Certification Process Management

1. Purpose

This document establishes a structured framework for the certification process managed by Abet Management Consulting Private Limited (the Company) under the IFWCS Certification Scheme. It outlines responsibilities, procedural requirements, and compliance measures to maintain the effectiveness and integrity of certification activities. The policy ensures a transparent, accountable, and standardized approach to certification by defining the process for evaluations, reviews, certification decisions, and the issuance of certificates. Additionally, it provides mechanisms for handling appeals, complaints, and continuous improvement to enhance certification effectiveness.

2. Scope

2.1. This procedure applies to all certification activities undertaken by the Company and ensures compliance with IFWCS standards and relevant regulatory frameworks. It governs the assessment of organizations seeking certification, specifies the responsibilities of auditors and evaluators, and establishes a structured process for dispute resolution, appeals, and complaints. Furthermore, it includes provisions for continuous monitoring and periodic review of certification procedures to uphold quality and adherence to IFWCS standards.

3. Certification Process

3.1. The Company shall assign at least one independent reviewer for each certification evaluation to ensure impartiality. The assigned reviewer must not have participated in the original evaluation. A Scheme Manager shall be appointed to oversee all certification activities related to IFWCS. Findings, analyses, and recommendations must be documented in structured reports to maintain accountability and transparency.

3.2. Certification recommendations shall always be documented unless the same individual conducts both the review and decision-making. Certification decisions must remain objective, impartial, and free from conflicts of interest. Approvals shall be subject to periodic review to confirm continued adherence to IFWCS standards. The Company shall implement a structured approach to managing certification and inspection processes, as per IFWCS guidelines. Compliance with all certification requirements shall be always maintained, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) shall be developed to ensure consistency. Any instances of non-compliance shall be addressed through corrective action measures and documented resolutions.

3.3. Detailed certification process is attached to **Appendix A** in this document.

4. Issuance of Certificates and Use of Scheme Logo

4.1. The Company shall issue certifications exclusively under the IFWCS Scheme. The Scheme logo shall be displayed on all official certification documents to validate compliance. A formal agreement shall regulate the use of certificates and the Scheme logo, ensuring that certified organizations adhere to proper usage guidelines. Additionally, the Company shall continuously monitor certified organizations to ensure the appropriate use of the Scheme logo and address any misuse.

5. Appeals and Complaints Handling

5.1. A transparent and structured appeals process shall be maintained by the Company to address any certification-related disputes. Complaints from certified organizations, service users, or stakeholders shall be handled in a timely manner. A designated team shall objectively investigate all appeals and complaints, ensuring fairness in the resolution process. To enhance accountability, records of appeals, complaints, and resolutions shall be maintained for audit and regulatory purposes.

6. Auditor Requirements for Certification of Producer Groups and Multisite Producer

6.1. Auditors responsible for certification assessments must meet specific qualification criteria. At least one auditor shall be qualified to conduct Quality Management System (QMS) audits, while a second auditor shall be required for the relevant sub-scope and certification scope. All auditors must complete QMS auditor training before conducting certification

assessments. Furthermore, the Company shall mandate continuous professional development and ethical compliance for all auditors to ensure competency and reliability in certification procedures.

7. Records and Documentation

7.1. The Company shall maintain detailed and verifiable certification records to support compliance with IFWCS standards. All records shall be retained for the duration specified by IFWCS guidelines. To improve efficiency and accuracy, a digital record-keeping system shall be implemented. Regular documentation reviews shall be conducted to ensure data integrity, accuracy, and compliance with certification standards.

8. Compliance and Continuous Improvement

8.1. Ensuring adherence to all IFWCS Scheme requirements is a fundamental responsibility of the Company. Certification processes shall undergo regular review to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Continuous improvement mechanisms shall be implemented based on audit findings and stakeholder feedback. Performance metrics shall be utilized to evaluate certification activities and identify areas for enhancement. Additionally, periodic external audits shall be conducted to verify compliance, assess gaps, and drive improvements in certification procedures.

9. Review

9.1. This guiding principle shall be reviewed periodically to align with evolving industry standards and best practices. Necessary amendments shall be incorporated to enhance certification effectiveness and regulatory compliance. Stakeholder feedback shall be considered when updating the policy to ensure its relevance and applicability. A dedicated oversight committee shall be responsible for evaluating the policy's effectiveness and implementing necessary revisions to improve certification processes continuously.

Certification Application Form

Use this form to apply to Abet Management Consulting Private Limited for certification under the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS). Fill in all relevant sections, if a section does not apply (based on the certification type selected), you may leave it blank.

Section 1: Applicant and Organization Details

Name of Applicant/Organization:	
Type of Applicant/Entity:	☐ Individual ☐ Government Agency / Forest Division ☐ Private Company / Corporation ☐ Farmers' Producer Organization / Cooperative ☐ NGO / Civil Society Group ☐ Other (please specify): _____
Year of Establishment / Incorporation (if applicable):	
Registration Number: *(if applicable, e.g., Company Registration or ID)*	
Contact Person (Authorized Representative):	Full Name: _____ Designation: _____ Phone (Mobile & Landline): _____ Email: _____
Primary Business Address / Office Location *(Include complete postal address, PIN code, district, and state)*:	

Section 2: Certification Scope and Type

Type of Certification Requested *(tick all applicable)*:	☐ Forest Management (FM) ☐ Trees Outside Forests (ToF) ☐ Chain of Custody (CoC)
Experience with Certification Assessments:	☐ New to this process ☐ Previously certified/audited (Please provide year and scheme): _____

	☐ Currently certified (Please specify and attach certificate copy): _____
Have you held any certification under IFWCS or other schemes (e.g., FSC, PEFC)?	☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please provide the following:

Scheme	Certificate No.	Scope	Validity Period	Certification Body

Section 3: Forest Management / TOF Operations

Type of Management:	☐ Private Landowner ☐ Public Agency / Corporations ☐ State Forest Department ☐ Group Certification (multiple FMUs) ☐ Community Forest ☐ Concession Holder ☐ Other: _____
Total Area to be Certified (area of forest/ToF land in hectares)**:**	
Location of the Area (describe the location of the forest or tree plantation — include village/town, district, state)**:**	
GPS Coordinates / Map References (if available)**:**	
Brief Description of Land Use and Tree Cover (Highlight main tree species, rotation cycle, intercropping practices, etc.)**:**	

Section 4: Description of Operations and Facilities (For CoC)

Nature of Business Activities:	☐ Timber harvesting ☐ Saw milling

	☐ Furniture manufacturing ☐ Plywood production ☐ Herbal/NTPF processing ☐ Trading / Exporting ☐ Importing ☐ Paper / Pulp manufacturing ☐ Other (please specify): _____
Number of Operational Sites/ Facilities to be Included:	

List of Sites and Addresses for Certification:

S. No.	Name of Site / Facility	Location (Address, District, State)	Site Function
1.			
2.			
3.			

Do you already procure materials from certified sources?	☐ Yes (mention source): _____ ☐ No
Describe Your Recordkeeping / Inventory Tracking System *(e.g., software used, manual logs, barcoding, batch numbers, etc.)***:**	

Section 5: Applicant Declaration and Signature

I, the undersigned, hereby submit this application for certification under the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS). I affirm that the information provided above is true and complete to the best of my knowledge and agree to provide access to additional relevant documents, records, and sites for the purpose of certification.

Name of Authorized Representative:	
Designation:	
Signature:	
Date:	

Certification Process

Task I. Audit Scoping for Forest Certification:

Audit scoping is the initial phase where the certification scope is defined. It categorizes the certification services into three distinct areas: Forest Management (FM) Certification, Tress outside Forest (ToF) Management Certification, and Chain of Custody (Certification). Each category has specific requirements and assessment procedures to ensure compliance with IFWCS standards.

1. **Forest Management (FM) Certification**
   – Certification of Recorded Forest Areas with an approved working plan/working scheme aligned with NWPC 2023.
   – Compliance with IFWCS standard (Annexure I), as approved by IFWCC.
   – Assessment conducted by an IFWCS-accredited Certification Body.

