the export horticulture sector (smallholders and commercial farms); and experience of participatory research approaches and techniques. At least one team member should have specialist knowledge of each of the social, environmental and food safety aspects of the code.

Guiding principles for CIV development process

- Stakeholder-led, consultative (with the exception of some environmental aspects)
- Non-discriminatory – all stakeholders are given a hearing
- Non-judgemental – it is **not** an audit
- Voluntary – no-one is forced to give information
- Bridge-building – aiming to reconcile differences between stakeholders

Key steps in the process

- ❶ **Review existing sources of information on CIVs:** local organisations with relevant knowledge, other codes of practice covering similar issues.
- ❷ **Identifying stakeholder groups:** consult with owners, managers and workers of export companies/packhouses, commercial farms and smallholder farms.
- ❸ **Introducing the process:** make sure that both workers and management understand that you will be non-judgemental and ensure confidentiality. Let them know how you will use the information collected, and how you will select participants.
- ❹ **Collecting the data:** use informal individual and group interviews, supported by diagramming exercises such as mapping, daily routine diagrams, transect walks and ranking/scoring exercises.
- ❺ **Repeated visits:** repeated visits are important to build trust, improve understanding, and minimise disruption to export operations.
- ❻ **Feedback, review & modification of CIVs:** it is important to feed back synthesised findings to both workers and management.
- ❼ **Field test and refine CIVs:** this can be done through pilot audits.

N.B. Additional methods need to be used in identifying CIVs for certain environmental issues.

## Introduction

Many of the major European supermarkets are now implementing codes of practice in response to growing consumer concern about food production methods and their impact on poor people and the environment. Codes require producers to meet minimum standards on food safety, working conditions, and environmentally friendly production. In all parts of the world, exporters and growers supplying European supermarkets are now being asked to comply with these codes. In response to these supermarket codes, a growing number of horticultural producer associations in developing countries have also been developing their own national codes of practice (NCOPs). NCOPs have been set up as a means of ensuring that producers comply with the supermarket codes, so they reflect the standards required by supermarkets.

There is a good deal of overlap in the kinds of issues covered by the different supermarket and national codes. However, there are big differences in the level of detail to which the issues or principles are spelt out. In many cases, statements are made at the level of vague aspirations and left at that. Yet, if a code is to have any “teeth”, all the principles and values it aspires to need to be backed up by details of *what* exactly is required, and *how* the principles and values are going to be achieved or met.

But there are good reasons why codes often get stuck at the level of general principles or aspirations, and don't get down to defining criteria, indicators and verifiers. How a given principle should be interpreted and put into practice will vary depending on the particular economic, social and physical conditions to be found in a given country or sector. For example, what would count as a minimum “living wage” in England would be the equivalent of a generous professional salary in Ethiopia. Moreover, when it comes to social principles, different groups of people will have different priorities, and these differences need to be taken into account when developing criteria and indicators. For example, while female workers may consider the existence of maternity leave as an important criterion when considering employment terms and conditions, male workers may not perceive maternity leave to be a significant issue. So developing good quality and appropriate CIVs is not an easy task, and requires sensitivity to local conditions.

This paper provides practical guidance on how to go about developing robust criteria, indicators and verifiers, which take into account the conditions faced by horticultural farmers and workers in developing countries, and the varying priorities of different stakeholders.

## Who should develop criteria, indicators & verifiers?

Developing criteria, indicators and verifiers (CIVs) requires specialist knowledge and skills, so you should consider recruiting externally if you do not have the necessary skills within your organisation or company. It is not an easy task to do well, yet the quality of CIVs will really affect the quality of future auditing against the code, and the ease with which producers can interpret and implement the code. NRET's experience suggests that you need a better qualified and experienced team to develop CIVs, compared to the level of qualifications/experience necessary for an audit team. So if you decide to recruit, it is worth paying the price for good people.

### Knowledge, skills and experience required

A team of 2 or 4 members is recommended (if there are 4 members, they may carry out field work separately in 2 pairs). All of the team members should have the following characteristics:

- **Familiarity with the export horticulture sector** (smallholders and commercial farms)
- **Experience of participatory research approaches and techniques** (e.g. Participatory Rural Appraisal or PRA)
- **Strong interpersonal skills, social sensitivity and diplomacy.** You need people who can win the trust of workers and smallholders, as well as senior managers and farm owners. Team members need to be diplomatic, since the work involves probing sensitive topics such as the relationship between employers and workers – issues that may be at the heart of entrenched conflicts between stakeholders.

