



Accreditation and Certification Requirements for CBs under NCCF ToF Certification Scheme

NCCF -STD- ACR-ToF 1.1/2019

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Foreword

The Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is a not for profit organization registered under Societies Registration Act, 1860. NCCF is involved in developing Forest Certification scheme in the country. It is an institutional mechanism to ensure collaborative and streamlined efforts for development of National Forest Certification System and Standards. It aims to promote the implementation of improved forest/ToF practices in the country and further the development of healthier, sustainable: economically beneficial, environmentally responsible and socially appropriate in accordance with national policies, institutional frameworks and sustainability usage norms.

The Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is the National Governing Body of the National Forest Certification Scheme and Standards (NFCSS) and has overall responsibility for the smooth working/functioning of the NFCSS while maintaining its credibility.

This document describes the procedures to be followed for the accreditation and certification requirements for CBs operating the NCCF ToF certification scheme.

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1. Scope

This document defines the requirements for the Certification Bodies intending to operate with the Trees outside Forests certification scheme established by Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF).

2. Normative References

- a. *ISO/IEC 17065: Conformity assessment — Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services(as applicable)*
- b. *ISO/IEC 17021: Conformity assessment — Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems(as applicable)*
- c. *PEFC Annex 6: Certification and Accreditation Procedures*
- d. *PEFC ST 2003:2012: Requirements for Certification Bodies operating Certification against the PEFC International Chain of Custody Standard*
- e. *ISO 9000:2005 Quality Management systems - Fundamentals and vocabulary*
- f. *ISO 9001 Auditing practices group guidance on third party auditor impartiality and conflict of interest, 2005*
- g. *ISO/IEC 17000:2004 Conformity Assessment - Vocabulary and general principles*
- h. *ISO/IEC 17024:2012-11 Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies operating certification of persons*
- i. *ISO 19011:2011 Guidelines for auditing management systems*
- j. *ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004 Standardization and related activities – General vocabulary*
- k. *ISO/IEC Guide 60:2004 Code of good practice for conformity assessment*
- l. *PEFC ST 2001, , PEFC Logo Usage Rules - Requirements (hereinafter PEFC Logo usage rules)*
- m. *NCCF–STD-LOGO-01/2017, NCCF Logo usage requirements*

Verbal forms for the expression of provisions:

“shall”: indicates requirements strictly to be followed to conform to the standard.

“should”: indicates that among several possibilities one is recommended as particularly suitable, without mentioning or excluding others, or that a certain course of action is preferred but not necessarily required. A CB can meet these requirements in an equivalent way provided this can be demonstrated and justified.

“may”: indicates a course of action permissible within the limits of the document.

“can”: used for statements of possibility and capability, whether material, physical or causal.

3. Role of NCCF, CB and AB:

- 3.1. **Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF):** NCCF is a standard setting organisation and develops standards for certification of natural resources.
- 3.2. **Certification Body (CB):** Third-party Conformity Assessment Body operating for NCCF certification scheme(s).
- 3.3. **Accreditation Body (AB):** AB provides accreditation to Certification Bodies based on assessment of their competence as per the AB's criteria and in accordance with NCCF Standards and Guidelines contained here with.

4. General Requirements

- The criteria against which the client organisation is evaluated are those outlined in latest version of the ToF Certification Standard, Group Management Certification Standard and relevant mandatory appendices.

Note: The latest version of the NCCF standards and their amendments are available at NCCF Website www.nccf.in.

- **Accreditation Scope:** The CB shall conduct its certification operations according to their granted accreditation scope and in conformity with the requirements specified in this standard.
- CB shall be accredited by an accreditation body that is signatory of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) for product certification.
- CB shall comply with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17065, ISO 19011 and be accredited with ISO/IEC 17065.
- The CB shall inform the affected clients within 30 days after the reduction, withdrawal or suspension of their accreditation scope. The clients shall be informed to seek certification from another accredited CB within 6 months to keep their certification valid, as applicable.