2. **Tress Outside Forest (ToF) Management Certification**
   – Certification of Trees Outside Forest Areas with an appropriate management plan/working plan/working scheme.
   – Compliance with IFWCS standard (Annexure II), as approved by IFWCC.
   – Ensuring sustainability across economic, environmental, and social aspects, including supply chain management.
   – Assessment conducted by an IFWCS-accredited Certification Body.

3. **Chain of Custody (CoC) Certification**
   – Certification of the unbroken path of forest and ToF products from origin to final sale with an IFWCS claim.
   – Includes conversion into finished products (e.g., paper, furniture, handicrafts, wood panels, herbal products) with IFWCS labelling.
   – Compliance with IFWCS CoC standard (Annexure III), as approved by IFWCC.
   – Assessment conducted by an IFWCS-accredited Certification Body.

Task II. Pre-Assessment

Pre-assessment involves preparatory steps to facilitate a smooth and effective certification audit. It includes technical discussions, site selection, audit planning, gap analysis, and preliminary communication with the applicant to ensure clarity and readiness for the audit process.

- **Conduct Technical Meetings**
  Technical meetings will be organized with the applicant to establish a clear understanding of the certification scope, audit objectives, and the applicable IFWCS (International Forest and Wildlife Certification Standards). These meetings serve as a platform for open discussion regarding the audit process, roles, and responsibilities of both the auditors and the applicant's team.

  To ensure the effective execution of technical meetings, the following steps will be undertaken:
  – **Scheduling and Invitations:** Key stakeholders, including forest management representatives, technical experts, and IFWCS-accredited auditors, will be identified, and formal invitations will be issued accordingly.
  – **Agenda Development:** A structured agenda will be developed, covering the certification scope, applicable standards, and audit methodology.
  – **Discussion and Clarifications:** A comprehensive briefing on audit expectations, required documentation, and site visit logistics will be conducted.
  – **Q&A Session:** The applicant's concerns will be addressed to ensure complete clarity on compliance expectations and the overall audit process.
  – **Meeting Documentation:** Key discussion points, decisions, and action items will be recorded for future reference and follow-up.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:
- **FM Certification**
  - Conduct meetings with forest division representatives to verify compliance with IFWCS Guidelines Annexure – I: Indian Forest Management Standard (8 criteria, 69 indicators).
  - Assess alignment of working plans with NWPC 2023, including biodiversity conservation and socio-economic benefits.
  - We will Verify meeting documentation and stakeholder engagement.

- **ToF Management Certification**
  - Conduct meetings with ToF managers (e.g., farmers, urban planners) to verify compliance with Annexure – II: Standard for Sustainable Management of Trees Outside Forest in India (5 criteria, 22 indicators).
  - Review management plans, soil/water conservation practices, and supply chain sustainability measures.
  - We will Verify meeting records and stakeholder involvement.

- **CoC Certification**
  - Conduct meetings with supply chain entities (e.g., manufacturers, retailers) to verify compliance with Annexure – III: Chain of Custody (CoC) Certification Standard.
  - Review traceability methods (physical separation, percentage, or credit system) and labelling requirements.
  - Our team will Verify meeting documentation and adherence to CoC standards.

- **Select Audit Sites**

  The selection of audit sites is a critical component in ensuring a representative evaluation of the applicant's forest management system. Sites will be chosen based on ecological significance, operational complexity, and risk assessment to provide a comprehensive review of compliance with IFWCS standards.

  To effectively execute the site selection process, the following steps will be taken:
  - **Data Collection:** Relevant data, including maps, ecological assessments, and operational reports, will be gathered to assess potential sites.
  - **Risk Assessment:** Sites will be evaluated based on environmental impact, biodiversity importance, and operational intensity.
  - **Stakeholder Consultation:** Local communities, environmental experts, and forest managers will be engaged to validate site selection criteria.
  - **Finalization and Approval:** The selected sites will be confirmed with the applicant, and necessary logistical arrangements will be planned accordingly.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  - **FM Certification**
    - **Prioritize** recorded forest areas with ecological significance and compliance with NWPC 2023 for site selection, as per **Annexure – I**.
    - Conduct **stakeholder** consultations (e.g., local communities, forest officers) to validate selected sites.

  - **ToF Management Certification**
    - Focus on **non**-forest areas such as farmlands and urban plantations for site selection, based on management plans per **Annexure – II**.
    - Consult **with** ToF stakeholders (e.g., farmers, municipal bodies) to confirm sustainability criteria.

  - **CoC Certification**
    - Select relevant supply chain nodes (e.g., processing units, warehouses) handling IFWCS-certified products, as defined in **Annexure – III**.
    - **Conduct** stakeholder consultations to validate traceability and verify site relevance and CoC compliance.

- **Develop an Audit Plan**
  An audit plan will be developed to define the scope, methodology, timelines, and resources required for the certification audit. This structured approach ensures comprehensive coverage while allowing flexibility for unforeseen challenges.

  The audit plan will be formulated through the following actions:
  – **Defining the Audit Scope:** The key assessment criteria, geographical coverage, and applicable IFWCS standards will be established.
  – **Selection of Audit Methodologies:** The audit will incorporate document reviews, field inspections, and stakeholder interviews to ensure a thorough evaluation.
  – **Development of a Timeline:** Key milestones, including pre-audit preparation, on-site assessments, and reporting deadlines, will be determined.
  – **Resource Allocation:** The responsibilities of auditors, technical experts, and logistical coordinators will be assigned.
  – **Contingency Planning:** A flexible strategy will be outlined to address any unforeseen challenges that may arise during the audit process.
  – **Approval and Distribution:** The finalized audit plan will be shared with all relevant stakeholders to ensure alignment and preparedness.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  – **FM Certification**
    - Prepare an audit plan detailing scope, methodologies (e.g., document review, field inspections), and timelines in accordance with Annexure – I.
    - Ensure alignment with NWPC 2023 and incorporate all 8 criteria (e.g., biodiversity, productivity).

  – **ToF Management Certification**
    - Define audit scope, methodologies, and timelines as per Annexure – II.
    - Address all 5 criteria including environmental sustainability and socio-economic benefits.
    - Our team will verify feasibility and stakeholder alignment.

  – **CoC Certification**
    - Specify audit scope, methodologies (e.g., record checks, site visits), and timelines per Annexure – III.
    - Ensure traceability and labelling compliance.
    - Our team will verify plan robustness and adherence to CoC requirements.

- **Perform a Gap Analysis**
  A gap analysis will be conducted to assess the applicant's existing forest management practices against IFWCS certification requirements. This analysis will help identify areas requiring corrective actions before the full evaluation audit.

  To execute the gap analysis effectively, the following steps will be implemented:
  – **Review of Documentation:** The applicant's policies, procedures, and past compliance records will be assessed against IFWCS standards.
  – **On-Site Inspections:** Preliminary field visits will be conducted to verify the implementation of forest management practices.
  – **Stakeholder Engagement:** Discussions with management teams, employees, and external experts will be carried out to identify operational gaps.
  – **Identification of Non-Conformities:** Findings will be categorized into major and minor gaps requiring corrective actions.
  – **Development of an Action Plan:** A structured list of recommendations will be provided to the applicant for addressing identified gaps.

– **Follow-Up and** Support**:** Continuous guidance and monitoring will be provided to assist the applicant in implementing corrective measures effectively.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:
– **FM Certification**
– Compare current forest management practices with requirements in Annexure – I: Indian Forest Management Standard (69 indicators).

– Conduct document reviews and field visits to identify major or minor non-conformities.

– We will Verify thoroughness of gap analysis and adequacy of corrective action plans.

– **ToF Management Certification**
– Evaluate ToF practices against Annexure – II: Standard for Sustainable Management of Trees Outside Forest in India (22 indicators).

– Conduct site inspections and document reviews to identify implementation gaps.

– Our team will Verify accuracy of analysis and feasibility of action plans.

– **CoC Certification**
– Assess supply chain processes against Annexure – III: Chain of Custody (CoC) Certification Standard.

