

10YFP Consumer Information Programme for Sustainable Consumption and Production (CI-SCP)

Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information

International Guidance on making sound environmental, social
and socio-economic claims to inform and empower consumers
to make sustainable consumption choices

Draft for Global Stakeholder Consultation

19 August 2016

1	Table of Contents	
2		
3	Overview of the Guidelines' Principles	3
4	Fundamental Principles	3
5	Aspirational Principles	3
6	1 Introduction: A navigator for communicating sustainability information.....	4
7	Objectives: Set a common ground for reliable sustainability information to consumers.....	5
8	Consumers and sustainable consumption	7
9	2 Mindset	9
10	3 Fundamental Principles.....	11
11	3.1 Reliability.....	11
12	3.2 Relevance	14
13	3.3 Clarity	16
14	3.4 Transparency.....	19
15	3.5 Accessibility.....	20
16	4 Aspirational Principles.....	22
17	4.1 Three Dimensions of Sustainability.....	22
18	4.2 Comparability.....	23
19	4.3 Encourage Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impacts	23
20	4.4 Systematic Approach	25
21	4.5 Collaboration.....	26
22	5 Glossary.....	27
23	6 Acronyms	29
24	7 Guidance Documents.....	30
25	8 References	31
26		
27		

Overview of the Guidelines' Principles

Fundamental Principles

Reliability

- Accurate and scientifically true
- Robust and consistent
- Substantiated data/information and assumptions
- Independent and competent organization for verification (if feasible)

Relevance

- Significant aspects ('hotspots')
- Not masking poor product performance
- Genuine benefit and beyond legal compliance

Clarity

- Exclusive and direct link between product and claim
- Explicit and easy to understand
- Limits of sustainability claim clearly stated

Transparency

- Developer of the claim and provider of evidence published
- Traceability and generation of claim (methods, sources...)
- Accessibility of confidential information by competent bodies for verification

Accessibility

- Clearly visible: claim can be found easily
- Readily accessible: claim is close to the product

Aspirational Principles

Three Dimensions of Sustainability

- Three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, social, socio-economic) considered

Comparability

- Product comparisons substantiated and helpful for consumers

Encourage Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impact

- Insights from behaviour science applied

Systematic Approach

- Various complementing communication channels applied

Collaboration

- Broad number of stakeholders included in the process of claim development and communication
- Inclusive language used

1 Introduction: A navigator for communicating sustainability information

Sustainable consumption and production is increasingly a priority for business and for policy-making. It is a cross-cutting theme of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), directly addressed by Goal 12; and sustainable products are a growing business opportunity, especially in emerging and developing countries (Nielsen 2014).

However, the growth of markets for sustainable products¹ is impaired by the malpractice of greenwashing² and the myriad of information facing consumers which is often imprecise, unclear, incomparable, unsubstantiated, unreliable or irrelevant when guiding their choices. There is a proliferation of diverging and/or unchecked product sustainability information tools,³ which can negatively affect the reputation of credible standards and labels. This all results in mistrust and confusion among consumers, as well as among information providers in business and government. A key barrier to progress is the lack of international agreement and guidance on how to provide information on products' sustainability attributes and performance to consumers, targeting the providers of such information, including:

- governments⁴ and public procurement practitioners
- private sector, from primary producers, manufacturers, retailers and procurement practitioners to recyclers and waste or resource management facilities
- marketing and advertising professionals
- trade unions, trade or industry sector bodies
- consumer, environmental and other civil society organisations
- labelling and voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) schemes
- market surveillance authorities

Box 1: Sustainable Development Goals and consumer information

The need for sound product sustainability information for consumers is directly addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in **Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns**, under which Target 12.8 states:

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

¹ Products refers to goods and services

² See <http://greenwashingindex.com/about-greenwashing/>

³ Information tools include labels, voluntary standards and certification, product declarations, ratings, marketing claims, foot printing, life-cycle assessments, and other ways of communicating with consumers on environmental and social issues connected to products. They can be single- or multi-issue tools, and can follow a life cycle approach to provide a holistic perspective that considers the impacts of every stage of the product development process, including how a product is used and how it is treated responsibly at end-of-life.

⁴ Including sub-national authorities (regions, municipalities)

Objectives: Set a common ground for reliable sustainability information to consumers

The Guidelines aim to address the underlying causes of information overload, consumer confusion and mistrust, and ultimately create a level playing field to enhance consumer awareness, ease and uptake of sustainable lifestyle choices during the purchase, use/re-use, disposal and recycling phases of products.

The Guidelines include a comprehensive set of high-level principles for users to follow, and guidance on how to apply them. They cover fundamental and aspirational approaches and aim to be useful for developed and developing countries, and implementable in companies of all sizes.

The Guidelines' consultation process was led by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the International Trade Center (ITC), under a working group of the [10YFP Consumer Information Programme for Sustainable Consumption and Production](#) (CI-SCP)⁵. The working group comprises a number of public and private sector stakeholders from all regions (Table 1).

Table 1: Participating organisation of the working group

Co-Leads

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) www.unep.org

International Trade Centre (ITC) www.intracen.org

Facilitators

100 Prozent Erneuerbar Stiftung www.100-prozent-erneuerbar.de

THEMA1 www.thema1.de

Working Group Members

3Keel LLP www.3keel.com

International Association for Soaps, Detergents and Maintenance Products (AISE) www.aise.eu

European Brands Association (AIM) www.aim.com

Akatu Institute www.akatu.org.br

Caribbean Consumer Council (CCC)

Centro Tecnológico para la Sustentabilidad, Argentina www.cts.fra.utn.edu.ar

Consumer Education Trust (Consent), Uganda www.consumersinternational.org/our-members/member-directory/CONSENT%20-%20Consumer%20Education%20Trust

Consumers International (CI) www.consumersinternational.org

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), United Kingdom
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs

European Commission, Directorate General for the Environment <http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/environment>

European Policy Centre (CEP) www.epc.eu

⁵ The CI-SCP is part of the [10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production \(10YFP\)](#), the implementation of which is target 12.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

EVEA Tourisme www.evea-tourisme.com

Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), Germany
www.bmub.bund.de/en/

GEDnet – Global Environmental Declarations Network www.gednet.org

Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) www.globalecolabelling.net

Global Standards 1 (GS1) www.gs1.org

Green Purchasing Network (GPN), Japan www.gpn.jp/english

HEJSupport www.hej-support.org

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) www.iccwbo.org

International Network of Product Sustainability Initiatives (INPSI) www.wrap.org.uk/content/international-product-sustainability-network

International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) www.ipen.org

ISEAL Alliance www.isealalliance.org

LAC Footprint Initiative www.lac-footprint.com

L'OREAL www.loreal.com

Ministry of Environment, Peru www.minam.gob.pe

Ministry for Environment, Energy and Sea (MEEM), France www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr

Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia <http://www.menlh.go.id/>

Ministry of Environment, Jordan <http://moenv.gov.jo/En/Pages/default.aspx>

Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) World Forum www.pef-world-forum.org

The County Administrative Board of Östergötland, Sweden <http://www.lansstyrelsen.se/Ostergotland/En>

The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) www.sustainabilityconsortium.org

UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative (LCI) www.lifecycleinitiative.org

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Consumers and sustainable consumption

While the Guidelines support the actions of information providers from the private and public sectors, their ultimate beneficiary is the consumer. A consumer, as referred to within this document, is a person purchasing, using and/or disposing of goods and services for private or commercial purpose (i.e. it includes individuals in a private sector supply chain or public procurement process).