- **Knowledge of regional/ethnic languages or dialects.** Many African countries are made up of a variety of ethnic groups, each of which may speak different languages or dialects. It is important that the team includes members who can speak the particular languages or dialects of the workers and smallholders in the export horticulture sector.

#### Social issues specialist

At least one member of the team should have a training in and knowledge of the social aspects of the code, and knowledge and experience of the social conditions and constraints faced by smallholders and agricultural workers. Preferably, this member should be a trained sociologist, social anthropologist or social development specialist with experience in agriculture.

#### Environmental and food safety specialist(s)

It is also essential to have a team member who has a sound knowledge of the agronomic (technical) aspects of production and post-harvest handling practices for the key export crops, both on commercial and on smallholder farms. The individual also needs to have a practical knowledge of sustainable agricultural practices and a broad awareness of environmental implications of production and post-harvest practices for the crops in question. Preferably, they will also have experience of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

#### Where to look

Where are you likely to find researchers with the relevant skills and experience? This will vary from country to country, but you should consider the following:

- Social science, agriculture or environmental departments of local universities
- Agricultural research institutes
- Larger NGOs working on rural development and/or environmental issues
- Environmental consultancy firms.

## Guiding principles & key steps

### Guiding principles

There are a number of principles that underpin the successful development of CIVs. The process should be:

- Stakeholder-led, consultative (with the exception of some environmental aspects – see later)
- Non-discriminatory – all stakeholders are given a hearing
- Non-judgemental – it is **not** an audit
- Voluntary – no-one is forced to give information
- Bridge-building – aiming to reconcile differences between stakeholders

### Key steps in the process

The process involves the following steps:

- ➊ Review existing sources of information on CIVs
- ➋ Identifying stakeholder groups
- ➌ Introducing the work
- ➍ Collecting the data
- ➎ Repeated visits
- ➏ Synthesis, feedback, review & modification
- ➐ Field test and refine CIVs

## ➊ Review existing sources of information

Possible sources of information include:

- **Local organisations with relevant knowledge:** e.g. NGOs, government labour inspectorates, government environmental departments, private agricultural or environmental consultants,

university departments, agricultural research institutes. Arrange meetings with them to get general guidance, try and get hold of any relevant reports, and/or consider recruiting appropriate individuals onto your CIV team.

- **CIVs currently used by other codes/code bodies:** e.g. COLEACP Harmonised Framework 2000, the SA8000 Guidance Document for auditors, self-audit questionnaires used by other schemes such as EUREP GAP, AEAZ (see **Theme Paper 8: Where to Find Further Information**).

## 2 Who needs to be consulted?

Representatives from the following stakeholder groups need to be consulted as part of the process of developing CIVs: owners, managers and workers of export companies/packhouses, commercial farms and smallholder farms. Within these broad stakeholder groups, there are likely to be “sub-groups” who have different priorities, concerns and interests from each other e.g. amongst the broad stakeholder group of workers, you may have different interests between migrant and local workers, male and female workers, permanent and casual workers. You need to find criteria, indicators and verifiers that meet the priorities of all these sub-groups.

There may also be individuals or teams with specific responsibilities and/or knowledge who may be able to help you on particular areas of the code e.g. union representatives, the pesticide spray team, the health and safety officer. You need to identify who these are and make sure you draw on their specialised knowledge.

It is generally best to consult with each stakeholder group and sub-group on a separate basis. However, this can be time-consuming if you have identified many different sub-groups. In such a case you may wish to interview one or more groups together, and draw out differences between them as part of the interview. Nevertheless, you should always avoid mixing groups where one group is likely to feel intimidated by the other e.g. interviewing workers in front of their supervisors. In such a situation, workers will be afraid to speak out and you will not be getting good information.