– Conduct record checks and site visits to identify gaps in traceability.

– We will verify completeness of analysis and appropriateness of corrective measures.

- **Conduct Preparatory Communications with the Applicant**
Clear communication with the applicant is essential to ensure they understand the audit process, documentation requirements, and logistical arrangements. This step enhances transparency and preparedness, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings or delays during the certification audit.

The preparatory communication process will be executed through the following measures:
– **Provision of** Detailed **Guidelines:** The applicant will be provided with **comprehensive** guidelines on audit procedures, expectations, and compliance checklists.
– **Verification of Documentation Readiness:** A review will be conducted to confirm that all **necessary** records, policies, and evidence have been compiled and are ready for assessment.
– **Establishment** of **Communication Channels:** Dedicated points of contact will be designated to provide ongoing support and address inquiries.
– **Pre-Audit** Briefings**:** Training or orientation sessions will be conducted to familiarize the **applicant's** team with audit procedures and expectations.
– **Logistical** Coordination**:** The necessary arrangements for site visits, stakeholder meetings, and document submissions will be finalized.
– **Resolution of Queries:** Any last-minute concerns raised by the applicant will be addressed to ensure a seamless audit process.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:
– **FM Certification**
  - Provide FM applicants with guidelines on compliance requirements per Annexure – I and audit procedures.

  - Verify documentation such as working plans and biodiversity records and establish communication channels.

– **ToF Management Certification**
  - Provide ToF applicants with guidelines as outlined in Annexure – II and explain audit process.

  - Verify submitted management plan documentation and confirm communication protocols.

- **CoC Certification**
  - Share guidelines on Annexure – III requirements and traceability protocols with CoC applicants.
  - Verify supply chain documentation and communication setup.

Task III. Stakeholder Consultation

- **Consult with Various Stakeholders as per IFWCS Guidelines**
  To ensure transparency and inclusivity, we will engage with all relevant stakeholders, including government bodies, local communities, environmental organizations, and industry representatives. This consultation process will serve to address concerns, gather valuable input, and enhance the overall credibility of the certification process.

  The execution of this process will involve:
  - **Stakeholder Identification:** Identifying and categorizing stakeholders based on their relevance to the certification process.
  - **Engagement Strategy Development:** Establishing communication methods, such as **meetings**, surveys, and public forums, to encourage active participation.
  - **Consultation Sessions:** Conducting structured meetings to discuss key aspects of forest management practices and certification requirements.
  - **Feedback Compilation and Analysis:** Documenting stakeholder concerns and suggestions for integration into the certification assessment.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  - **FM Certification**
    - Engage stakeholders (e.g., local communities, government bodies, NGOs) to discuss practices as outlined in Annexure – I.
    - Address biodiversity, ecosystem services, and socio-economic impacts.
    - We will verify stakeholder participation and maintain proper documentation.

  - **ToF Management Certification**
    - Conduct consultations with stakeholders (e.g., farmers, urban planners, environmental groups) in alignment with Annexure – II.
    - Cover key concerns related to environmental sustainability and socio-economic benefits.
    - Our team will verify engagement process and records.

  - **CoC Certification**
    - Conduct consultations with supply chain stakeholders (e.g., processors, retailers) to confirm compliance with Annexure – III.
    - Address issues related to traceability and labelling.
    - We will verify engagement outcomes and documentation.

- **Notify IFWCS Before Consultation**
  Prior to initiating the stakeholder consultation, IFWCS will be formally notified to ensure all necessary protocols and guidelines are adhered to. This step ensures regulatory compliance and allows IFWCS to review the consultation framework in advance.

  Key actions in this process include:
  - **Preparation of Notification Document:** Compiling relevant details, including consultation scope, timeline, and stakeholder list.
  - **Submission to IFWCS:** Sending the formal notification to IFWCS within the required timeframe.
  - **Confirmation and Review:** Receiving acknowledgment from IFWCS and addressing any additional requirements or modifications they may suggest.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  - **FM Certification**

- Submit formal notification to IFWCC, including consultation scope and stakeholder list in line with Annexure – I.
- Ensure compliance with IFWCS transparency protocols.
- Verify submission documentation and IFWCC acknowledgment.

  - **ToF Management Certification**
    - Notify IFWCC with details of ToF-related consultations as per Annexure – II.
    - Ensure alignment with IFWCS stakeholder engagement guidelines.
    - Verify notification completeness and IFWCC response.

  - **CoC Certification**
    - Notify IFWCC with details of CoC consultations following Annexure – III.
    - Comply with IFWCS transparency requirements.
    - Verify notification accuracy and receipt of confirmation from IFWCC.

Task IV. Full Evaluation Audit

For each of the three certification services we would follow:

1. FM Certification Methodology

Evaluation Audit for FM certification

Conduct a rigorous evaluation of recorded forest areas to ensure compliance with the IFWCS FM standard (Annexure I), which encompasses 8 criteria, and 69 indicators aligned with the National Working Plan Code (NWPC) 2023. Verify the implementation of sustainable forest management practices, biodiversity conservation, and socio-economic benefits for local communities.

Preparatory Communications and Document Review

This initial stage ensures that FM applicants are fully informed and prepared for the audit process.

- Communicate with FM applicants, providing a structured overview of the audit scope, methodology, and documentation requirements.

- Require submission of:
  - NWPC 2023-aligned working plans
  - Biodiversity inventories
  - Harvest records
  - Community engagement reports
- Review submitted documents to confirm alignment with Annexure I requirements, including forest health, productivity, and legal compliance.

- Identify and flag discrepancies such as incomplete working plans, missing biodiversity data, or non-aligned reports for resolution prior to further evaluation.

This stage establishes a robust baseline for verification and ensures the audit process is built on accurate, complete information.

Technical Meetings

Serve as a platform for collaboration, clarification, and alignment among stakeholders.

- Involve forest division representatives, local stakeholders, and auditors.

- Facilitate discussions on audit objectives and requirements outlined in Annexure I and clarify technical or contextual issues identified during the document review.

- Cover key discussion areas:
  - Ecosystem health and biodiversity conservation
  - Soil and water conservation strategies
  - Socio-economic impacts and benefit-sharing mechanisms
  - Silvicultural practices and invasive species management
- Document all discussions to ensure transparency. Address identified gaps or concerns collaboratively to strengthen stakeholder engagement and audit credibility.

These meetings ensure all parties are aligned before field-level verifications commence.

Execute Field Visits and Collect Necessary Evidence for Compliance Verification
Represent the most direct and evidence-based stage of the FM audit process.

- Conduct site inspections of recorded forest areas to observe and verify implementation of sustainable practices against the 69 indicators in Annexure I.

- Collect evidence including:
  – Tree measurement records
  – Water quality samples
  – Photographic documentation of biodiversity and conservation measures

- Conduct stakeholder interviews with forest officers and community members to validate socio-economic benefits such as employment generation, community participation, and resource access.

- Review collected evidence to confirm compliance. Record and require corrective action for any non-conformities such as unauthorized logging or poor soil conservation.

This stage ensures on-ground practices align with documented plans and uphold IFWCS standards. The FM audit methodology, conducted by our team ensures a comprehensive and credible evaluation of forest management practices. Through rigorous documentation review, inclusive stakeholder consultations, and detailed field verification, the process safeguards ecological integrity and promotes community welfare in line with Annexure I and NWPC 2023.

2. ToF Management Certification Methodology

Full Evaluation Audit for ToF certification
Assess non-forest areas—including farmlands, urban plantations, and linear plantings—for alignment with the IFWCS ToF standard (Annexure II), which consists of 5 criteria and 22 indicators focused on environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social impact. Emphasize the effectiveness of management plans and integration into sustainable supply chains.

Preparatory Communications and Document Review
This initial step ensures ToF applicants are audit-ready and aligned with the sustainability requirements of Annexure II.

- Engage stakeholders such as farmers, municipal bodies, and private landowners through structured communication, providing clear audit guidelines.