Figure 1: The moving landscape of consumer choice. Illustration based on: (WRAP 2015) (Foto subject to change)

What motivates and drives consumer choice in the purchasing of products is complex and varies from one consumer to another, depending on their social, cultural, educational and economic background. Sustainability is only one of many consumer choice factors (WRAP 2015, see Figure 1), and different incentives, such as having a positive environmental impact, play different roles, too (see, for example, Accenture 2014).

Furthermore, targeting consumers' *purchasing* behavior is only one of the purposes of communicating sustainability information, as using, re-using, sharing, recycling and disposing of products can also be addressed.

Consumers' expectations and the information they demand sometimes differ from what is legally required or regarded as important from a scientific or marketing perspective. These differences can be reconciled by developing and applying a deeper understanding of consumer interests and insights to find an appropriate level and quality of sustainability information to meets their needs; and by using drivers to motivate and establish an emotional connection to more sustainable products to help change consumption behaviour and habits (e.g. nudging).

Providers of product sustainability information can engage with consumers via many channels (Figure 2). Information can be provided directly on the package or on point of sale signs or posters, online, via social media, TV or radio adverts, on receipts, or in instruction manuals. The information may have a single-issue (e.g. carbon footprint) or multi-issue approach (e.g. environmental footprint), and can provide a holistic perspective considering the impacts of every stage of the product development and

- 1 production process, including how a product is used and how it is treated responsibly at end-of-life ('a
- 2 life cycle approach').
- 3 A common form of claim is a logo (sentence/affirmation or label), often complemented by written
- 4 information and/or links to additional information. Figure 3 presents potential components of a claim.



Figure 2: Selection of different channels to communicate sustainability claims

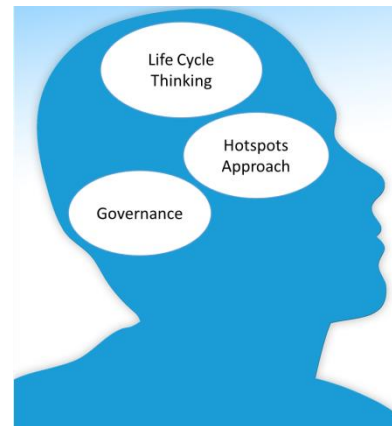


Figure 3: Potential components of a claim (ISEAL 2015a)

2 Mindset

This section sets the scene for the application of the Guidelines and describes the manner in which those applying them should approach and consider their sustainability efforts. If these general approaches are not at first available or possible, they can serve as inspiration for further refinement and improvement.

The Guidelines recommend that users consider the **whole product life cycle** (Figure 4) when sustainability information is provided to the consumer. This means that sustainability impacts are considered for every stage of a product's life, from resource extraction to disposal, so that no burden shifting occurs from one stage to another.



In applying **life cycle thinking**, a holistic perspective of the product system is taken, considering most potential and actual impacts, to ensure that no unintended trade-offs arise⁶ nor potential positive or negative implications are overlooked. The latter is particularly relevant when information providers aim to motivate consumers to change their behaviour during the use phase or the end-of-(first)-life⁷ of the product.

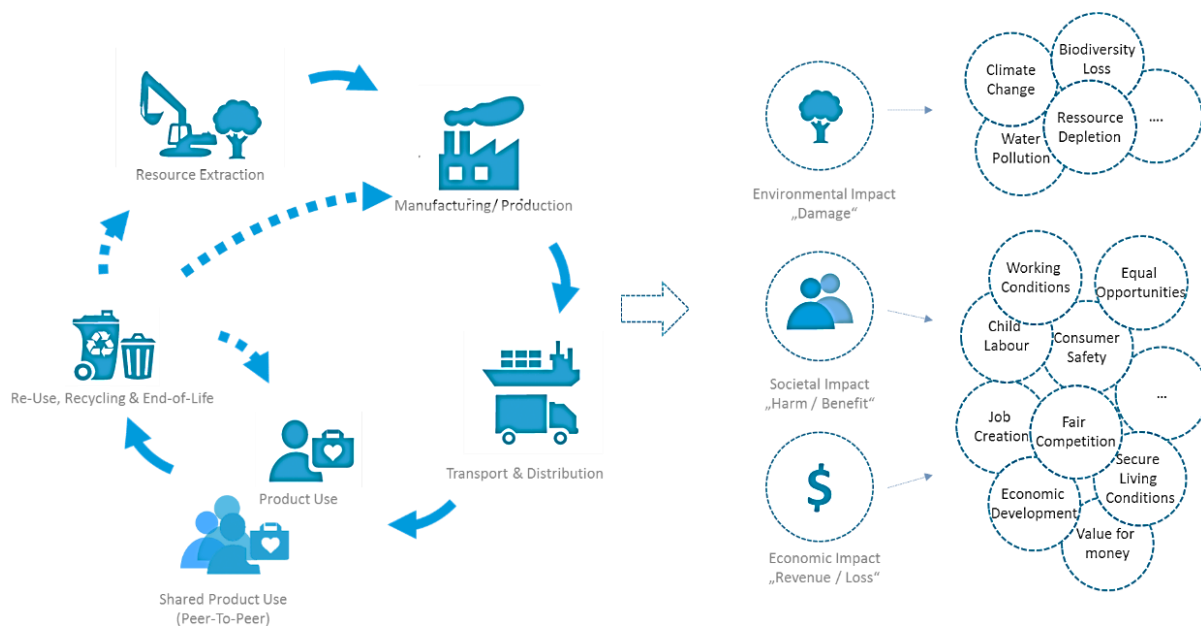


Figure 4: The life cycle of a consumer product & examples of environmental, societal & (socio-) economic impacts & benefits

Life cycle thinking does not necessarily imply quantitative, data-intensive measurement, and should not be confused with a life cycle assessment (LCA), which requires qualitative information and life cycle inventory data for detailed impact assessment. Validated information gained through

⁶ Considering relevant environmental, social and economic impacts prevents the so-called burden shifting: e.g. improving the climate performance of meat products (by increasing livestock units per area) could lead to adverse effects on animal welfare and unsustainable land use patterns.