## 3 Introducing the process

It is very important to think carefully about how to introduce the process, both to management and workers. The whole concept of codes may be new to them, so you may need to think about how to explain the code to them in a way that they will understand and appreciate (see section on “Entry Points” in **Theme Paper 5: Building Awareness & Support for Codes**). In addition, you need to emphasise that the purpose of the study is to develop the code and the tools for measuring compliance – it is **not** about measuring performance of the company itself. In particular, NRET’s experience shows that it is important to emphasise the following points with management and workers, respectively:

For management :

- **Non-judgemental:** the study is non-judgemental. It will not lay blame on owners, managers or workers. The aim is to develop CIVs which incorporate all stakeholders’ views.
- **Confidentiality:** the study is not interested in commercial aspects of the operation, and will not collect or release any information that will threaten the company’s commercial interests. Likewise, the study will not release any information on the company’s treatment of workers.
- **Review by management:** Management will have the chance to review CIVs developed with smallholders & workers. The final CIVs will take into account management perspectives.
- **Use of information:** How information collected will be used i.e. to develop CIVs, and that’s all.
- **Selection of participants:** How you would like to select workers and smallholders to participate in the study, what exactly you will do with workers and smallholders, what they will be told and what they will be asked. Emphasise that you understand the need to manage the expectations of workers and smallholders.

For workers:

- **Confidentiality:** no-one is forced to take part in the study. If they don't feel comfortable taking part in the interviews, they don't have to. If they do decide to take part, no names will be taken or used during interviews, to help maintain confidentiality.
- **Review by management:** Management will have the chance to review the CIVs developed with workers, and the study will take into account management's constraints and suggestions.
- **Use of information:** How information collected from the study will be used i.e. to develop CIVs. N.B. management are not immediately obliged to act on issues raised during the study.
- **Selection of participants:** What will be their involvement in the study process. How workers will be selected to take part in interviews and discussions, what they will be asked, timing of interviews/discussions. Make sure you ask workers what timing and location would be convenient for them.

## 4 Data collection techniques

Sample checklist

The following is a sample checklist of questions to be asked when developing CIVs for health and safety issues. This can be used as a basis for developing checklists for other code areas.

### SAMPLE CHECKLIST FOR DEVELOPING CIVs ON HEALTH & SAFETY (H&S)

#### **Questions for workers**

**To identify H&S criteria:** Explain that the code requires employers to provide safe & hygienic working conditions. Ask workers if they think their job is dangerous. Why? What are the specific H&S risks of their job? Does their employer do anything to help reduce the risks, or to provide help if an accident takes place? What do workers think need to be done to reduce risks (what procedures, facilities etc.).

**To identify H&S indicators and verifiers:** Ask workers how they think a visitor to the farm/packhouse would be able to find out whether or not their employer was providing safe and hygienic working conditions. What indicators would they look for? How would they get the information they wanted (who should they talk to? where do they need to look?)?

#### **Questions for management**

**To refine H&S criteria:** Explain that the code requires employers to provide safe and hygienic working conditions, and that you have talked to workers about their perceptions of H&S. Ask management which jobs are most dangerous, which are least dangerous. Why? What are the specific H&S risks? What does management do to help reduce the risks, or to provide help if an accident takes place? Are there any improvements that could be made? List any additional risks/criteria mentioned by workers – does management agree with these? List suggestions made by workers to reduce risks – does management think these are possible & practical? Why? Any other suggestions?

**To refine indicators & verifiers:** Ask how they think a visitor to the farm/packhouse would be able to find out whether or not the company was providing safe and hygienic working conditions. What indicators would they look for? How would they get the information they wanted? What relevant records are kept? List indicators & verifiers suggested by workers – does management think they are workable, accurate? Why? Any alternatives?

Specific data collection techniques

NRET's experience in Ghana and Zimbabwe shows that informal interviews – either with individuals or with groups of 8-12 workers – are the best method of data collection. For group interviews, you need to make sure that the workers are “peers” – e.g. don't mix general workers with supervisory staff, and in general it is best to interview men and women separately. Group interviews can be strengthened by combining them with a diagramming exercise. Such exercises help to relax interviewees, bring out detailed information on specific issues, and are fun! Examples of particular exercises found to be useful by NRET researchers are given in the box below. For further details about each exercise, please refer to the PRA reference listed in **Theme Paper 8: Where to Find Further Information.**

### DIAGRAMMING TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING CIVs

**Mapping:** Ask workers to draw a map of the farm, packhouse or other relevant area. For example, a map of the farm can be useful to identify CIVs about housing (e.g. where should new housing be located?), and about environmental management (e.g. identifying potential sources of water pollution, identifying visual verifiers).

**Daily routine diagrams:** Draw a clock face on the ground or a big piece of paper, and ask the workers to draw on what they are doing at different times of day, using words or symbols to represent different activities as appropriate. This exercise is useful for drawing out information about transport for workers (frequency/quality of transport – what do workers consider to be acceptable standard?), working hours and amount of overtime (what do workers consider a reasonable amount of overtime? What is considered a reasonable working week?), rest periods (do these need to be formalised? Do workers prefer 2 short breaks or one longer break?), access to toilets and washing facilities.