- Require submission of:
  – Comprehensive management plans
  – Tree species and planting schedules
  – Soil and water conservation strategies
  – Socio-economic contributions (e.g., farmer income improvements, employment generation)

- Review documents to assess alignment with Annexure II, focusing on agroforestry practices, urban greening, and environmental impact.

- Identify incomplete plans or missing environmental impact assessments and provide technical guidance for resolution.

This phase ensures a solid foundation for subsequent field verification and sustainability assurance.

Technical Meetings
Conduct meetings to build consensus and address sustainability issues collaboratively.

- Involve ToF managers, farmers, environmental groups, and auditors.

- Focus discussions on:
  – Soil health and water management strategies
  – Economic benefits (e.g., timber or non-timber yields)
  – Intercropping practices and pest control measures

- Work through issues identified during the document review, such as inadequate water management or species mismatch.

- Document discussions and track resolution of gaps to maintain audit transparency.

These meetings foster trust and promote integrated stakeholder participation in the certification process.

Execute Field Visits and Collect Necessary Evidence for Compliance Verification
Conduct field visits to validate on-ground sustainability practices against Annexure II indicators.

- Perform site inspections to assess:
  – Tree health and growth patterns
  – Soil erosion control measures
  – Biodiversity support, such as pollinator habitats
- Collect evidence including:
  – Soil samples
  – Yield records
  – Photographic documentation
  – Interviews with farmers and local stakeholders
- Validate socio-economic contributions and implementation accuracy through stakeholder interviews.

- Identify non-conformities such as pesticide overuse or improper spacing and recommend corrective measures.

This hands-on evaluation confirms that ToF initiatives contribute meaningfully to environmental stewardship and community development.

The ToF audit methodology ensures a robust and transparent evaluation of non-forest tree management practices. It promotes sustainability and socio-economic benefits while verifying strict compliance with Annexure II standards.

3. CoC Certification Methodology

Full Evaluation Audit for CoC certification
Focus on verifying traceability across the supply chain of forest and ToF products, ensuring uninterrupted tracking from source to final sale. The audit is based on the IFWCS CoC standard (Annexure III), which upholds traceability integrity and correct labelling for certified products including paper, timber, herbal goods, and furniture.

Preparatory Communications and Document Review
This step establishes a traceability-ready supply chain framework.

- Inform CoC applicants (e.g., manufacturers, processors, retailers) about the audit scope and Annexure III requirements.

- Require submission of:
  – Purchase orders and supplier records
  – Inventory logs and production reports
  – Labelling protocols, demonstrating physical separation, credit, or percentage methods
- Review traceability documentation to ensure completeness and alignment with Annexure III.

- Identify gaps such as incomplete chain-of-custody certificates or mislabelled products and initiate corrective guidance.

This phase ensures the supply chain is transparent and conforms to IFWCS certification requirements.

Technical Meetings
Enable supply chain actors to understand and comply with traceability protocols.

- Include processors, distributors, auditors, and relevant supply chain managers.

- Discuss critical topics:
  – Material segregation and labelling accuracy
  – Batch tracking and supplier verification mechanisms
  – Correction of missing documentation or incorrect processes
- Document discussions and track resolutions to support audit integrity.

These meetings build consensus and resolve traceability bottlenecks before field validation.

Execute Field Visits and Collect Necessary Evidence for Compliance Verification
Validate the physical implementation of CoC practices across supply chain nodes.

- Conduct facility inspections to verify:
  - Proper segregation of certified and non-certified products
  - Accurate labelling in accordance with IFWCS standards (e.g., logo use, batch IDs)
- Collect evidence such as:
  - Batch records
  - Labelled product samples
  - Invoices
  - Photos of storage and processing areas
- Conduct staff interviews to assess understanding and application of traceability systems.
- Identify and flag non-compliance cases (e.g., material mixing, missing batch identifiers) for rectification.

This thorough field verification ensures unbroken product traceability from origin to final sale.

The CoC audit methodology ensures the integrity of certified products through rigorous traceability verification. It guarantees compliance with Annexure III and sustains market confidence in IFWCS-certified goods.

Task V. Reporting

- **Convey Evaluation Results**
  To maintain transparency and provide all relevant stakeholders with necessary insights, the evaluation results will be communicated to the applicant, peer reviewers, certification decision-making entities, stakeholders, and IFWCS. This ensures that all parties involved are informed about the findings of the audit process.

  The execution of this step will involve:
  - **Compilation of Evaluation Findings:** Summarizing audit results, including compliance status, areas of **concern**, and recommendations.
  - Stakeholder **Communication:** Distributing findings to key stakeholders to ensure transparency and **accountability**.
  - **Clarifications and Discussions:** Addressing any queries from stakeholders regarding the evaluation results to ensure understanding and alignment.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  - **FM Certification**
    - Verify that FM audit results have been shared with stakeholders per Annexure I and including compliance status and non-conformities.
    - We will verify that the result dissemination and transparency has been ensured.

  - **ToF Management Certification**
    - Audit results circulated to stakeholders per Annexure II, detailing compliance and gaps.
    - Assessment by our team to verify result communication and clarity, ensuring all stakeholders understand the findings and necessary corrective actions.

  - **CoC Certification**
    - Audit results provided to supply-chain stakeholders as required by Annexure III, covering traceability and labelling compliance.
    - Verification of result distribution and CoC adherence ensured through documentation review and stakeholder confirmation.

- **Submit the Draft Report**
  A draft report will be prepared, summarizing the audit findings, observations, and compliance status. This report will be shared with the client for review, allowing them to provide feedback and address any concerns before the finalization of the certification decision.

  To ensure an effective submission process, the following steps will be implemented:
  - **Draft Report Preparation:** Structuring the report to include key findings, non-conformities (if any), and recommendations for improvement.

- **Review and Internal Validation:** Ensuring accuracy and consistency in the findings before sharing with the applicant.
- **Client Submission:** Providing the applicant with the draft report and allowing them a review period for feedback.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:
- **FM Certification**
  - Draft FM report submitted, summarising Annexure I compliance, findings, non-conformities and recommendations.
  - Verify report accuracy and completeness to ensure all Annexure I compliance, findings, non-conformities, and recommendations are thoroughly covered.

- **ToF Management Certification**
  - Draft ToF report submitted, detailing Annexure II compliance, gaps and corrective actions.
  - Assessment by the team confirms that the report provides thoroughness in addressing all critical aspects.

- **CoC Certification**
  - Draft CoC report submitted, covering Annexure III compliance with traceability and labelling findings.
  - Verify the report confirms robustness and adherence to all specified traceability and labelling requirements.

- **Client Confirmation of the Draft Report**
  The client will be given the opportunity to review the draft report and provide confirmation or necessary clarifications. This step ensures that any discrepancies or misunderstandings are resolved before issuing the final certification report.
- **Issue the Final Report**
  Once the review process is complete, the final report will be formally issued to the client. This report serves as the official record of compliance and certification status, marking the conclusion of the evaluation phase.

  To execute this step effectively, the following measures will be taken:
  - **Final Validation and Approval:** Ensuring all stakeholder feedback has been incorporated before finalization.
  - **Formal Issuance to the Client:** Delivering the final report to the applicant with clear certification outcomes.
  - **Archival and Documentation:** Maintaining records of the final report for compliance, future reference, and certification renewal considerations.

Task VI. Non-Conformities and Corrective Action Requests
- **Record All Conformities and Non-Conformities Against IFWCS-FM Standard Requirements**
  To ensure a structured approach to tracking compliance, all identified conformities and non-conformities against the IFWCS-FM standard will be systematically documented. This process will highlight areas requiring corrective action and ensure that compliance measures are effectively addressed.

  This will be executed through:
  - **Detailed Compliance Assessment:** Reviewing all aspects of forest management practices to identify areas of conformity and non-conformity.
  - **Systematic Documentation:** Recording findings in a structured manner for transparency and ease of reference.
  - **Stakeholder Communication:** Informing the applicant about identified non-conformities and outlining the necessary corrective actions.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:

- FM Certification
  - Conformities and non-conformities documented against 69 indicators in Annexure I, with detailed audit findings.
  - We will assess that document provides accuracy.