⁷ To enable a second life of a product (e.g. second hand clothing) appropriate disposal, i.e. at collection bins, is required.

consultations or consumer reviews based on life cycle thinking can also be helpful to generate product sustainability information.

To put life cycle thinking into practice, a **hotspots analysis** approach can be taken to identify the most impactful or relevant stages, activities, material and energy flows and impacts within a product's life cycle. The identification of these 'hotspots' requires quantitative or qualitative information⁸. Once a given product's hotspots are identified, the only data needed to be collected to define and communicate the product's sustainability information is that which is related to the hotspots. This can extensively reduce the data collection effort and is consequently a feasible way for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to start applying life cycle thinking.

Box 2: Support for applying life cycle thinking

Support for applying life cycle thinking

It is understood and reflected in the principles of these Guidelines that there are difficulties in applying life cycle thinking, particularly in a developing country context, due to lack of data and resources. However, initiatives such as the UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative provide capacity development and support growing expertise and data availability globally; particularly in the field of environmental Life Cycle Assessment (LCA or eLCA)⁹.

Work is also underway in the area of hotspots analysis to help focus on those issues/ impacts which, if reduced, will have the greatest improvement in the sustainability of products. This aims to reduce the level of complexity of applying life cycle thinking.

For more information contact: info@lifecycleinitiative.org or visit: www.lifecycleinitiative.org, specifically: www.lifecycleinitiative.org/activities/phase-iii/hotspots-analysis/

The Guidelines' scope covers product sustainability information only. In line with the fundamental principles, which follow, it is important to enable consumers to distinguish between product sustainability and brand sustainability, and to not transfer product-related claims to the brand as a whole (unless this is substantiated).

Ideally, a product-related sustainability claim becomes an integrated part of the entire **decision-making and management process** for the development and marketing of new or improved products, or of a brand itself. This relates to governance, i.e. the system of interaction and decision-making among stakeholders to improve the sustainability performance of products. Having clear goals and appropriate processes in place helps companies to maintain and improve their products' performance over time and to apply this logic to other products in their portfolio. This requires reliable data acquisition processes, sustainable design tools and practices to engage and interact with relevant stakeholders, including suppliers. Eventually this could influence the way the entire organization and supply chain works.

⁸ The identification of the relevant processes within the lifecycle of a product requires a broader array of information. Data could be qualitative, semi-quantitative or quantitative and could be developed via surveys, interactions with experts, stakeholders, and/or available studies.

⁹ Other areas are: Social Life Cycle Assessment (SLCA) and Life Cycle Costing (LCC).

3 Fundamental Principles

- Reliability
- Relevance
- Clarity
- Transparency
- Accessibility

These principles describe the fundamental criteria on which sustainability claims should be based. Users of the Guidelines¹⁰ are required to comply with all of the fundamental principles, which seek to build and reinforce each other, and lay the foundations for the subsequent ‘aspirational principles’. The ‘guiding questions’ and examples under each principle should help users to apply them.

3.1 Reliability

Build your claims on a firm basis

- Ensure that the conveyed message matches the evidence you have (what has been measured or evaluated)
- Obtain confirmation from the experts who provide the evidence that their methods and data are state of the art and provide the information that can be used to communicate with consumers
- Be aware of exclusions, limitations and assumptions that were used in building the evidence for the claim

Gaining consumers’ trust is a vital prerequisite for ensuring that they purchase and use products in a more sustainable manner. Telling consumers the truth is fundamental to gain their trust in the product. Therefore, claims need to be based on substantiated evidence.

The sustainability claim **must** be **accurate**. The sustainability claim **must** be **based on a generally accepted methodology in the relevant scientific field(s)**. **Methods and standards must** be applied in a way that is **consistent** with the sustainability claim.

The sustainability claim **must** be **robust**.

Guiding questions¹¹:



Are selected methods and standards endorsed or applied by governments, NGOs or competitors; or provided or backed by reliable scientific institutions?

Do the aspects that have been assessed match with the aspects that are communicated? Is the assessment complete or have relevant aspects been excluded? Can you be sure that any uncertainties relating to supporting information do not jeopardise the basis of the sustainability claim? Could others uncover uncertainties or exclusions, therefore damaging the claim and your reputation? Would other stakeholders be able to support the sustainability claim?

¹⁰ The current draft does not describe how to formally adhere to the Guidelines – this is envisaged for a revised draft and depending on results of a further consultation process.

¹¹ Guiding questions should only clarify the requirement but are not part of it.

1 Table 2: Example of accuracy and robustness

Product: T-Shirt	Do (company A)	Don't (company B)
Claim and applied method	<p>"Our T-Shirts are organic"</p>  <p>Method: GOTS Version 4.0</p>	<p>"Our T-Shirts are organic"</p>  <p>Method: [Hypothetical] RTS Standard 2.0</p>
Discussion	<p>Company A has participated in the GOTS certification scheme. The GOTS standard is an accepted methodology to guarantee a minimum content of organic fibre (+95%), the exclusion of hazardous substances in garments sold as organic, plus minimum social requirements. Compliance is based on annual on-site inspections at production sites.</p> <p>Revision processes of the standard include participation of relevant stakeholders (e.g. Greenpeace International, Consumers International or Clean Clothes Campaign).</p>	<p>The (hypothetical) labelling organisation is fairly well known. It would need independent assurance that the methodology is robust and sufficient transparency/ documentation on the supply chain and production processes are available, so the claim can prove to be accurate.</p> <p>Next step would be to guarantee that the methodology is correctly applied.</p>

2 If the sustainability claim is based on an expected change in consumer behaviour, the information
3 provider **must** be able to prove that its assumptions on impact reductions are **substantiated**.

4 *Guiding questions:*

5 Has consumer testing shown 'improved' (desired effect) behaviour (e.g. higher recycling rates, more
6 efficient product use, purchase of sustainable product)? Do comparable cases, scientific studies or
7 consumer surveys provide evidence for the assumed behaviour change?

8 The sources of information and data **must** be **trustworthy**. The level of assurance depends on the
9 reliability of the accreditation type (see Figure 5). When third party verification is applied, the verifying
10 organisation **must** be **independent**¹² and **competent**¹³.