4.1. Legal Requirement

Legal Responsibility: CB shall conform with the requirements of the ISO/IEC 17065 Certification

- i. CB Shall conform with the requirements of the ISO/IEC 17065
- ii. The CB shall have a legally enforceable certification agreement signed by the CB and the client prior to the main evaluation. Certification agreement shall consider the responsibilities of the CB and its clients and the same shall be made available to AB or NCCF upon request

4.2. Certification Agreement

- 4.2.1 The client shall inform the CB within 10 working days, of changes that may affect its ability to conform with the certification requirements.

Note: *Examples of changes can include the following:*

- the legal, commercial, organizational status or ownership
- organization and management (e.g. key managerial, decision-making or technical staff)
- modifications to the product or the production method
- contact address and production sites
- major changes to the quality management system

4.2.2 Regarding the obligations of the client

- i. conform with all applicable certification requirements including any conditions set by the CB for granting or maintaining certification;
- ii. disclose current or previous application or certification with any other forestry/natural resource management certification schemes in the last five (5) years, if any;
- iii. agree to the conduct of evaluations at the required intervals, including the CB's right to carry out unannounced or short notice audits; participation of the observers, if applicable.
- iv. agree to witness audits and other surveillance activities of the accreditation body;
- v. agree, that a complaint is first handled according to the CB's dispute resolution procedure and if not resolved, then referred to AB and ultimately to NCCF, in case of disagreement with audit findings related to NCCF normative documents;
- vi. making claims regarding certification consistent with the scope of certification and not making any claims of conformity (or near conformity) with NCCF certification requirements until and unless certification is granted;
- vii. the client does not use its product certification in such a manner as to bring the CB into disrepute and does not make any statement regarding its product certification that the CB may consider misleading or unauthorized;
- viii. the client keeps a record of all complaints made known to it relating to compliance with certification requirements and makes these records available to the CB when requested, and
 - takes appropriate action with respect to such complaints and any deficiencies found in products that affect compliance with the requirements for certification;
 - documents the actions taken;
- ix. the client provides copies of the certification documents to others, the documents shall be reproduced in their entirety.
- x. agree, that in case of reduction, suspension or withdrawal of the scope of CB's NCCF accreditation, the certification of the affected clients will be suspended within six (6) months after the date of reduction, suspension or withdrawal of the respective scope of NCCF accreditation;

4.2.3 Regarding the rights of the CB, AB and NCCF

- i. agree, that the CB has right to delay or postpone its decision on certification, in order to take account of new or additional information which has not already been considered in its audit report and which, in the opinion of the CB, could affect the outcome of its evaluation;
- ii. agree, that the CB shall not be obliged to grant or maintain certification, if activities of the client conflict with the obligations of the CB as specified in its accreditation contract with AB, or which, in the sole opinion of the CB, reflect badly on the good name of the CB;
- iii. agree, that the CB and NCCF have the right to revise the requirements of certification within the period of validity of the certification, including the revision of costs and fees;

- iv. agree, that the CB, NCCF and AB have the right to access confidential information, examine documentation deemed necessary, and access to the relevant equipment, location(s), area(s), personnel, and bodies providing outsourced services to clients;
- v. agree, that the CB has the right to use information which is brought to its attention, to follow up on misuses of the NCCF trademarks and of the intellectual property rights held by NCCF;
- vi. acknowledge the title of the NCCF's intellectual property rights and that NCCF retains full ownership of the intellectual property rights and that nothing shall be deemed to constitute a right for the client to use or cause to be used any of the intellectual property rights;
- vii. agree, that the CB has the right to suspend and/ or withdraw its certification with immediate effect if, in the sole opinion of the CB, the client is not in conformity with the conditions specified for the maintenance of certification;

4.3 Management of Impartiality

4.3 **Management of Impartiality**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065:2012

4.3.1 The CB shall identify risks to its impartiality on an on-going basis. This shall include those risks that arise from its activities, from its relationships, or from the relationships of its personnel. However, such relationships may not necessarily present a CB with a risk to impartiality. If a risk to impartiality is identified, the CB shall be able to demonstrate how it eliminates or minimizes such risk. This information shall be made available to the NCCF.

4.3.2 An individual who has provided consultancy or worked for the client, shall not be used to review, audit or make a certification decision for a period of 3 years.