**Transect walks:** Transect walks are walks where a route is planned to take in a “cross-section” of the farm and/or packhouse, including key points of interest, such as worker accommodation, toilets, pesticides stores, waste disposal facilities, water sources. A transect walk allows you to cross-check information by seeing, hearing and smelling (!). You may well pick up on new issues that workers haven't mentioned. Walks are particularly important for identifying key environmental risks for that particular farming system/crop/agroecological conditions, and identifying corresponding CIVs.

**Matrix ranking/preference scoring:** You will very soon end up with a situation where you have many different CIVs. At the end of the day, the emphasis needs to be on quality rather than quantity – you need a few good CIVs, rather than many mediocre ones. So an important part of the process once you have collected the data is to get workers and other stakeholders to prioritise. For them, which are the most important issues? For the six criteria identified for one principle, which are the really crucial ones? Matrix ranking and preference scoring are 2 effective diagramming techniques that can be used to prioritise CIVs.

## 5 Repeated visits

NRET's experience in Zimbabwe and Ghana demonstrated that it is very important to carry out repeated visits to the same farm/packhouse, and have a series of discussions with the same groups of people over a period of time. Repeated visits were found to be critical in obtaining comprehensive, in-depth and accurate information from workers as well as management. Repeated visits help to:

**Build up trust:** Many of the issues addressed by codes are sensitive for exporters and farmers. For example, in Zimbabwe, labour issues are culturally and politically sensitive due to most farm owners being white, and the majority of farm workers being black. Environmental issues on horticultural farms are also a touchy subject, due to recent TV documentaries on the alleged environmental damage caused by intensive export horticultural farms in Zimbabwe. Given such a backdrop, it is not surprising that it takes time to build up trust between farmers and the study team. Until that trust is built, farmers and managers are unlikely to speak freely about labour and environmental issues. And building trust takes time – hence the importance of repeated visits. This is equally true with workers, who may initially be anxious that the study team is on the side of management, and will “spill the beans” if they say anything critical. Again, it will take time for the study team to win the trust of workers. Until trust is won, workers are unlikely to be very open about their concerns.

**Develop understanding:** Repeated visits over a period of time give people time to mull things over. The concepts of codes of practice, principles, criteria, indicators and verifiers are difficult to grasp, and often take time for managers and workers to become familiar with. Repeated visits, with constant reminders of the concepts, and time for questions to be asked and answered, help workers and managers to develop a better understanding of the issues, and gives them time to reflect on previous discussions. This helps to ensure that key issues are not left out.

**Avoid disruption:** A series of short visits is less disruptive for farm and export operations. Managers on export farms tend to find it difficult to give up big chunks of their day, given the nature of their operations. A larger number of brief interviews therefore helps to get round this logistical constraint. This is also an issue for workers on piece rates – they will start getting edgy if interviews go on for more than one hour, since this may prevent them from reaching daily harvesting or other targets.

## 7 Feedback, review & modification

Information collected through interviews and discussions will inevitably be somewhat jumbled – with criteria, indicators and verifiers mixed together to a greater or lesser extent. The team will therefore need to sort and summarise the information after visits. It is important that you feed back your synthesised criteria, indicators and verifiers to the informants (i.e. the people who gave you the information), so you can check whether or not you have got the main points, interpreted things correctly. Once you have done this, you then need to present the synthesised results to the managers and owners. This is to give them the chance to review the CIVs, to say if something is incorrect or unrealistic, and to mention any constraints they may face to implementing the criteria, using the indicators, or finding the verifiers. This is also a good opportunity for management to suggest alternative or additional indicators and verifiers. The appropriate way to get this feedback will vary from place to place. By way of example, the feedback processes used in Zimbabwe and Ghana are described in the box below.

### EXAMPLES OF FEEDING BACK CIVs TO MANAGEMENT

#### Zimbabwe

Indicators and verifiers identified by workers, smallholders and the research team were presented at a one-to-one meeting with appointed manager(s) of the individual company. During these meetings, the managers were given the chance to propose amendments, to note if they considered any CIVs to be unrealistic, unacceptable, and/or impractical. Any amendments suggested by management were then presented back to the relevant stakeholder group (workers or smallholders), and the final set of CIVs were based on finding some kind of compromise between the two groups. Some of the exporters/managers suggested that a quicker way of getting feedback on the draft CIVs would be to use a written questionnaire, which they would complete in their own time and send back to the CIV team. However, the NRET team felt that this would only work with a limited number of exporters.

