

Discussion paper on a proposal for a GBEP Task Force to work towards the development of a voluntary international sustainability framework of principles for bio-energy

Background

1. Bio-energy is a valuable and important part of the renewable energy mix. It offers considerable potential to help mitigate climate change, enhance energy security and support economic development, especially for developing countries and other emerging economies. Alongside this, there is a broad global consensus across governments, industry, international institutions and civil society, that bio-energy must be developed in a sustainable way to ensure that any negative environmental, social and economic consequences are avoided. At this time there is no such international consensus on the best ways to achieve this or a formal global decision-making mechanism through which to obtain it.
2. There is currently a multitude of separate initiatives looking at or developing sustainability standards, criteria and compliance schemes (including certification) for bio-energy, mainly biofuels, and a number of regulatory measures are either in development or about to come into force, most notably in Europe and the USA. Several studies and reports have suggested what such standards should cover and optimum approaches for their implementation. The level of activity in this sector is evidence of the strong global interest and commitment to finding ways of achieving sustainable bio-energy development.
3. But there is also growing concern that these largely un-coordinated efforts could lead to a number of competing and duplicate standards and compliance/certification schemes with different requirements. This proliferation could have adverse consequences, including:
 - excessive burdens on producers, with the main impact being felt in developing countries and emerging economies;
 - inconsistent enforcement;
 - market segmentation and risk of international disputes arising from a lack of a harmonised approach;
 - confusion over comparative benefits (especially for consumers) which could influence the acceptability or otherwise of certain bio-energy technologies and products;
 - a barrier to the expansion of global bio-energy markets; and
 - failure to address sustainability concerns in the round at international level due to dissipation of effort.
4. If these consequences are to be avoided, international efforts on sustainability of bio-energy need to be more joined up, and where possible integrated, to ensure that they are on a common track and deliver consistent and complementary outcomes. The Global Bio-energy Partnership, with its growing membership and clear mandate from the

Heiligendamm G8 Summit of June 2007 to “take forward the successful and sustainable development of bio-energy” is ideally placed to pursue this important work.

Work proposal

5. In order to support a more coherent effort to address the sustainability issue at the global level, GBEP should establish a Task Force with the following three key objectives:
 - 1) to develop a voluntary framework of international sustainability principles for bio-energy (which would form the main element of the task);
 - 2) to facilitate closer co-operation between organisations and groups currently working to define sustainability standards and compliance/certification schemes in order to minimise duplication and overlap of effort, and to achieve consistent outcomes;
 - 3) to improve understanding of the practical application of sustainability standards and compliance/certification schemes in different circumstances and settings by identifying current best practices and facilitating collaborative field projects and R, D & D, and to use this information to inform future policy development and improvements in achieving sustainable development in practice.

Objective 1 - International sustainability framework for bio-energy

6. The deliverable would be in the form of an overarching framework of principles covering the environmental, social and economic factors relevant to the sustainable development of bio-energy. It would apply to all forms of bio-energy, including transport biofuels, solid biomass for energy use and biogas/biomethane, and cover all types of feed stocks used in their production.
7. The principles would be designed in such a way as to enable them to be applied, *inter alia*, to the development of national and international bio-energy sustainability policies and regulatory measures, future sustainability standards, including the achievement of environmental quality standards for air and water, and criteria to support project funding decisions. They would serve as an international reference point with the principal aim of ensuring that such policies, standards and criteria develop in a consistent and transparent way. As the framework would, in effect, be a meta-standard, the Task Force would need to consider whether the framework should be benchmarked against other standards and the feasibility of undertaking such a task. The Task Force would also develop a set of guidelines on the practical application of the principles for use by decision-makers in governments and industry, international decision-making bodies, those investing in bio-energy projects and technologies (including international development banks and investors), and civil society.
8. All GBEP Partners would be invited to endorse the final framework of principles and application guidelines. Other non-Partner national governments, international institutions, civil society and industry groups and other stakeholder interests would also be welcome to endorse them according to their wishes. The Task Force would also examine how, and through which international mechanisms, the framework could be formally recognised and adopted as a global reference point, i.e. beyond GBEP, on sustainability of bio-

energy, and to set this out in a discussion paper outlining possible options for consideration.