4.4 **Liability and Financing**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

4.5 **Non-Discriminatory Conditions**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

4.6 **Confidentiality**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

4.6.1 The CB shall inform the client that it is obliged to provide information to the NCCF. To comply with this requirement, CB shall have written consent of the client organization for information disclosure.

4.7 **Publicly Available Information**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

The CB shall maintain its impartiality statement, (through publications, electronic media or other means), and make available upon request.

5 Structural Requirements

5.1 Organizational structure and top management

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- 5.1.1 The management of the CB shall identify board, group of persons, or a person having overall authority and responsibility for the following:
- complaint mechanism;
 - impartiality of NCCF certification;

5.2 Mechanism for safeguarding Impartiality:

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- 5.2.1 The CB shall establish, document and implement a policy on safeguarding impartiality, demonstrating its understanding of the possible influence that can be exerted on it as an organization and/or on its personnel when performing its verification/certification functions, and stressing its commitment to fully address that issue.

5.2.1.1 A CB shall have a documented structure that safeguards impartiality of its operations.

5.2.1.2 The CB shall have a committee (optional) that safeguards the CB's impartiality in its verification/certification functions and ensures that the policy on safeguarding impartiality and related procedures and other systems are effectively implemented.

5.2.1.3 The impartiality committee (if exist) shall:

- a. be independent from all verification/certification operations of the CB, and shall report directly to the CB's top management
- b. have in its composition the participation of key interested parties with a balanced representation of each of them
- c. have a chairman who shall be a person independent from the activities of the certification program
- d. have documented terms of reference. This committee shall meet , at least once a year, and a complete record of its proceedings shall be maintained
- e. have access to all verification/certification files or records and be able to review them, if needed. This committee need not intervene in or review each verification/certification activity, but may need to review them to fulfill its mandate
- f. prepare an annual synthesis report of its activities, which shall be included in the CB's annual report to the Board to be submitted in accordance with the NCCF accreditation procedure. This report shall be presented to the AB upon request

5.2.1.4 In cases where the impartiality committee identifies issues through the monitoring or review of implementation of the CB's systems to safeguard impartiality, it shall report the instance to the CB's top management. If the top management does not follow the advice of the

impartiality committee, this committee shall have the right to report the instance to the Board through the NCCF.

5.2.1.5 The CB shall enable a NCCF assessment team, upon request, to observe meetings of the impartiality committee, as part of the CB's accreditation process.

5.2.1.6 Analysis of threats against Impartiality:

- a. The CB shall establish, document, implement and maintain a procedure for analyzing potential threats against impartiality.
- b. In analyzing conflict of interest , following activities of the CB or its related bodies, but not limited to these activities, shall be considered as threats to impartiality:
 - Consultancy related to Certification activities
 - Providing training on NCCF FM activities
 - Offering/payment of commissions for promotion or new business
 - Other organizational considerations such as performance targets in financial terms or in terms of a specific number of NCCF certification scheme

5.2.1.7 The CB shall establish, document, implement and maintain a procedure for the mitigation of threats against its impartiality.

5.3 **Review of Effectiveness**

5.3.1 The CB shall analyze and review, at least once a year, all data and information relevant to impartiality, such as the conflict of interest analysis, the mitigation strategies and actions undertaken, any non-conformity raised regarding impartiality and the corrective actions implemented to correct the non-conformities.

5.3.2 Based on the data/information referred to above, the CB shall carry out, once a year, an analysis of the process to safeguard impartiality and a review of its effectiveness.

5.3.3 The recommendations of actions resulting from the review of the process of safeguarding impartiality shall be reported to the CB's top management. The CB shall keep a record of this review.

6 **Resource Requirements**

6.1 **General Considerations**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

6.1.1 The CB shall ensure that all personnel carrying out the key activities, such as technical review, auditing, granting of certification, monitoring of auditors, etc. have the relevant and appropriate competencies corresponding to these activities.