#### Ghana

The initial set of principles, criteria, indicators and verifiers identified from field work with the case study companies was summarised into a set of matrices – or the draft code. A multi-stakeholder working group was then formed to review each section of the code. The working group consisted of exporters, growers, smallholders, representatives from the Export Promotion Council, horticultural trade associations and the ministry of agriculture, and the research team (acting both as facilitators and representative of worker interests). The working group reviewed the code section by section over a series of a dozen meetings. Many indicators were clarified and modified through the suggestions of the group and the draft code was shaped into a more practical, coherent format. Although the process was time consuming, it helped to build a strong sense of consensus and ownership of the code by the industry.

## 8 Field testing of CIVs

However well you have done the job, you are unlikely to come up with a perfect set of indicators and verifiers first time round. This is normal, but for this reason it is very important then to “field test” your indicators and verifiers through a series of pilot audits (i.e. the process can be combined with field-testing of your audit methodology). After field testing, you will find that some indicators are too vague, some verifiers (written records) non-existent. So you will have to throw some out, and add a few new ones. You may find that it is useful for the audit team to review indicators and verifiers on an annual basis, since as the audit team becomes more experienced, they will get better at identifying good indicators and verifiers.

## Developing environmental CIVs – additional methods

The approach described above for developing CIVs relies heavily on stakeholder consultation, where stakeholders' own perceptions are used to identify and prioritise appropriate CIVs. This tends to work well with most of the social issues – workers on the whole are well placed to say what constitutes good worker welfare standards. It also works reasonably well where environmental good practice complements social good practice e.g. responsible pesticide management, clean water, preservation/planting of woodlots. In such cases, workers or other stakeholders can be relied upon to raise the issues, since they also touch on their own welfare. However, reliance on stakeholder perceptions does not provide all the answers when it comes to environmental CIVs.

In the first place, workers' and even managers' awareness of environmental issues was found to be quite limited in both Ghana and Zimbabwe. Moreover, the environmental sections of codes drafted by European stakeholders can also be narrow in focus, only emphasising environmental issues that have received strong media coverage or have been the focus of NGO campaigning. Secondly, environmental aims may threaten or conflict with short-term priorities of workers and managers. For both reasons, stakeholder consultation cannot be relied on to come up with a comprehensive list of environmental issues that should be covered by codes.

In response to these constraints, the approach developed and tested in Ghana was as follows. The environmental specialist on the team (previously an organic inspector) developed a checklist of possible environmental hazards of pineapple production, based on observations made during preparatory field visits with the rest of the research team. He also highlighted examples of “good practice” and “bad practice” – which helped in identifying potential criteria and indicators – and providing training for other team members on how to develop appropriate environmental indicators and verifiers. The team identified a number of environmental issues and CIVs through stakeholder interviews and discussions. They then compared these results with the environmental checklist, and earmarked issues for further attention. Appropriate CIVs for the missing elements were then identified through more guided discussions with farm managers, and further field observation.

N.B. Given the resource and time constraints of auditing against codes, the environmental CIVs focus on the existence or otherwise of appropriate **practices** (e.g. contour planting, crop rotation, mulching), and **not** on measuring **environmental impact** (e.g. changes in soil fertility over time, monitoring of water quality).

## For further information...

Please see **Theme Paper 8 – Where to Find Further Information.**

The information contained in this paper is distilled from a 3-year study managed by the Natural Resources and Ethical Trade Programme (NRET), in collaboration with Agro Eco Consultancy of the Netherlands and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) of the University of Zimbabwe. The study involved in-depth research in Ghana and Zimbabwe and the U.K, and was conducted in close collaboration with key players involved in the supply of fresh horticultural produce to European markets, from farm workers to supermarket buyers. For more detailed information about the findings from the study, please contact NRET (contact details are on the front page). The individual researchers involved in the study were Man-Kwun Chan (Project Leader), Geoffrey Bockett, Mick Blowfield, Stephanie Gallat, Seth Gogoe, Richard Tweneboah-Kodua (NRI); Rufaro Madakadze, Elias Madzudzo, Diana Auret, Edward Mbizo (CASS); and Bo van Elzakker (Agro Eco Consultancy).

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