¹² Independence is specified by ISO 17021 (ISO 2015) or by the ISEAL Assurance Code: <http://www.isealalliance.org/our-work/defining-credibility/codes-of-good-practice/assurance-code>

¹³ Competence of verifiers is defined by e.g.: knowledge of relevant sector, product and product-related environmental aspects. See also: ISO 14026 (ISO 2006a)

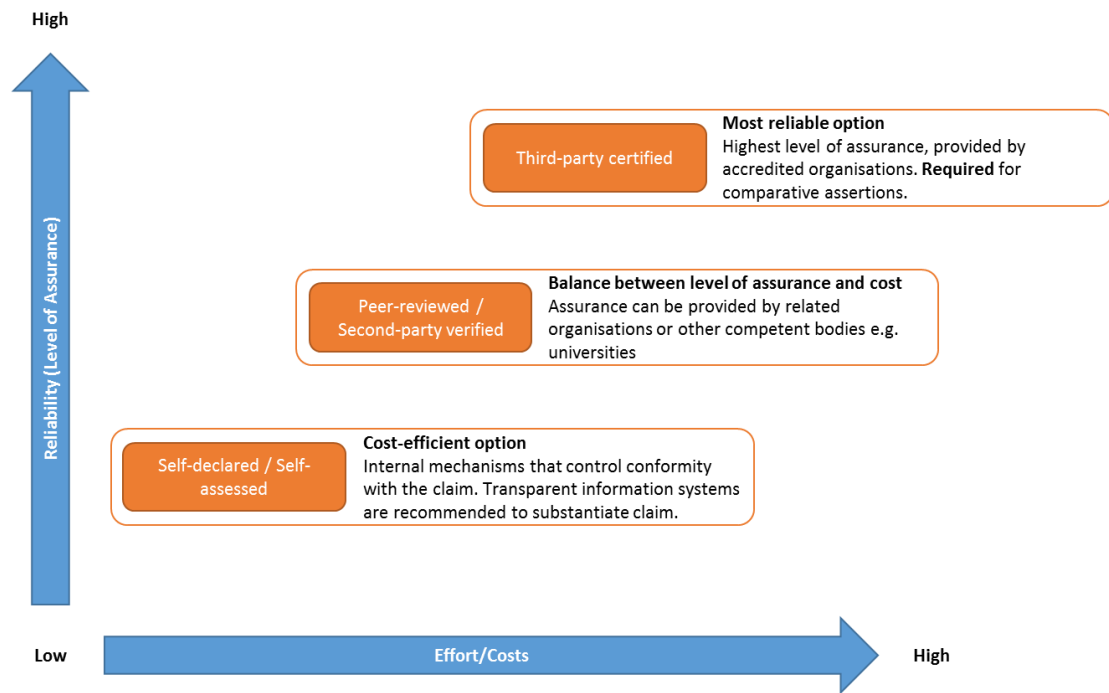


Figure 5: Assurance models (own representation)

Guiding questions:

Is the information or data verified and was it verified by a competent body? Is the quantity and quality of data sufficient¹⁴? Are data sources trusted by relevant stakeholders?

Is the verifier providing a truly independent, objective view or are their views somehow influenced by links to the provider of information? Is the verifying organisation accredited to recognised standards or codes of practice? Does the verifier have proven experience in providing assurance in the field of product sustainability?

Box 3: Main accreditation standards and guidelines

Accreditation Standards and Guidelines

- ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015: Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems (ISO 2015)
- ISO/IEC 17011:2004 Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies (ISO 2004)
- International Accreditation Forum (IAF) requirements

¹⁴ Examples for ambitious data quality requirements: Environmental Footprint Guide (European Commission 2013) and ISO 14044:2006 (ISO 2006b)

3.2 Relevance

Talk about major improvements – not the details

- 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 key to the product
- Check legal requirements before making a claim, so that your product is significantly better than what is already required by law¹⁵

Consumers need to be sure that sustainability claims are material to the product (and the key sustainability issues associated with it) and that their informed purchasing decisions and, if necessary, their changed behaviour have an impact.

The sustainability claim **must** provide information on the **relevant aspects** (e.g. processes, materials), which, according to the selected scope of the underlying study and the applied methods, **contribute significantly** to the sustainability profile of the product, i.e. the **sustainability hotspots**. At the same time, the claim **must not enhance one aspect where the product is performing well (or has improved) while masking other aspects where the product is performing poorly (or has deteriorated)**.

The claim **must** refer to a **genuine and measurable benefit** of the product and **must exceed what is already required by law**.

Guiding questions

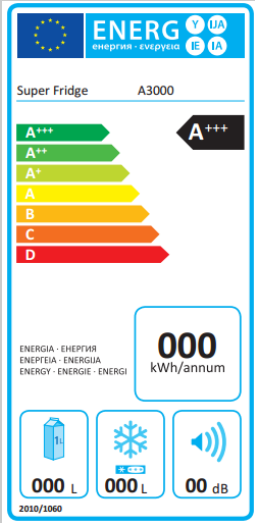

Is the communicated claim a major driver of the sustainability performance of the product? And is this valid for the technology and the region where the product is produced and used? Do other stakeholders share the same view?

Does the product exceed regulatory requirements of the production countries and (where this is required) also of the consumption countries¹⁶? Is the product performing better than the market average?

¹⁵ Making claims on what is already legally required can be a black practice in some jurisdictions (e.g. the European Union).

¹⁶ This is particularly relevant for claims addressing the use phase.

1 Table 3: Example on sustainability hotspots and compliance beyond law

Product: Refrigerator (household)	Do (company A)	Don't (company B)
Claim	<p>Legally required:</p>  <p>Additional statement:</p> <p>"Our fridge is one of the most efficient models on the market."</p>	 <p>"Our fridge is ozone friendly".</p>
Discussion	<p>Refrigerators are energy driven products, where the biggest environmental impact is embedded in the use phase.</p> <p>The EU Energy Labelling Directive requires the display of energy labels for certain products, including refrigerators, to help consumers make informed purchasing decisions. Additional statements need to be in line with the result of the required energy labelling. A+++ is the top energy class, thus the claim is emphasizing a genuine benefit.</p>	<p>CFC damages the ozone layer but it has been banned internationally. The impact on the ozone layer is not a hotspot for refrigerators anymore and CFC-free labelled products are not beyond legal compliance. The law required products to be CFC free, therefore the label becomes obsolete.</p>

2 Box 4: Life cycle complexity and lack of transparency

Life cycle complexity and lack of transparency

The organisation that intends to make a sustainability claim for a product must ensure that the product exceeds the legal requirements of the country of consumption (where the consumer is using and disposing of the product) and production (countries where raw materials are extracted and processed or where a product is assembled or manufactured).