6.2 Management of competence for personnel involved in the certification process

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

6.3 Contract with the personnel

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

6.4 Eligibility of personnel involved in certification activities

6.4.1 Eligibility for Auditors

6.4.1.1 Educational qualification and professional experience:

- Education qualification (college/university degree) in forestry/agriculture/agroforestry/life sciences/environmental science
- Five (5) years of professional experience in certification sector, preferably forestry, organic, agroforestry, timber legality, etc.
- Successful completion of IRCA-registered or equivalent (e.g. QCI registered) “ISO management standard auditor course” ISO 9001:2015 or ISO 14001:2015 or ISO 19011
- Successful completion of NCCF auditor training¹
- Participation in audit
 - a. As observer in one evaluation audit
 - b. As observer in one surveillance audits
 - c. As Auditor under supervision of CB’s approved Lead Auditor
- For maintaining the qualification of auditor, the CB shall ensure that auditor participated in two (2) on site audits every year.

Note: *NCCF will provide provisional approval to Auditors having experience and training completed for any other Forest Management Certification Scheme operating in the country. Auditors will be required to undergo mandatory NCCF Training to continue their auditor status for NCCF schemes.

Note: CBs are required to contact NCCF regarding the auditor training schedule for auditor trainings.

6.4.1.2 CB shall be responsible both for ensuring that the training program remains current with scheme changes, and for updating it, as needed, to improve its effectiveness.

6.4.1.3 **Competencies:** The CB shall ensure that auditors demonstrate ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- i. principles, requirements, criteria or indicators of the ToF certification standard, as applicable;
- ii. knowledge of the socio-demographics and cultural issues in the region of application of the ToF certification standard;

¹ FM Auditor Training, ToF Auditor Training, etc.

- iii. audit principles, procedures and techniques: to enable the auditor to apply those appropriate to different audits and ensure that audits are conducted in a consistent and systematic manner.
- iv. organisation situations including organizational size, structure, functions and relationships, general business processes and related terminology and cultural and social customs such as knowledge of the client organisation working language: to enable the auditor to comprehend the organisation's operational context.
- v. legislation, regulations or other relevant requirements – enabling the auditor to operate in the right legal framework and to be aware of the legislative requirements applicable to the client organization which is the subject of the audit;
- vi. the principles of forest/ToF management based on techniques involving inventories, cropping, planning, protection and the management of forest and ToF resources – to enable the auditor to examine the ToF certification scheme and to decide whether it is being adequately applied;
- vii. environmental science and technology, economic principles applicable to forest/ToF management – to give the auditor a grasp of the fundamental relations between human activities and natural resources

6.4.1.4 **Performance Review:** The CB shall provide evidence of annual monitoring of auditors applying methods such as audit witnessing, reviewing audit reports or client organisations' feedback, etc. based on the frequency of their usage and the level of risk linked to their activities. In particular, the CB shall review the competence of its personnel in the light of their performance in order to identify training needs. The auditors shall be witnessed onsite at least once in 3 years.

6.4.2 **Audit Team:** The audit team shall be comprised of by auditor(s) fulfilling the requirements. In some cases, technical experts may be required to support the required auditor competency in a particular technical area by providing appropriate technical expertise.

6.4.3 **Knowledge of NCCF System:** CB staff involved in NCCF ToF certification activities shall have at least basic knowledge of the NCCF System and competent as per their roles and responsibilities.

7 Management System Requirements

7.1 General Requirements

7.1.1 The certification body shall establish and maintain a management system that can achieve the consistent fulfillment of the requirements of this standard.

7.1.2 The management system of the certification body shall address the following:

- general management system documentation (e.g. manual, policies, definition of responsibilities) (see 7.2);
- control of documents (see 7.3);

- control of records (see 7.4);
- management review (see 7.5);
- internal audit (see 7.6);
- corrective actions (see 7.7);
- preventive actions (see 7.8)

7.2 **General management system documentation**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.3 **Control of documents**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.4 **Control of Records**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.5 **Directory of certified clients**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.6 **Management Review**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.7 **Internal Audits**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.8 **Corrective Actions**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.9 **Preventive Actions**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.10 **Records**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

7.11 **Complaints and Appeals**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

8 Supplementary Requirements

- 8.1 The CB shall comply with the additional requirements of AB for accreditation, such as requirements for using logo and text of accreditation body.

9 Process Requirements

9.1 **General Requirements:**

9.1.1 **Application:**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

For application, the CB shall obtain all the necessary information to complete the certification process in accordance with the relevant NCCF certification scheme.