- ToF Management Certification
  - Conformities and non-conformities documented against 22 indicators in Annexure II, supported by audit observations.
  - Assess that the document verifies record completeness and ensures compliance with the specified standards.

- CoC Certification
  - Conformities and non-conformities documented against Annexure III, highlighting traceability and labelling issues.
  - We will verify that the document verifies robustness.

- **Categorize non-conformities as Major or Minor**
  Non-conformities will be classified into two categories: Major and Minor. Major non-conformities indicate significant deviations from IFWCS standards that could impact certification, whereas Minor non-conformities reflect areas requiring improvement without immediate certification risk.

  The classification process will include:
  - **Impact Assessment:** Evaluating the significance of each non-conformity in relation to IFWCS compliance.
  - **Risk Analysis:** Determining the potential consequences of non-conformities on forest management **operations**.
  - **Prioritization of Corrective Actions:** Addressing major non-conformities with immediate **remedial** measures while allowing reasonable time for minor non-conformities to be corrected.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  - FM Certification
    - Non-conformities classified as major or minor per Annexure I, with impact on biodiversity and NWPC 2023 compliance evaluated
    - Classification accuracy will be assessed to ensure alignment with standards and regulatory requirements.

  - ToF Management Certification
    - Non-conformities classified per Annexure II, assessing sustainability impact.
    - Classification correctness to be thoroughly evaluated.

  - CoC Certification
    - Non-conformities classified per Annexure III, assessing traceability breaches.
    - Classification validity will be assessed to ensure compliance and accuracy.

- **Raise Corrective Action Requests (CARs) and Monitor Their Closure**
  Corrective Action Requests (CARs) will be issued for all identified non-conformities, requiring the applicant to implement necessary corrective measures. The closure of these CARs will be actively monitored to ensure compliance with IFWCS requirements before final certification approval.

  The execution of this step will involve:
  - **Issuance of CARs:** Providing a detailed explanation of identified non-conformities and the necessary corrective actions required.
  - **Implementation Support:** Offering guidance to the applicant to ensure corrective measures align with IFWCS standards.
  - **Progress Monitoring:** Conducting follow-up assessments to verify the effective resolution of non-conformities.

- **Final Compliance Verification:** Ensuring all corrective actions have been satisfactorily implemented before certification approval.
- For each of the three certification services we would follow:

For each of the three certification services we would follow:
- **FM Certification**
  - Corrective Action Requests (CARs) issued for FM non-conformities under Annexure I and implementation monitored.
  - CAR closure and compliance assessed to ensure all corrective measures are effectively addressed.

- **ToF Management Certification**
  - CARs issued for ToF non-conformities under Annexure II and corrective measures tracked.
  - Verification of CAR resolution is conducted to ensure effective closure.

- **CoC Certification**
  - CARs issued for CoC non-conformities under Annexure III, with traceability corrections monitored.
  - Our team will verify CAR closure and CoC compliance.

Task VII. Certification Decision

- **Review of Audit Report**
  A thorough review of the Audit Report will be conducted to assess compliance with IFWCS standards. This review ensures that all findings, observations, and corrective actions are properly evaluated before making a certification decision.

  This process will involve:
  - **Comprehensive Report Analysis:** Evaluating audit findings, corrective measures taken, and overall compliance status.
  - **Stakeholder Verification:** Ensuring input from auditors and peer reviewers is accurately **reflected** in the final decision.
  - **Decision Preparation:** Compiling a summary of compliance and outstanding issues for the certification decision-making body.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  - **FM Certification**
    - Audit report reviewed for Annexure I compliance, evaluating corrective actions and stakeholder input.

  - **ToF Management Certification**
    - ToF audit report reviewed for Annexure II compliance, assessing gap resolutions and sustainability.

  - **CoC Certification**
    - CoC audit report reviewed for Annexure III compliance, evaluating traceability corrections.

- **Certification Decision by Competent Technical Reviewer**
  The final certification decision will be made by a competent technical reviewer with expertise in forest certification. This ensures that the decision is based on a professional and impartial evaluation of the audit findings.

  The steps involved will include:
  - **Reviewer Assignment:** Ensuring that a qualified and impartial expert evaluates the audit report.
  - **Independent Assessment:** Conducting an unbiased evaluation of compliance status and corrective actions taken.

- **Final Decision Approval:** Granting or denying certification based on a comprehensive assessment of all audit findings.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:
- **FM Certification**
  - CoC audit report reviewed for Annexure III compliance, evaluating traceability corrections.
  - Our team with higher management will verify decision validity.

- **ToF Management Certification**
  - Qualified reviewer issues decision on Annexure II compliance, confirming sustainability criteria.
  - Our team with higher management will verify decision correctness.

- **CoC Certification**
  - Qualified reviewer issues decision on Annexure III compliance, verifying traceability and labelling.
  - Our team with higher management will verify decision robustness.

- **Grant of Certification**
  The certification may be awarded only after complete adherence to the respective certification standards have been established. There is no scope for conditional certification other than for minor non-conformities.

- **Certification Validity**
  The certification shall be valid for five years after it has been awarded, but a yearly surveillance will be carried out to make sure that all certification standards are being met and to check for any new problems that may have arisen during this time, including during the annual surveillance.

  The certification granted will remain valid as long as the organization continues to comply with IFWCS requirements. Organizations must maintain adherence to these standards to retain their certification status.

  This will be managed through:
  - **Ongoing Compliance Monitoring:** Conducting periodic assessments to verify continued adherence **to** IFWCS standards.
  - **Renewal Procedures:** Establishing clear processes for recertification to ensure uninterrupted certification status.
  - **Non-Compliance Actions:** Implementing measures for suspension or revocation if compliance is not maintained.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  - **FM Certification**
    - Certification valid for five years with annual surveillance audits per Annexure I, maintaining NWPC 2023 compliance.
    - We will check for continue adherence.

  - **ToF Management Certification**
    - Certification valid for five years with annual audits per Annexure II, ensuring sustained management-plan adherence.

  - **CoC Certification**
    - Certification valid for five years with annual audits per Annexure III, requiring continuous traceability.

- **Usage of IFWCS Logo**
  Certified entities will be required to follow applicable guidelines for the use of the IFWCS logo. Proper logo usage ensures credibility and compliance with branding and certification regulations established by IFWCS.

This process will include:
– **Guideline Distribution:** Providing certified entities with official IFWCS logo usage policies.
– **Compliance Monitoring:** Ensuring proper application of the logo across certified products and **promotional** materials.
– **Enforcement Measures:** Addressing any misuse of the IFWCS logo to maintain credibility and standardization.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:
– **FM Certification**
  ▪ IFWCS logo usage follows Annexure I guidelines, ensuring the logo reflects certified status.

– **ToF Management Certification**
  ▪ IFWCS logo usage adheres to Annexure II rules, aligning logo with certification.

– **CoC Certification**
  ▪ IFWCS logo usage follows Annexure III protocols, evidencing traceability.

Task VIII. Re-Application for Certification

In cases where a client's application for certification under the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS) — whether for Forest Management (FM), Trees outside Forests (ToF), or Chain of Custody (CoC) — is rejected due to non-compliance or failure to meet certification requirements, the applicant has the option to reapply.

- **Fresh Submission Required:** The applicant must submit a new application in the prescribed format to the Certification Body (CB), along with updated documentation and management plans as applicable.

- **Reference to Earlier Application**: The applicant must clearly mention the previous application number and provide a written explanation of corrective actions taken to address the non-conformities or deficiencies that led to the initial rejection.

- **Review of Corrective Actions:** The Certification Body will review the reapplication to ensure that all previously identified issues have been adequately resolved. This may include a reassessment or additional audit, if necessary.

- **Reapplication Timeline**: The applicant may reapply at any time; however, it is advisable to do so only after addressing all non-conformities to avoid repeated rejections and additional costs.

- **Limitation on Reapplication**: Multiple reapplications without significant improvement or failure to demonstrate conformity with IFWCS standards may result in a temporary disqualification or require higher-level review before accepting future applications.