As in the case of the mobile phone sector, proving to exceed the legal requirements of the countries of production can be challenging due to the lack of supply chain transparency, making it difficult to trace back all materials to their origin. In such exceptional cases the Guidelines allow users to consider the regional/sectoral context. An organisation can issue a claim even if it does not have

full transparency on all materials or production processes but is significantly outperforming its competitors (and can prove this).

The limitations of the claim must be communicated to the consumer in accordance to the fundamental principles of the Guidelines. Further, the provider of the information must actively work towards gaining transparency over their suppliers over time and close the evidence gaps.

1 *Box 5: Single-issue criteria vs multi-issue criteria claims*

Single-issue criteria vs multi-issue criteria claims

Single-issue criteria claims such as carbon footprint, energy, conflict-free mineral sourcing, child-labour free or animal welfare labels are widely used. When these claims are clearly linked to the product and to widely accepted environmental and social priorities, they can help consumers to take informed choices on more sustainable products (OECD 2000).

Single-issue criteria can be an entry point or stepping-stone to a more comprehensive approach, but they can have several limitations and create the risk of hiding or shifting negative impacts from one sustainability area or issue to another. Therefore, users of the Guidelines are encouraged to use multi-issue criteria claims, or to ensure that negative impacts are avoided in areas beyond the cited issue, to avoid unanticipated or unexpected consequences.

2

3 **3.3 Clarity**

Make the information useful for the consumer

- Share information that helps consumers to 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
- Avoid vague, ambiguous and broad “general environmental/social benefit” claims

4 Consumers want clear messages and language to enable an informed purchasing decision, to know
5 how to use the product responsibly and what to do at the end of its life (e.g. re-use, recycling,
6 responsible disposal). This allows consumers to take action – even if they may be easily distracted,
7 confused or not able to read instructions in a particular language. The use of (info-) graphics,
8 pictograms, or other forms of visualising information and messages can overcome potential language
9 barriers.¹⁷ By facilitating consumers to take action, producers and retailers can reliably claim that the
10 product’s sustainability attributes promote sustainable consumption.

11 *Box 6: Avoid general sustainability benefit claims*

Avoid general sustainability benefit claims

Broad, general sustainability benefit claims are difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate and can mislead or confuse consumers. Terms that should be avoided are (not exhaustive list of examples):

¹⁷ Work is currently underway by the UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative - Flagship Project 3a to provide guidance on the communication of information derived from hotspots analysis, which will include examples of graphic display/ visualisation. More information can be found at <http://www.lifecycleinitiative.org/activities/phase-iii/hotspots-analysis/>





“environmentally friendly”, “eco-friendly”, “eco”, “good for the environment”, “sustainable”, “green”, “carbon friendly”, “natural”, “non-toxic”, “ecologically safe”, “pollutant free”, “zero emissions”, “an ethically correct choice”

If such a general claim is made, it should be accompanied by clear and prominent qualifying language that limits the claim to a specific benefit or set of benefits.

For example, a claim such as “Eco-friendly: made with recycled materials,” would be misleading if: (1) the statement “made with recycled materials” is not clear and prominent; (2) the trader cannot substantiate that the entire product, excluding minor, incidental components, is made from recycled material; (3) making the product with recycled materials does not make the product more environmentally beneficial overall; and (4) the advertisement’s context implies other misleading claims.

- 1 There **must** be a **direct link** between the sustainability claim and the product to avoid generalization
- 2 of the claim. The consumer **must be able to differentiate between product and brand information**.
- 3 The information (visual, text-based or via design) provided to the consumer **must be explicit and easy**
- 4 **to understand**.

5 Table 4: Example for direct link of claim to the product



Product: Eggs	Do (company A)	Don't (company B)
Claim	 <p>“These eggs were produced by free ranging chickens”</p>  <p>(un-labelled)</p>	 <p>“Our eggs are produced by free ranging chickens”</p>  <p>(un-labelled)</p>
Discussion	The complementing claim is directly connected with the product.	Complementary but generalised claims might give the impression that all products from the same brand/category are covered by the claim.

6 Guiding questions

- 7 Is the connection between the claim and product clear or might consumers think that the claim is also
- 8 valid for similar/all products from the same brand?
- 9 Are all visual methods of communication (e.g. symbols, pictograms) clear and unambiguous? Is plain,
- 10 non-technical language used for text-based information? Is information clear and concise or too
- 11 detailed and confusing? Are further details available elsewhere (e.g. online) to support a better
- 12 understanding of the claim (see principle of accessibility)?

- 1 For quantitative information: Is a context or reference system provided so consumers can better
- 2 understand the impact of their consumption (e.g. understand higher and lower carbon footprints)?

3 Table 5: Example for explicit and easy to understand information



Product: Bottled Beverage	Do (company A)	Don't (company B)
Claim		
Discussion	Concise visual information, complemented by simple text, helps the consumer to understand that the product packaging is not only recyclable but can be recycled based on the availability of local recycling infrastructure. Guidance can also be provided for individual packaging components (e.g. a soft drinks bottle and lid made from different types of plastic).	While the Mobius loop is a well-known and internationally recognised symbol for recycling, its use without text assumes that all consumers understand its meaning. It also only shows that the packaging is recyclable but not that this recycling is actually available via local infrastructure. Additional information can make the consumer's role far easier.

- 4 The **limits** of the sustainability claim **must be clearly stated** and must not be misleading or ambiguous.

5 *Guiding questions:*

- 6 Is the claim masking other relevant issues that are or could be known by the provider of information?
- 7 Is imagery used in a way that is not likely to be misinterpreted?

8 Table 6: Example related to the limits of a claim

Product: Milk	Do (company A)	Don't (company B)
Claim	 "We measure our impact on the climate"	 "We save the environment"
Basis for the claim	The National Guideline on Product Carbon Footprinting (by TGO).	
Discussion	The carbon label is based on a stated, accepted methodology and only communicates the amount of CO ₂ emissions associated with the product. There is no claim on other types of emissions reduction or other impacts on the environment. Company A has not exaggerated the limit of the claim.	A claim that is based on a carbon footprint must not include any assertions that are wider than the underlying study. Further research/proof would be necessary to back up a claim that addresses wider issues e.g. conservation of the environment or natural resources. Company B has exaggerated the limit of the claim and therefore the sustainability benefits of the product, using emotive language which misleads the consumer.

3.4 Transparency

Satisfy the consumer's appetite for information

- 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

Consumers expect sufficient information to be provided so that they have the option to evaluate the basis for the sustainability claim, should they wish.