9. The bio-energy sustainability framework should in particular make a valuable contribution to a range of related international objectives, including climate change, food security, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, rural development and international trade. All of these aspects will need to be taken into account by the Task Force.
10. The development of common principles does not imply the selection of a particular model or approach. Nor would it seek to replace initiatives addressing specific needs and/or circumstances which are either in operation or in the pipe line. Instead, the Task Force would harness the efforts of those which have gone before in order to learn from the experience of others, maximise the use of global expertise and knowledge in this area and avoid unnecessary conflict and duplication. It will therefore be essential for the Task Force to establish close links with other countries, groups and organisations responsible for, or working to develop, standards for sustainability of bio-energy and compliance/certification schemes, including:
 - The roundtables on sustainable biofuels, palm oil and responsible soy, the Better Sugarcane Initiative, IEA Task 40 on Sustainable International Bio-energy Trade, the Brazilian biofuel certification initiative, the Dutch, German and UK governments and their agencies who have considerable experience in this field, the European Commission and CEN, who are currently considering developing a European standard for the sustainable production of biomass for transport fuels and energy production applications.
11. The Task Force on sustainability will also liaise closely with the GBEP Task Force on GHG Methodologies for Biofuels, which is working on the greenhouse gas emission elements of sustainability, to ensure consistency between the two GBEP initiatives. Consideration will be given to whether the outputs of the two Task Forces could be combined in due course.
12. As far as possible the framework of principles should be future-proofed to accommodate the emergence of future generation bio-energy technologies. The framework should be kept under review to ensure it remains relevant and up to date.
13. The main elements of the work programme to develop the principles and application guidelines would most likely include:
 - a stock take of current bio-energy sustainability standards initiatives and compliance/certification schemes, and a short report on common principles, standards, criteria and requirements for the sustainable development of bio-energy, as well as any differences and identified barriers to consensus. This would be an essential first step in informing the development of the draft principles and guidelines. (Much of this analysis has already been done by earlier studies and so it would not be a major task to collate the findings into a single paper);
 - Drawing up stakeholder communication and engagement strategies to ensure the widest possible awareness of, and buy-in to, the framework;

- Developing the principles and guidelines within the Task Force and with interested/engaged stakeholders through an iterative process;
- Identifying issues on which there is currently no consensus and attempting to agree an acceptable way forward on them;
- Finalising the principles and the guidelines, seeking the endorsement of the GBEP Partners and the G8 (and ideally those +5 countries which are not at that time GBEP Partners) at the Summit of the Italian G8 Presidency in 2009 and publishing them with recommendations on their use.
- Seeking endorsement from non-GBEP countries, other key international organisations in accordance with their decision-making arrangements, e.g. CBD, UNFCCC, IPCC, civil society and industry groups and other stakeholder interests.

Objective 2 - Encouraging closer co-operation

14. The work of the Task Force would also provide a useful platform for the analysis of current sustainability standards/principles and compliance/certification initiatives and enable those involved to share information, data, experiences and best practices on the different approaches. The main aim would be to identify synergies between these efforts and encourage closer joint working and integration where possible to ensure they are on a common track. The suggested report on the existing sustainability standards and initiatives would inform this activity.

Objective 3 - Improve understanding

15. The Task Force would seek to establish a portfolio of field projects and R, D & D activities to promote further understanding of the practical application and assurance of sustainability standards in relation to bio-energy production. These projects and initiatives (which may include ongoing activities) would be undertaken by GBEP Partners and other willing parties under the GBEP umbrella. The results would be disseminated widely to inform development of future policies and measures to enhance sustainability.
16. In addition, the Task Force could commission a review of ongoing and completed projects to identify lessons learned and best practices for wider dissemination, with the same objective as above.