- **Non-Refundable Application Fee**: The application fee paid during the initial application process is non-refundable, irrespective of the outcome. A new application fee must be paid with each fresh submission, as per the applicable fee structure defined by the Scheme Operating Agency (SOA) and approved by the IFWCC.

- **Documentation and Record-Keeping**: The Certification Body shall maintain complete records of the original application, reasons for rejection, and reapplication reviews for traceability and transparency.

Task IX. Re-Certification (Renewal)

- **Continuation of Certification**
  Recertification will be conducted to ensure that the certified entity continues to meet IFWCS standards. This process includes a comprehensive evaluation of ongoing compliance, operational practices, and corrective actions implemented since the previous certification.

- **Establishment of a New Certification Contract**
  A new certification contract will be established between the certification body and the certified entity to formalize the recertification process. This contract outlines the terms, conditions, and obligations required for maintaining certification under IFWCS guidelines.

This process will be implemented through:

– **Contract Drafting:** Developing a detailed agreement outlining compliance **requirements**, audit schedules, and responsibilities.

– **Applicant Review and Agreement:** Providing the certified entity with the contract for review and ensuring mutual understanding of obligations.

– **Approval and Formalization:** Finalizing the agreement and securing official endorsements from both parties.

– **Implementation Monitoring:** Ensuring adherence to the contract terms **throughout** the certification period, with periodic evaluations and necessary updates.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:

– **FM Certification**
  ▪ New FM contract outlines Annexure I obligations, audit schedules, and compliance terms.
  ▪ Our team will verify contract validity.

– **ToF Management Certification**
  ▪ New FM contract outlines Annexure I obligations, audit schedules, and compliance terms.
  ▪ We will verify contract robustness.

– **CoC Certification**
  ▪ New CoC contract specifies Annexure III obligations, outlining traceability and audit terms.
  ▪ We will verify contract compliance.

Task X. Suspending, Withdrawing, or Reducing Scope of Certification

- **Compliance with Standards**
  All certification activities will be conducted in alignment with the requirements set forth by ISO/IEC 17065. Any decision regarding suspension, withdrawal, or scope reduction will be based on an objective evaluation and strict adherence to international certification norms.

  This process will be executed through:

  – **Systematic Compliance Review:** Regularly assessing certified entities to ensure **continuous** adherence to IFWCS standards.

  – **Risk-Based Evaluation:** Identifying factors that may necessitate suspension, withdrawal, or reduction in certification scope, such as non-compliance or operational changes.

  – **Decision Justification:** Ensuring all actions taken are based on transparent, well-documented, and verifiable findings.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:

  – **FM Certification**
    ▪ Ongoing compliance with Annexure I and ISO/IEC 17065 maintained; impact of any non-compliance assessed.

  – **ToF Management Certification**
    ▪ Continual compliance with Annexure II and ISO/IEC 17065 ensured; non-compliance effects evaluated.

  – **CoC Certification**
    ▪ Continuous compliance with Annexure III and ISO/IEC 17065 upheld; impact of non-compliance assessed.

- **Notification to IFWCS**
  In the event of certification suspension, withdrawal, or reduction in scope, IFWCS will be formally notified in writing. This ensures transparency and enables IFWCS to take necessary actions in accordance with regulatory and certification guidelines.

  The notification process will include:

- **Formal Documentation Preparation:** Clearly outlining the reasons, evidence, and justification for the decision.
- **Submission to IFWCS:** Sending an official notice to IFWCS within the required timeframe.
- **Stakeholder Communication:** Informing the certified entity and relevant stakeholders about the decision and next steps.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:

- **FM Certification**
  - IFWCC notified of FM suspension or withdrawal in line with Annexure I, with documented reasons and evidence.
  - Our team will verify notification accuracy.

- **ToF Management Certification**
  - IFWCC notified of ToF suspension or withdrawal per Annexure II, supplying justification and documentation.
  - Our team will verify notification completeness.

- **CoC Certification**
  - IFWCC notified of CoC suspension or withdrawal per Annexure III, detailing traceability issues and evidence.
  - Our team will verify notification robustness.

- **Impact and Corrective Actions**
  Organizations affected by suspension, withdrawal, or scope reduction will be provided with clear reasons for the decision, along with guidance on corrective measures. The certification body will support the entity in addressing concerns and regaining compliance where possible.

  This process will involve:
  - **Detailed Impact Assessment:** Evaluating the consequences of certification suspension or withdrawal on the organization and its operations.
  - **Corrective Action Plan Development:** Assisting the affected entity in creating and implementing measures to address non-conformities.
  - **Follow-Up and Reassessment:** Conducting periodic reviews to determine whether corrective **actions** have been effectively implemented and whether certification can be reinstated.

  For each of the three certification services we would follow:
  - **FM Certification**
    - Impact of suspension or withdrawal assessed per Annexure I, with corrective-action guidance provided.
    - Our team will verify action plan feasibility.

  - **ToF Management Certification**
    - Impact of suspension or withdrawal evaluated per Annexure II, offering corrective-action support.
    - Our team will verify action plan effectiveness.

  - **CoC Certification**
    - Impact of suspension or withdrawal assessed per Annexure III, providing traceability-correction guidance.
    - Our team will verify action plan robustness.

Task XI. Transfer of Certification

Organizations choosing to transfer their certification/registration to Abet Management Consulting Private Limited will be handled as follows:

- If the supplier's current registrar is fully accredited, and the supplier is in good standing and has a current certificate the Company can issue a confirmation report in order to cover any lapse in certification/registration that may occur prior to the Company recertification audit.

- For transfer certification/registrations, a documentation review will be conducted to see that the organization has addressed all requirements of the applicable standard.

- The audit is conducted in accordance to audit procedure for certification and all management system elements shall be audited. Upon successful completion of the audit and review by the certification/registration committee, a certificate is issued.

- This process will be implemented through:

  – **Contract Drafting:** Developing a detailed agreement outlining compliance **requirements**, audit schedules, and responsibilities.

  – **Applicant Review and Agreement:** Providing the certified entity with the contract for review and ensuring mutual understanding of obligations.

  – **Approval and Formalization:** Finalizing the agreement and securing official endorsements from both parties.

  – **Implementation Monitoring:** Ensuring adherence to the contract terms **throughout** the certification period, with periodic evaluations and necessary updates.

For each of the three certification services we would follow:

– **FM Certification**
  ▪ Existing FM certification records reviewed for Annexure I compliance, with transfer audit confirming NWPC 2023-aligned plans and biodiversity management.

  ▪ Our team will verify documentation accuracy, audit findings, and issuance of a new FM certificate.

– **ToF Management Certification**
  ▪ Existing ToF certification records reviewed for Annexure II compliance, with transfer audit verifying management plans and sustainability practices.

  ▪ Our team will verify record completeness, audit results, and issuance of a new ToF certificate.

– **CoC Certification**
  ▪ Existing CoC certification records reviewed for Annexure III compliance, with transfer audit validating traceability and labelling across the supply chain.

  ▪ Our team will verify record accuracy, audit outcomes, and issuance of a new CoC certificate.

Sampling Description Note

1. **Introduction**

   These notes describe the methodology for conducting sampling during evaluations for:

   a) Forest Management (FM)

   b) Trees outside Forests (ToF), and

   c) Chain of Custody

   certification under the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS), as carried out by IFWCS accredited Certification Bodies (CBs). The sampling approach aims to ensure a robust, representative, and risk-informed verification of conformity with the applicable IFWCS standards (Indian Forest Management Standard, ToF Management Standard) and the National Working Plan Code 2023. This methodology is integral to the CB's internal procedures for auditing and certification against IFWCS standards

2. **Objectives**

   The primary objective of sampling is to gather sufficient, direct, and factual evidence of conformity or non-conformity with the requirements of the IFWCS standards. This includes assessing the implementation and effectiveness of the management system across the entire scope of the certification. To ensure compliance with the IFWCS standards through systematic sampling, covering:

   - Forest Management (FM) certification
   - Trees Outside Forests (ToF) certification
   - Chain of Custody (CoC) certification

3. **Scope**

   Sampling is applicable to all IFWCS forest management evaluations, including main evaluations, surveillance evaluations, and re-evaluation. It covers Forest Management Unit (FMU) areas under approved working plans/schemes, Trees outside Forests (ToF) areas, and Chain of custody.