It **must** be clear **by whom and how the sustainability claim** was developed, and who provided the evidence behind the claim and how (e.g. through a scientific study, multi-stakeholder process, company, etc.).

The consumer **must be able to trace the way the sustainability claim was generated**. Selected methods, data sources, assumptions or professional judgements, value choices (e.g. for aggregation of data) **must be available / published**. This is particularly important for single-score¹⁸ claims to show how the score was reached.

Information subject to confidentiality **must be accessible to competent bodies** that are able to verify the claim, noting that information on "health and environment" should not be considered confidential.¹⁹

Guiding questions

Is the claim self-declared or verified by a competent, independent third party? If the claim is verified, is the certificate number clearly provided/available? Is a list of the bodies/ stakeholders involved in the claim development process available?

Are consumers and/or competent bodies able to assess the quality of information, and how/if it was verified?

Can the underlying information be made available to the public or at least to a competent body?

Table 7: Example on traceability of the claim and the claim development

Product: Tea	Do (company A)	Don't (company B)
Claim	<p>"Our tea producers receive a fair payment"</p> 	<p>"Our tea producers receive a fair payment"</p> <p>No further information is provided on or close to the product.</p>

¹⁸ Single score: sustainability aspects are aggregated into one number. Also environmental labels can aggregate environmental impacts into a single-score.

¹⁹ See for example: Stockholm Convention (UNEP 2009)

Discussion	For Fairtrade products, a Fairtrade Minimum Price (where it exists) and a Fairtrade Premium must be paid. The use of the label demonstrates that the product of company A has gone through this process, was awarded with third party certification and can justify the claim.	It is not transparent to the consumer what this claim is based on. Self-declared claims must be backed up by further information – at least upon request or further investigation.
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2 3.5 Accessibility

Let the information get to the consumer and 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

3 Time and interest are often limiting factors for consumers when making a purchasing decision,
4 particularly for products that are bought frequently (e.g. time-pressured grocery shopping).
5 Purchasing and usage behaviour can be more difficult to change as a result. Equally, if attributes of a
6 product have been altered to realize sustainability benefits through behaviour change (e.g.
7 concentrated laundry detergents) it is vital to make this information visible to consumers, so that the
8 benefit will be realised through appropriate action. The more accessible the information, the more
9 likely the consumer will take notice.

10 The required information **must** be clearly **visible**.




11 The information **must be readily accessible** during purchase and use (where relevant). The proximity
12 of the information to the consumer at the time when the consumer needs it is of prime importance.

13 *Guiding Questions*

14 Can consumers easily find the sustainability information? Are they able to come across or find the
15 information by using the accustomed ways of communication in their region (on-pack and point of
16 sale information, leaflets, websites, social media...)?

17 Is the basic information as close to the product as possible and accessible without the help of external
18 devices (e.g. scanners, websites; though these may help later)? Are there barriers (intended or
19 unintended) that impair the access to information (e.g. small font size, technical language or data)?
20 Are consumers able to dive deeper and evaluate the level of transparency and reliability of the
21 information (e.g. web-based information)?

1 Table 8: Example of accessibility of information

Product X	Do (company A) (good practice)	Do (company B) (but improvable)
Claim	 <p>On-pack CO2 label</p> <p>+</p>  <p>Barcode scanner with additional information</p>	 <p>On-pack CO2 label</p>
Discussion	<p>Making information available on complementary channels is important to increase accessibility. By providing basic information on-pack and then extending it with a web-based application via a barcode or smart label, the consumer has the possibility to better understand its impact.</p>	<p>If only a carbon footprint label is provided on-pack, consumers do not have the opportunity to verify the information. This is particularly important for labels which are less well-known and where consumers do not have any leads on how they can access further information.</p>

2 Box 7: Accessibility of information for disposal

Accessibility of information for disposal: electronic products

For many countries electronics recycling is a serious challenge. Safe recycling facilities or product take-back schemes are lacking and huge amounts of electronic waste are created and discarded in an inadequate way. Sustainability claims for electronic products should contain information about where they have to be sent to ensure safe recycling. Information about any toxic chemicals or materials used in electronic products should be made available and should be part of any sustainability claims to minimise any risks of exposure to hazardous materials to those recycling the products – and to the environment.

4 Aspirational Principles

- Three Dimensions of Sustainability
- Comparability
- Encourage Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impacts
- Systematic Approach
- Collaboration

Providing product sustainability information to consumers is a dynamic process, in which consumers should be engaged. Not only should information be provided to them, but they should be consulted and interacted *with*, to better understand their information needs. These aspirational principles are for information providers to go beyond the fundamental principles and to continuously improve the ways in which they communicate to consumers. They are not compulsory to follow the Guidelines, but all users should ultimately aspire to do so.

The fundamental principles must not be abandoned or replaced by the aspirational principles.

4.1 Three Dimensions of Sustainability

Show the complete picture of product sustainability

- Inform the consumer of the improved performance of your product in all three sustainability dimensions (see Figure 6 below) 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

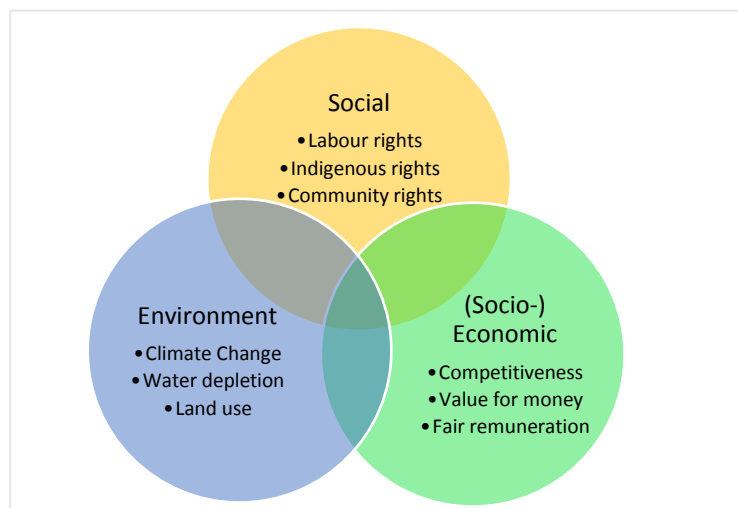
Consumers require comprehensive and balanced information, which ensures that no burden shifting occurs from one sustainability dimension to another (for example, a new chemical decreases the climate impacts of the product but leads to deterioration in work place safety).

All **three dimensions of sustainability should be taken into account** for the provision of information, albeit with a particular focus on the most relevant aspects/hotspots for a given product (Figure 6).