Stakeholder engagement

17. Membership of the Task Force will be open to all GBEP Partners. It's work will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders in industry and civil society, custodians of other relevant sustainability and compliance/certification schemes, international development institutions (including development banks and investors) and key international decision-making bodies and institutions, such as the UNFCCC, the IPCC and the CBD, which have a direct interest in achieving sustainable bio-energy development in the context of the wider climate change and biodiversity agendas.
18. Securing the involvement of biomass-producing developing countries and emerging economies in this work will be essential to ensure their buy-in to the principles given the

significant impact the principles could have on those countries and the crucial role of those countries in delivering any associated environmental and social benefits. The capacity and capability of these countries to apply and enforce the principles should also be taken into account and consideration given to possible practical measures to support their application.

19. The development of stakeholder communication and engagement strategies, therefore, will be priority early jobs for the Task Force. International organisations, including several GBEP Partners, with established links with developing countries/emerging economies can play a very important role in helping to raise awareness of this work and facilitating engagement between the Task Force and those countries. Lessons from consultations undertaken by other sustainability standards initiatives in developing countries, for example, by the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels, could also be informative. The Task Force will explore and seek to maximise such possibilities.

Outputs/deliverables

20. The main outputs/deliverables of this Task Force will be:

- An internationally endorsed framework of sustainability principles for bio-energy with application guidelines;
- A paper summarising existing bio-energy sustainability standards initiatives and compliance/certification schemes, including commonalities and differences;
- An options paper setting out a possible route map towards the formal international endorsement of the framework;
- A portfolio of field projects and R, D & D activities to promote further understanding of the practical application and assurance of sustainable bio-energy production, and subsequent dissemination of the results to inform future policy development;
- A report on best practices and lessons learned on the practical application of sustainability principles and compliance/certification schemes from previous and ongoing bio-energy projects and initiatives.

21. These outputs/deliverables will complement those from a separate, but related, work stream on facilitating collaboration on bio-energy field projects. There is a linked paper on this for discussion at the TWG meeting on 9/10 April 2008.

Next steps and Timescale

22. This paper will be discussed by the GBEP Technical Working Group (TWG) on 9/10 April 2008 in London. Following that meeting, and subject to the TWG's agreement, a formal paper proposing the establishment of a Task Force will be prepared for discussion and endorsement by the 5th meeting of the GBEP Steering Committee, which is expected to be held towards the end of May or in June 2008.

23. The Task Force will need to work quickly and make early progress in order to maximise the opportunities presented by a number of prominent and influential conferences on sustainability aspects of biofuels/bio-energy in the second half of 2008, including the FAO High-Level conference, an IUCN event in October and an international biofuels conference in Brazil in November. In view of this, and in order to build early momentum, **it is proposed that the Task Force be established** following the TWG meeting **pending formal approval by the Steering Committee**. During the intervening period, the Task Force could undertake preparatory work, such as identifying the prospective membership (including experts), drafting terms of reference and scope of work, building engagement with interested countries and stakeholders, gathering information on current sustainability practices and fleshing out the main elements of a sustainability framework. This would enable the Task Force to move ahead quickly once approval is formally received from the Steering Committee.
24. The establishment of the Task Force should be endorsed or welcomed by the July G8 Summit, as should the establishment and work of the separate Task Force on GHG Methodologies for Biofuels, which commenced work between Summit sessions. The GBEP Secretariat will prepare a paper for the Japanese Summit drawing attention to these two initiatives, summarising their objectives and progress, and the timing of the respective deliverables.
25. The work of the sustainability Task Force may be sufficiently advanced to enable the Chair of GBEP to provide a useful update at the Brazil conference in November (subject to invitation). (Such a presentation could also cover the work of the GHG Methodologies Task Force. A GBEP side event may be another option if a slot at the main conference is not forthcoming).
26. The first significant milestone would be to secure G8 endorsement of the framework of sustainability principles and guidelines at the July 2009 Summit in Italy. In order to meet this deadline, the framework would need to be finalised by April 2009. Following G8 endorsement, efforts would be made to secure wider international endorsement of the framework. The Task Force may need to continue in operation beyond the Italian G8 Summit to complete some of the other activities outlined in this paper.
27. An outline schedule of work is attached in the Annex to this paper.