4. **Basis for Sampling Plan Development**

   We shall develop a sampling plan for each evaluation based on an analysis of the entity (client) and the area under evaluation (New Units, Existing Unit, Size Class, and etc). This analysis informs the selection of management units (MUs) or defined areas for ToF, sites within those areas, documentation, and stakeholders for consultation. Key inputs for the sampling plan include:

   - Information provided by the applicant entity
   - The entity's management plan/working plan/working scheme.
   - The scope of the certification, including the number, size, type (forest area, plantation, agroforestry, ToF), geographical distribution, and management structures of the areas/MUs.
   - Identification of relevant Criteria, Indicators, and Verifiers from the applicable IFWCS standard and NWPC 2023.
   - Assessment of potential risks of non-conformity based on information gathered. This can be informed by the specific context of the State and forest divisions, presence of sensitive values (e.g., biodiversity, ecosystem services, HCVs if identified), land tenure or use disputes, and previous evaluation findings.
   - Results of previous evaluations, including identified non-conformities and corrective actions.
   - Information from stakeholder consultation and complaints received.

5. Sampling Methodology Components

The sampling methodology shall encompass the selection of:

5.1 Management Units (MUs) / Defined Areas:

We would categorize the Management Units (MUs) covered in the evaluation into groups of similar or 'like' MUs for sampling purposes. These groupings should aim to reduce differences within each set based on the following criteria:

a) Type of forest (e.g., natural or semi-natural forests vs. plantations)
b) Size of the Management Unit (refer to sample units)
c) Classification under the applicable IFWCS
d) Operational status of the MU—whether it is active or inactive.

Note 1: An evaluation involving multiple MUs or group certification may include one or several such sets of 'like' MUs.
Note 2: For forest management groups that include both Small or Low Intensity Managed Forests (SLIMF) and non-SLIMF operations, streamlined SLIMF procedures can be applied to those sets that are made up solely of SLIMF MUs.
Note 3: We may classify MUs into a higher size category if needed, provided that the overall sample size remains the same or is increased.

5.2 Sampling for Multiple MUs and Forest Management Groups:

For each group of similar ("like") MUs identified, we would determine the minimum number of MUs to evaluate as follows:
For multiple MUs, apply the formula:

$$X = 0.8 \times \sqrt{Y}$$

where Y is the total number of MUs within that set.

5.3 Sampling for Inactive MUs:

If a group of "like" MUs is considered **inactive** (i.e., no harvesting or forest activity since the last evaluation), a reduced sampling formula applies:

$$X = 0.1 \times \sqrt{Y}$$

Note: If we do not formally define which MUs are inactive, all are treated as active by default.

5.4 Sampling for Active Large and Medium MUs:

Size Class	Main Evaluation	Surveillance / Re-evaluation
> 10,000 ha	X = y (100%)	X = 0.8 × y
1,000 – 10,000 ha	X = 0.3 × y	X = 0.2 × y

All sets of 'like' MUs must be audited in the main evaluation.
During surveillance and re-evaluation:
- 50% of the sets (1,000–10,000 ha) must be audited.
- All sets (>10,000 ha) must still be audited.

5.4 Sampling for Active Small MUs and SLIMFs (≤ 1,000 ha):

Size Class	Main Evaluation	Surveillance / Re-evaluation
100 – 1,000 ha	X = 0.8 × √y	X = 0.6 × √y
SLIMF Units	X = 0.6 × √y	X = 0.3 × √y

5.5 Two-Step Sampling Process for ≤ 1,000 ha MUs:

Step 1: Calculate the minimum number of sets of 'like' MUs to be evaluated using the formulas in Table 5.4.

Step 2: Within each set, determine how many MUs to evaluate. MUs managed by the same person/entity may be grouped as a Resource Management Unit (RMU).

Count = number of individually managed MUs + number of RMUs.

Applying Table 5.4 formulas using this adjusted count.

Each SLIMF MU within an RMU can be counted as one MU. Non-SLIMF MUs must still follow regular sampling formulas.

5.6 Additional Sampling Rules and Adjustments:

Sample size will be increased statistically in the presence of:

- Risk indicators
- Stakeholder complaints
- Previous non-compliances

We would like to select MUs for evaluation by:

- Including some that were part of the Organization's internal monitoring sample since the last evaluation.
- Adding others at our discretion.

5.7 Mega-Groups of Small MUs (over 5,000 members):

For very large groups of small MUs:

- We may further sub-stratify the group based on risk factors such as:
    - Presence of High Conservation Values (HCVs).
    - Land tenure/use disputes.
    - Long harvesting rotations.

If none of these risks are present, we may:

- We would reduce the required sample size by up to 50%, as defined in Table 5.4.

5.8 For Forest Management Units

Type I Group (Classic Groups): A traditional group structure where the central group entity is limited to administrative functions on behalf of its members. This may include activities like sales and marketing, but it does not involve any direct engagement in forest management at the Forest Management Unit (FMU) level, such as silviculture, harvesting, or monitoring.

Type II Group (Groups with Shared Responsibilities): A collaborative structure where both the group entity and the members share responsibilities. Key forest management activities—including planning, silviculture, harvesting, and monitoring—are jointly managed by the group entity and its members.

Type III Group (Resource Manager Groups): Also known as a "resource manager" model, this type involves the group entity assuming full operational responsibility. This includes not only administrative duties but also all aspects of forest management and harvesting on behalf of the group members.

The minimum number of samples to be visited each year for internal monitoring shall be determined as follows:

a) Type I – Classic Groups
Classic groups or sub-groups are required to conduct monitoring visits covering at least 10% of their members annually.

b) Type II – Groups with Shared Responsibilities
For groups or sub-groups with shared responsibilities, reduced sampling is allowed for large memberships (more than 100 members). The sampling size is determined as:

$$X = \sqrt{y} \text{ for standard Forest Management Units (FMUs)}$$

$$X = 0.6 \times \sqrt{y} \text{ for SLIMF FMUs (Small or Low-Intensity Managed Forests)}$$

However, the sample size must not fall below 10 FMUs, and reductions do not apply where High Conservation Values (HCVs) are at risk or where there is unresolved land tenure or use rights disputes.

c) Type III – Resource Manager Groups

Groups in which the entity acts as a resource manager have the flexibility to define their own internal monitoring sample size. This discretion applies regardless of the size or ownership of the forest areas under management, and the minimum requirements outlined above do not apply.

Additional Monitoring Provisions:

- The group entity should stratify the group for monitoring based on criteria such as forest type, geographic location, and management system.
- If any non-compliance is found during monitoring visits, the group entity must issue corrective action requests and follow up to ensure implementation.
- Extra monitoring visits must be conducted if there are indications of issues or if stakeholders report any violations of IFWCS standards by group members.

6. Risk-Based Approach

A risk-based sampling approach enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of forest management evaluations by focusing more resources on areas with higher risk. This method is widely adopted in forest certification standards, such as those of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and is applicable to both individual Forest Management Units (FMUs) and grouped forests.

Core Steps in a Risk-Based Sampling Approach:

1. Risk Assessment and Stratification

- Assess each FMU or group based on risk factors such as presence of high conservation values (HCVs), history of non-compliance, land tenure disputes, ecological sensitivity, or intensity of management activities.
- Stratify FMUs into risk categories (e.g., high, medium, low) based on this assessment.

2. Determining Sample Size

- Use statistical formulas that adjust sample size according to risk and FMU size. For example:
    - For small units (<1,000 ha):
        - Main evaluation: $X = 0.8 \times \sqrt{y}$
        - Surveillance: $X = 0.6 \times \sqrt{y}$
    - For SLIMF (Small and Low Intensity Managed Forests):
        - Main evaluation: $X = 0.6 \times \sqrt{y}$
        - Surveillance: $X = 0.3 \times \sqrt{y}$
    - For large units (>10,000 ha):
        - Main evaluation: $X = y$
        - Surveillance: $X = 0.8 \times \sqrt{y}$
    - Where y is the number of units in the risk category; always round up to the nearest whole number.