Addressing the relevant aspects of sustainability in all three dimensions is a challenging task, especially if the provider of information aims to cover the entire life cycle of a product. The maturity of available tools and methodologies to assess social, (socio-) economic and environmental impacts varies – with the highest level of maturity in the environmental dimension. To date, there are no internationally recognized standards or labels that cover all three aspects over the full life cycle.

A **combination of complementary certification schemes should be taken into consideration** to help solve this issue. For example: Fair Trade certification to improve

Figure 6: The three dimensions of sustainability including examples of potential indicators (non-exhaustive list)



the social and economic sustainability attributes, and an organic standard to help address the environmental sustainability attributes of a product. In the coffee sector this is common practice: In 2009, 42% of Fairtrade sales were combined with organic certification (ITC 2011).

If a **single-score²⁰** is used to express the overall sustainability, references to each of the dimensions should be further specified (e.g. emissions reductions, energy or water use, fair remuneration to workers) according to the fundamental principles (e.g. relevance, transparency), to justify the score and show that burden-shifting has not occurred.

4.2 Comparability

Do product comparisons help consumers? Yes and No.

- 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

To compare similar products on the basis of their sustainability performance and communicate this to consumers is a complex issue and not necessarily feasible for all product categories²¹.

Information providers **should carefully balance whether they are able to issue a claim that has the methodological, evidential and legal basis** to allow consumers to directly compare one product to a similar product. They **should also consider whether a product comparison helps consumers to make a more sustainable choice or to use one product more sustainably than the comparable product**. Alternatively, comparison with the market average could be used. Comparisons **should be based on quantitative or semi-quantitative data**.

In any case, more **specific guidance must be followed**, which goes beyond the scope of these Guidelines²².

4.3 Encourage Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impacts

From information to action

- Encourage consumers to take action during the purchase, re/use and disposal of products
- Implement engagement processes that secure longer-term relationships with consumers to better understand their behaviour and information needs and to create longer-term impact through your sustainability information

Even consumers who are willing to change their consumption behaviour in a positive way are easily distracted from doing so (the 'attitude-behaviour' or 'value-action' gap). Using behavioural insights to find the most effective interventions or levers for change can help lead consumers towards more

²⁰ Single score: sustainability aspects are aggregated into one number.

²¹ Between 2013 and 2017 the European Commission is testing the feasibility of comparing products on the basis of their environmental footprint (European Commission 2013).

²² Additional guidance for product comparisons: ISO 14025 Type III environmental declarations (ISO 2006a), Compliance Criteria on Environmental Claims (MDEC 2016); for household appliance sector: work by AHAM <http://www.aham.org>

sustainable consumption patterns and can not only benefit the environment and society but also evoke feelings of success and improved consumer experience.

The sustainability claim **should** go beyond simply informing consumers, to **actively encouraging** them to adopt more **sustainable consumption patterns**.

For the change of behaviour to be sustained and not only be adopted for a one-time decision, a **longer-term relationship should be built with the consumer** to embed new consumption behaviour. The success and impact of **behaviour change should be monitored**, and the **product sustainability information should be adapted** according to the results.

As a pre-condition, this implies that **sustainable products should be functionally superior, offer new or improved sustainability attributes and benefits to consumers, and demonstrate a level of performance clearly above the market average**.

Guiding Questions

Were consumer interests identified beforehand? Are topics that matter to consumers addressed?

Is concise guidance provided to consumers so they know how they can take action? Are they merely informed of how, or are they encouraged to do so?

Do default options (e.g. pre-set eco mode for appliances) support sustainable behaviour?

Are potential/ actual impacts of behaviour change communicated? Are they tangible? Do consumers receive feedback (e.g. statistics on emissions reductions as a result of using the product in a certain way) on the positive impact that results from their changed behaviour?

Are behaviour changes monitored? Are changes in the way the sustainability information is provided planned accordingly?

Is a long-term communication relationship built or planned with the consumer?

1 *Box 8: About Nudging for Good*

Nudging for Good

Nudging is a concept from behavioural science which aims to guide people's behaviour in a positive way without restricting choice. It addresses the fact that consumers do not act rationally, but are affected by habits, routines, time and convenience. Small adjustments in information provision can make a difference to the way consumers behave.

The concept is increasingly tested and applied by governments²³ and brands²⁴ in various areas, including sustainable consumption.

Principles of Nudging for Good²⁵

- *All nudging should be transparent and never misleading.*
- *It should be as easy as possible to opt out of the nudge, preferably with as little as one mouse click.*
- *There should be good reason to believe that the behaviour being encouraged will improve the welfare of those being nudged.*

2 **4.4 Systematic Approach**

Engage with consumers in diverse situations

- 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

3 Consumers are faced with a plethora of information when making purchase, usage and disposal
4 decisions. To get their attention using a single/stand-alone communication channel may not be
5 enough to elicit behaviour change.

6 The sustainability claim **should** be provided using a **multi-media approach**, addressing consumers
7 through different communication channels in different situations. The information **should** be
8 **complementary** and not redundant, and **should not overload** the consumer.

9 *Guiding Questions*

10 Do consumers have the possibility to follow up and interact (with each other or the information
11 provider)?

12 Are different information channels provided that address different user groups? Can the channels be
13 used differently to access the various consumer types to reinforce, repeat and amplify the product
14 sustainability information and support behaviour change?

²³ The Behavioural Insights Team: <http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk>

²⁴ AIM – European Brands Association: <http://www.nudgingforgood.com/>

²⁵ Richard H. Thaler: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/upshot/the-power-of-nudges-for-good-and-bad.html?_r=0

4.5 Collaboration

Collaborate 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: a new behaviour requires the consumer to feel he/she is not alone but part of a (large) group or movement

Collaborative approaches tend to increase acceptance and credibility of your product sustainability information among consumers and other stakeholders. Collaboration can also lead to improvements in the quality of the underlying evidence that supports your claims; cost-savings in both evidence gathering and communication; harmonisation of claims (making it easier for you and the consumer); and increased efficiency and impact. For instance, when conducting a hotspots analysis, collaboration at the sector or product level, with peers and other key stakeholders, is an important element in ensuring the credibility and robustness of the derived information.²⁶ For third party verified communication (e.g. labels), collaboration within and between value chain actors is common practice.

Multi-stakeholder consultations should be an integral part of the development of sustainability information. The development process **should be open and inclusive**. The **opportunities for stakeholder involvement should be clearly communicated**.

In particular, consumers themselves **should be invited and encouraged to feel part of a joint effort**. The product sustainability information (language, pictures, etc.) **should be inclusive**.