Resources

28. The UK is willing to lead this Task Force with support and contributions from other willing Partners.

ANNEX

Proposed GBEP Task Force on Sustainable Bio-energy – outline work schedule

1) Establish the Task Force during April 2008, subject to endorsement by the TWG on 9/10 April. Undertake the following tasks in advance of the 5th meeting of the GBEP Steering Committee:

- Identify the prospective membership of the Task Force, including experts within each Partner country (i.e. from governments, industry and academia) and institution;
- Draft terms of reference and scope of work for the Task Force, including the identification and preliminary allocation of specific tasks among the Task Force members;
- Develop outline stakeholder communication and engagement strategies. In parallel, identify potential stakeholders and make initial contact with them to raise awareness of the Task Force and encourage their involvement in its work;
- Gather and begin collating information on current bio-energy sustainability standards and compliance initiatives and flesh out the main elements of a framework of sustainability principles;
- Finalise the work proposal in light of the TWG discussions for submission to the Steering Committee for endorsement.

2) Hold first formal meeting of the Task Force as soon as possible after the Steering Committee's endorsement is received. In the interests of efficiency, this meeting could be held in conjunction with the 5th Steering Committee meeting. The first Task Force meeting would:

- Formally agree the terms of reference, scope of work, work plan, the activities to be undertaken and outputs/deliverables, the division of labour between the members and the stakeholder communication/engagement activities;
- Discuss each of the three objectives and the next steps for taking them forward.

3) Subject to the outcome of the first Task Force meeting:

- Develop a protocol for gathering information on best practices and lessons learned on the practical application and assurance of sustainable bio-energy production – by July 2008 (to be agreed by the Task Force by email, with the aim of issuing it in September 2008 following the summer break);
- Produce a first official draft of a framework of principles and an outline of the application guidelines – by September 2008;
- Carry out the stock take of existing sustainability standards/principles and compliance/certification initiatives, and produce a paper summarising commonalities and any differences – by September 2008;
- Develop proposals and modalities for building a portfolio of field projects and R, D & D activities around sustainable bio-energy production – by September 2008.

4) Hold a stakeholder seminar/workshop before the end of September 2008 to facilitate information sharing and consult stakeholders on the work of the Task Force. Possible topics could include:

- Presentations on current sustainability standards and compliance initiatives to share information and experiences, and identify the potential for greater synergy between the initiatives going forward;
- Discussion of the draft framework of principles and content of the application guidelines to establish where there is consensus and areas of difference, and discuss possible solutions to (the seminar/workshop would therefore double as a step in the consultation process).
- Discussion of other products produced by the Task Force to date and other work to be undertaken.

5) Following the workshop, refine the draft framework and guidelines and circulate them in early November 2008 to the Task Force and interested stakeholders for further comment. Further refine the draft framework and guidelines by the first week of January 2009 on the basis of comments received and prepare another draft for international consultation

6) Publish the revised draft for consultation on the GBEP web site by mid-January 2009, requesting comments by the end of February 2009 (allow at least 6 weeks for comments). Further refinement of the draft framework and guidelines to be undertaken by the end of March 2009 in light of comments received.

7) A Task Force meeting during April 2009 to sign off the final framework of principles and guidelines, the report on best practices and lessons learned from existing initiatives, including proposals for their dissemination, and an options paper setting out a possible route map towards the formal international endorsement of the framework. [The Steering Committee will also need to approve the framework and guidelines before it can be submitted for G8 endorsement].

8) The Task Force and Secretariat work together to prepare a paper seeking G8 endorsement of the final framework of principles and guidelines setting out GBEP recommendations for their use.

9) Field projects and R,D&D activities to continue in accordance with approach agreed by the Task Force.