9.1.1.1 Application review:

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

9.1.2 Audit team selection and assignment

9.1.2.1 The CB shall have documented procedures for selecting and appointing the audit team, including audit team leader considering competence needed to achieve objectives of the audit.

9.1.2.2 Translators used in audit shall be independent from the client organization. In cases non-independent translators are not available names of translators and their links with the client organization shall be included in the audit report.

Note: The 'team' may consist of a single qualified auditor who is then also the leader of the 'team'.

9.1.2.3 At least one (1) audit team member shall be:

- a. familiar with the local language of the area in which the audit takes place
- b. resident of India

9.1.2.4 Audit team shall include auditor(s) and/ or technical experts with the experience and qualifications to audit all aspects of the ToF Certification Standard(s), taking account of the scale and complexity of the area to be assessed.

Note: Selection of audit team shall include experience and qualifications in relation to relevant management, social, environmental and economic issues, as described in 6.4.1 of this document.

9.1.3 Determination of audit time by a CB

- The CB shall have documented procedures for determining audit time.
- For each client the CB shall determine and record, audit time with input from the auditor/technical expert with proper justification.
- In ToF, areas of LMUs are small and in most cases, less than 2 ha. Thus, substantial time is spent in travelling from one LMU to another.
- The area of LMUs can vary from **0.1 ha** to **5000 ha** and beyond for block formations and urban trees and forests. In such cases **10-12 sites may be visited per day depending on division of these LMUs.**
- Non-block formations cover linear plantations, isolated and scattered trees and bunds plantations. In such cases number of sites to be visited will depend on extent, intensity and spread of the LMU.

- In determining the audit time, the CB should consider among other things, the following aspects:
 - a) the requirements of the ToF certification standard(s),
 - b) size and complexity of the client organisation's operation, geographical and natural conditions
 - c) any outsourcing of any activities included in the scope of standard,
 - d) the results of any prior audits, including those of client organisation's management systems,
 - e) number of sites and multi-site considerations,
 - f) quality/ level of confidence of the internal monitoring programme

Note: *In case of ToF most of the plantations can be classified into three broad categories of ToF formations:*

- a) agroforests in block
- b) agroforests in non-block like linear, isolated, scattered and bund trees
- c) urban trees and forests (UTF) including trees in parks, in avenues etc.

S. No.	Formation	Threshold
A. Block Agroforest		
1	Block	Area (min) = 0.1 ha *All edges longer than 10 m; (limiting factor is area) Area (max) = 25 ha (single block, individual ownership, as per Land Ceiling Act) After a single block is >25 ha area, NCCF-STD- FM-01/2017 shall be applicable
B. Non-Block Agroforest		
2	Linear	Single/Multiple row; Maximum width = 10 m (limiting factor is edge length)
3	Isolated and Scattered	Singletree in farms, bunds, rural homesteads etc.
4	Bund	Trees around a farm boundary, tank bund, etc.
C. Urban Trees and Forests		
5	Urban trees	Single/Multiple row; Maximum width = 10 m (limiting factor is edge length)
6	Urban Forests	Area (min) = 0.1 ha *All edges longer than 10 m; (limiting factor is area)

The audit days can only be decreased on in the following cases:

- a. The site is very small to the number of personnel

- b. Mature Management system and no outstanding Major and Minor non-conformities from previous year audit.
- c. Pre-assessments or pre-preparedness audits
- d. Single generic activities

9.1.4 **Audit plan:** The standard requires that the CB shall have documented procedures to ensure that an audit plan is established for each audit to provide basis for agreement regarding the conduct and scheduling of the audit activities. The audit plan shall be communicated, and the dates of the audit shall be agreed upon, in advance with the client organization.