Stakeholder engagement should be continued after the sustainability claim has been issued to enhance evaluation and adaptive measures as required. **Joint communication channels should be used** to help build trust, consistency and understanding of the claim.

Guiding Questions

Are relevant stakeholders (partners) identified, contacted and involved in evidence gathering and development of the sustainability information? Does this include experts in the field and users (consumers) of the product? Where relevant, has a good mix of private, public and civil society stakeholders been approached?

Is information easily accessible on how to join or follow processes related to the claim development? Are participation options clearly communicated? Are the barriers for involvement low?

Is a follow-up process with the stakeholder group in place to assess the claim's effectiveness?

Is the sustainability information (language, pictures, etc.) inclusive so that the consumer feels part of a group that is changing behaviour?

²⁶ Examples for collaborative hot spots approaches is the work by: The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) www.sustainabilityconsortium.org, European Commission Environmental Footprint (European Commission 2013), WRAP Product Sustainability Forum <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/product-sustainability-forum>

1 5 Glossary

Term	Definition
Accredited	Accreditation is the formal recognition by an independent body that a <i>certification</i> (->) body operates according to international standards.
Certification	Procedure by which an <i>accredited</i> (->) third party provides written assurance that the requirements of a standard (e.g. for eco-labelling) are met.
Consumer	A consumer, as referred to within this document, is a person purchasing, using and/or disposing goods and services for private or commercial purpose (i.e. it includes individuals in a private sector supply chain or public procurement process).
Greenwashing	Derived from the term “whitewashing”. It is an attempt to mislead consumers and market products more environmentally friendly than they actually are. Even though “green” relates to environmental claims, the expression is sometimes also used in the context of social and ethical product information.
Hotspot	A hotspot is an activity in a product’s life cycle that has a documented environmental, economic or social impact associated with it and that is supported by significant evidence.
Hotspots Analysis	Hotspots analysis is a methodological framework that allows for the rapid assimilation and analysis of a range of information sources, including life cycle based studies, market, and scientific research, expert opinion and stakeholder concerns. The outputs from this analysis can then be used to identify potential solutions and prioritize actions around the most significant economic, environmental, ethical and social sustainability impacts or benefits associated with a specific country, industry sector, organization, product portfolio, product category or individual product or service. Hotspots analysis is often used as a pre-cursor to developing more detailed or granular sustainability information. ²⁷
Intermediate product	An output in a production process that is the input to another production processes and that requires further transformation before it becomes a product to be sold and used.
Life Cycle Assessment	A method for the compilation and evaluation of inputs, outputs and the potential environmental impacts of a product system throughout its life cycle (from raw material acquisition to final ‘end of life’ disposition).
Life Cycle Thinking	The considerations of risks and opportunities associated with a product system from raw material acquisition to final ‘end of life’ disposition.

²⁷ Further information on hotspots and hotspots analysis: UNEP/SETAC LCI - Hotspots Analysis, 2014 <http://bit.ly/1HQyyfO>

Nudging	“A Nudge is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people’s behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives.” ²⁸
Product	Refers to any good and service. E.g.: food (good), transport (service), providing accommodation (service), paper (good).
Product System	A product, how it can e.g. be bought in a shop, is only one part of a bigger product system, which includes upstream (e.g. cultivation of crops) and downstream (e.g. recycling) processes.
Product Sustainability Information	<p>Product sustainability information covers a range of tools and systems that seek to guide consumers to make more sustainable choices about goods and services (products) including in their use and end of life phase.</p> <p>Tools can take many forms, including ecolabels, voluntary standards, product declarations, ratings, marketing claims, foot printing, life-cycle assessments, etc. and other ways of communicating with consumers on environmental, (socio) economic and social issues connected to products. They can be single- or multi-issue, and can follow a life cycle approach to provide a holistic perspective considering the impacts of every stage of the product development process, including how a product is used and how it is treated responsibly at end-of-life.</p>
Sustainable/Sustainability	<p>The term sustainability addresses the environmental, (socio-) economic and social dimensions. Compared to the average, benefits of more sustainable products could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a reduced negative impact on society (or are beneficial to society) by reducing environmental and/or social impacts • are less harmful to the environment and human health • have a positive economic impact <p>Example: A more sustainable banana among others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allows for fair payment to a plantation worker • is not harmful to the worker, consumers and the environment alike due to the use of non-toxic pest management practices • is profitable for all partners of the supply chain and the final seller
Verification	Procedure by which a second or third party provides assurance that the requirements of a standard (e.g. for self-declared claims) or other predetermined criteria are met.

²⁸ Richard Thaler, Cass Sunstein, "Nudge - Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness" (2008)

1 6 Acronyms

10YFP	10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production
CI-SCP	Consumer Information Programme for Sustainable Consumption and Production
ITC	International Trade Center
LCA	Life cycle assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
VSS	Voluntary sustainability standards

2

1 7 Guidance Documents

- 2 The following chart provides an overview of guidance documents that were considered in the
3 development of the Guidelines.

A Members Guide to GENICES (GEN 2016)
A Review of Public Policies relating to the Use of Environmental Labelling and Information Schemes (ELIS) (Klintman 2016)
Building demand for sustainable commodities (ISEAL 2015b)
Claims or fair eco-advertising in practice (CENIA 2010)
Code of Advertising and Marketing (ICC 2011)
Compliance Criteria on Environmental Claims (MDEC 2016)
Consumer market study on environmental claims for non-food products (European Commission 2015)
Eco-promising: communicating the environmental credentials of your products and services (BSR and Forum for the Future 2008)
Environmental and Ethical Claims in Marketing (The Consumer Ombudsman Norway 2009)
Environmental Footprint Guide (European Commission 2013)
Environmental Footprint Guide Communication Guidance (European Commission 2014)
Five Universal Truths Challenge the label (ISEAL 2015c)
Green Claims Guide (DEFRA 2011)
Guidance from the Consumer Ombudsman on the use of environmental and ethical claims, etc., in marketing (Danish Consumer Ombudsman 2014)
Guidance on the application of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (European Commission 2016)
ISEAL Credibility Principles (ISEAL 2013)
ISO 14020: Environmental labels and declarations – General Principles (ISO 2000)
ISO 14021: Environmental labels and declarations – Self-declared environmental claims (Type II environmental labelling) (ISO 2016)
ISO 14024: Environmental labels and declarations – Type I environmental labelling – Principles and procedures (ISO 1999)
International Trade Center ‘Standards Map’
Recommendation on the use of common methods to measure and communicate the life cycle environmental performance of products and organisations (European Commission 2013)
UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection (United Nations 2003)

4

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