3. Targeted and Representative Sampling

- Prioritize sampling in high-risk strata, ensuring more frequent and detailed audits in these areas.
- Include a random element to avoid bias and ensure representativeness in terms of geography and management.
- For mega groups (>5,000 small units), sub-stratify further by risk factors like HCV presence, land disputes, or harvesting cycles, and adjust sample sizes accordingly.

4. Adaptive Sampling

- Increase sample size or frequency if there are stakeholder complaints, evidence of non-conformities, or emerging risks.

- Ensure every unit is audited at least once within a defined certification cycle (e.g., five years).

Why This Approach Is More Effective
- **Resource Optimization:** Focuses monitoring and evaluation on areas most likely to have issues, reducing unnecessary effort in low-risk areas.
- **Improved Detection:** Increases the likelihood of identifying non-compliance or ecological threats where they are most probable
- **Adaptability:** Allows for dynamic adjustment of sampling as new risks emerge or are mitigated

7. Our Policy for Sample Retention under IFWCS Certification

We would maintain a clear sample retention policy as it is essential for traceability, transparency, and quality assurance in the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS). Below is a model policy tailored for IFWCS certification processes, ensuring that all samples (e.g., wood, soil, or product samples) collected during audits or chain of custody checks are managed systematically.

Policy Provisions

A. Sample Labelling and Documentation
- Each sample will be labelled with a unique identifier, collection date, location, collector's name, and purpose of sampling.
- All samples will be recorded in a sample logbook or digital system, including details of storage location.

B. Storage Conditions
- Wood samples: We would store in a cool, dry, and secure area, protected from direct sunlight and pests.
- Soil or biological samples: Store as per scientific best practices (e.g., refrigeration if required for biological integrity).
- Chain of custody samples: We would store in a locked, access-controlled location to prevent tampering.

C. Retention Period
- All samples must be retained for a minimum of 12 months (may be subjected to change) from the date of certification decision or until the closure of any related disputes, whichever is later.
- For chain of custody audits, samples may be retained until the completion of the next surveillance audit cycle or as specified by IFWCS guidelines.

D. Access and Security
- Only authorized personnel may access stored samples.
- All access events must be logged to maintain chain of custody integrity.

E. Disposal
- After the retention period, samples must be disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner, with disposal documented in the sample log.
- Sensitive or hazardous material must be disposed of as per legal and environmental regulations.

F. Review and Compliance
- This policy will be reviewed at least every five years, or as required by updates to IFWCS standards.
- Non-compliance with this policy may result in corrective actions as per IFWCS and accreditation body procedures.

8. Documentation and Records

Relevant documentation and records shall be reviewed to verify the implementation and effectiveness of the management system. This includes, but is not limited to, management plans, operational plans, inventory data, harvesting records, chemical use records, training records, sales records, and records related to complaints and non-conformities.

9. Stakeholder Consultation and Interviews:

- Consultation with interested and affected stakeholders shall be conducted during the evaluation process.
- Interviews shall be conducted with management personnel, forest workers (including contractors), community members, and other relevant stakeholders to gather information and verify observations.

10. Documentation of Sampling

The sampling methodology employed, including the rationale for the selection of MUs/areas and sites, shall be clearly documented in the certification audit report. The observations of conformity or non-conformity made during the sampling activities shall be presented clearly, typically at the level of the indicators of the applicable IFWCS standard.

Sampling Receipt

Abet Management Consulting Pvt Ltd - IFWCS Sampling Receipt

FM/ToF/CoC   **Date of Issue:**

Recepient Details: -   **Issuer Details: -**
Name: Name:
Address: Certificate Code:
Contact Person: Address
Email/Phone: Contact Person
                                                                                              Email/Phone

Sample Details:

Item No.	Plot No.	Details	Wood Species	Sample Type	Quantity	Origin (Forest Unit / Region)	Remark
1							
2							

Purpose of Sampling:

☐   Chain of Custody Verification

☐   Legal Origin Verification

☐   Physical/Technical Testing

Receiving Confirmation (to be filled by Certifying Body)

Name: Signature:

Designation: Date:

Remark/Observation

Non - Conformity (NC) Record Matrix

Audit Date:

Certification Type (FM/ ToF /CoC):

Auditor Name:

Entity Name:

S. No	Clause/ Indicator Reference	Description of non-conformity	Severity (Major/ Minor/ OFI)	Evidence Collected	Status (Open/Closed)	Closure Date	Remarks

Audit Report Format for IFWCS Certification

Overview

Audit Report is a systematic documentation of findings from an IFWCS certification audit. After the on-site assessment and document review, auditors compiled a detailed report outlining compliance status, observed non-conformities, supporting evidence, and recommendations. The draft report is shared with the auditee for comments, followed by a peer review.

Section A: Cover Page & Identification	
Title: Audit Report under Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS) Certification Type	☐ Forest Management (FM) ☐ Trees Outside Forests (ToF) ☐ Chain of Custody (CoC)
Applicant Entity:	
Geographical Scope:	
Certification Body (CB):	
Unique Application ID:	
Audit Dates:	
Lead Auditor:	
Audit Team Members:	

Section B: Executive Summary
Overview of audit objectives, context and scope
Key observations and findings
Summary of conformity to relevant standards
Summary of non-conformities and follow-up actions
Certification recommendation and rationale

Section C: Scope of Certification			
Element	**Forest Management**	**Tress Outside Forest**	**Chain of Custody**
Area/Enterprise Description			
Ownership Type			
Approved Management Plan			
Certified Products			
Operations Covered			

Section D: Methodology and Process
Pre-Audit Preparations: Receipt and review of application, antecedent check

Document Review: Management plans, legal status, GIS data, stakeholder records

Field Audit: Site visits to compartments, plantations, working circles, production units, boundaries

Stakeholder Consultation: Forest officials, communities, farmers, processors, NGOs, SHGs, and industry representatives

Audit Tools Used: Checklists, interviews, inspection, GIS mapping, sampling

Section E: Compliance with Certification Standards

This section must evaluate compliance with applicable IFWCS standards across FM, ToF, and CoC

Forest Management (FM) Certification	Trees outside Forests (ToF) Management Certification	Chain of Custody (CoC) Certification
8 criteria 69 Indicators 254 verifiers	5 criteria 22 indicators 76 verifiers	

Section F: Non- Conformities and Corrective Actions

Include detailed descriptions of each NC, classification (Major/Minor/OFI), corrective actions suggested.

Section G: Stakeholder Feedback Summary

Summarize feedback from consulted stakeholders, including concerns raised and responses/actions by the applicant.

Section H: Positive Practices / Innovations / Strengths

Document replicable best practices, innovations in sustainable management, and any exemplary initiatives.

Section I: Certification Body's Recommendation

Clearly state recommendation by certification type and rationale for each decision.

Section J: Certification Details (If awarded)

Certificate No.	
Validity: 5 years (with annual surveillance)	
Certified Area/Units	
Certified Products	
Trademark/Logo Use Approval	☐ Yes ☐ No

Section K: Declarations and Sign-Off

Lead Auditor	Name:	_____
	Signature:	_____
	Date:	_____
Peer Reviewer	Name:	_____
	Signature:	_____
	Date:	_____
CB Certification Authority:	Name:	_____
	Signature:	_____
	Date:	_____

Section L: Annexures

Annexure A: Detailed Criterion-Indicator-Verifier Assessment

Annexure B: GIS Maps and Legal Status Documents

Annexure C: Stakeholder Interaction Records

Annexure D: Photographic Documentation (geo-tagged)

Annexure E: Non-Conformity Evidence and Closure Records

Annexure F: Sample Recordkeeping for CoC

Annexure G: Copy of Working/CoC Plans