9.1.5 Information Requirements

9.1.5.1 Public Information

- i. The CB shall inform the NCCF about upcoming scheduled Evaluation, Re-Evaluation and Surveillance audits before 1 month of main evaluation. NCCF will make this information publicly available via NCCF website.
- ii. The CB shall inform and provide the information about certificate issued to NCCF within 7 working days from the date of issuance of the certificate.
- iii. The CB shall make a summary of Audit Report which shall be made publicly available by NCCF within 90 days from the date of audit. Confidential data can be excluded. The summary shall include at least the following:
 - Information about the certificate holder
 - Name and contact information, Scope of Certificate (area details, Certificate type, management units), group members, production details, conservation areas details, etc.
 - Audit scope and objectives
 - Audit plan (dates and locations, activities, etc.)
 - Audit team (Name, qualification and brief experience)
 - Audit results (weaknesses and strengths found, corrective action requests)
 - Stakeholder comments (if any)
 - Use of pesticides and other chemicals used
 - Certificate Decision

9.1.6 Evaluation

Audit – Pre-Assessment²

Pre-assessment generally provides the client with a status of readiness for the main evaluation audit. It is carried out to assess & confirm, scope and objectives of main evaluation audit.

9.1.7 Preparation for main evaluation

² This is a non-mandatory process for NCCF ToF Certification

9.1.7.1 If there is a pre-evaluation, the CB shall use its results for preparation of the main evaluation.

9.1.7.2 Preparation for main evaluation shall include:

- i. The CB shall inform NCCF at least 45 days prior to the onsite visit of main-evaluation. The NCCF shall release a 30 days stakeholder announcement via NCCF Website which states the client's intention to pursue the NCCF Certification. The stakeholder announcement shall invite stakeholders to meet with audit team, or to submit written submission if preferred.
- ii. Stakeholders comments/response pertaining to the client's operations and certification shall be addressed by the CB as a part of main evaluation report.
- iii. For stakeholder announcement, the CB shall provide the following information to NCCF:
 - a. Name of client;
 - b. Name and contact details of CB;
 - c. Name and address of sites to be audited;
 - d. Description of evaluation area;
 - e. Type of area;
 - f. HCV area (if declared/disclosed)
 - g. A brief outline of the process that stakeholders should follow to meet the audit team or submission of comments.
- iv. An explicit analysis of the overall responsibility for full compliance with the applicable NCCF requirements (e.g. by land owner, resource manager) as well as of the delegated responsibilities for the implementation of selected requirements (e.g. by contractors).
- v. **Documents and records:** The CB shall collect copies of key documents or records that may be used in preparation for the main evaluation, such as management plans, inventory results, management system documentation, maps, legal documents, etc.
- vi. **National legislation and guidance:** The CB shall identify and obtain copies of relevant national and local laws and administrative requirements which apply in the country or region in which the evaluation is to take place.
- vii. **Potential main evaluation team members:** The CB may contact interview and/or brief potential personnel for a subsequent main evaluation.

9.1.8 Planning of Audits

9.1.8.1 Determining audit objectives, scope and criteria

- i. Audit scope determined by the CB shall describe the extent and boundaries of the audit, such as sites, organizational units, activities and processes to be audited.

- ii. CB shall plan the tools and technologies which will be used to gather evidence. It shall be clearly defined for which purpose the tools and technologies are used and which requirements are covered, if applicable.
- iii. The standard requires that the CB when defining the scope shall consider the following criteria:
 - a. Representation: the client’s operations and processes shall be randomly but representatively considered.
 - b. Protection: Areas with high impact on the archived objectives of the management system shall be considered.
 - c. Correction: difficult and areas with previously identified nonconformities shall be considered.
 - d. Prevention: The client organization shall not be able to fully predict the chosen areas.

Audit: Main Evaluation

- This shall take place at the office and the area of the client organisation. The audit plan for this stage is adapted based on the findings of the pre-evaluation (if any) and shall be submitted to the client at least three weeks before the onsite audit.
- The CB shall conduct an explicit analysis of the area included in the scope of the evaluation in term of land management units and the structure and system in place. This will form the basis for the subsequent evaluation of the management and for sampling of the population of land management units.
- The CB shall assess the documentation and records applicable at each level of the management and display conformance to the standard requirements (Refer Annex 4 for the suggestive list of documents).
- The CB shall evaluate the tracking and tracing of products within the scope of the certification from the area up to the gate and the procedure for the identification of products
- The CB shall select the land management units (LMUs) for the evaluations as followings:
 - ❖ Classify the LMUs in the scope of evaluation as sets of ‘like’ LMUs for sampling, based on the resource type, management type, natural vs. plantations, etc.
 - ❖ For each set of ‘like’ LMUs, the CB shall select a minimum number of units ‘S’ for evaluation by applying the following formula:

Table 1. Sample Category and number of LMUs to be evaluated

Sample category	Size Class (ha)- (X)	Main evaluation	Surveillance	Re-evaluation
Category A Management Units (State Government Forest/ JFMCs/VFCs)	>15,000	$S = X$	$S = 0.7 * X$	$S = 0.7 * X$
	1,000-15,000	$S = 0.4 * X$	$S = 0.2 * X$	$S = 0.3 * X$
Category B	100-1,000	$S = 0.8 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.6 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.6 * \sqrt{X}$

Management Units (Farmers/Individuals/ Community)	Less than 100	$S = 0.6*\sqrt{X}$	$S=0.3*\sqrt{X}$	$S=0.4*\sqrt{X}$
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- S is the number of LMUs to be sampled and evaluated. This number is calculated from above Table 1. (in case of decimal number it is rounded to the upper whole number)
- X is the total number of the LMUs in the group to be evaluated.

For example: In Category B, where the area of LMU of each farmer is 2 ha or less and total no. of farmers for group certification is 190. The no. of sample LMUs will be 9. ($\{S= 0.6*\sqrt{190}\} \rightarrow \{S=0.6*13.78 = 8.27\}$)

- The auditors shall visit a sufficient variety and number of sites within each LMU selected for evaluation as to make direct, factual observations as to conformity with the requirements of the NCCF standard. Examples of sites that may be assessed are listed in Annexure 4.
- Auditors shall also select sites for inspection based on the critical areas of risks, high intensity managed forests/ToF, etc.
- Main Evaluation audit shall assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the ToF certification standard on the defined area.

9.1.9 Audit Report

9.1.9.1 Pre-assessment report (if any) along with findings shall be presented to the organization prior to the Main Evaluation audit.

9.1.9.2 The content of all reports i.e. main evaluation audit, surveillance audits and reassessment audits shall:

- include a recommendation on certification by the audit team to the CB;
- be sufficient for the CB to make an informed decision on certification;
- allow for traceability of the objective evidence upon which the evaluation was based to establish conformance or non-conformance with the requirements of the ToF certification standard;
- include a summary of the most important observations, positive as well as negative, regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the ToF management system;
- where possible, include suggestions for continuous improvement;
- support the conclusions reached by the audit team

9.1.9.3 Additionally, the report shall contain a summary of the certified areas and the audit results (i.e. a Summary Report).

9.1.9.4 CB shall submit the draft report to client within 45 days of audit for review of findings and factual correction. Client must submit their confirmation to CB on Draft Report within 30 days of submission.

- CB shall submit the Final Report to client within 75 days of date of audit.
- Where applicable, reports (e.g. of surveillance and recertification audits) shall document the clearing of each nonconformity revealed previously.

9.1.10 Technical Review of Audit Report

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- a. The CB shall ensure that the reviewer is competent to review the documents and taking final decision.

9.1.11 **Certification Decision**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- a. The certification cycle is no longer than 5 years.

9.1.12 **Identifying and recording audit findings**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- a. The CB shall inform the client of all nonconformities.
- b. Audit findings shall be classified as Major Nonconformities, Minor Nonconformities and Observations. Definitions of Major, Minor or Observations shall be followed while grading the non-conformities.
- c. If Major Non-Compliances are issued in Evaluation Audit or Re-certification Audit, CB shall not issue the Certificate until unless Major Non-compliances are satisfactorily closed. If the client doesn't address the Major Non-conformity within 6 months of detection, then another on-site evaluation shall be required.
- d. Major and minor nonconformities identified in the surveillance audits shall result in corrective action(s) by the client organisation resolving the nonconformities. The corrective action plan, including a timeframe shall be reviewed and accepted by the CB. The time period for completion of the corrective action(s) for major nonconformities identified in surveillance audits and their verification by the CB shall follow the rules of the CB but not exceed 3 months. Corrective action(s) for minor nonconformities shall be verified in 12 months or next audit whichever is earlier. If Minor Non-Compliance(s) is not closed within 12 months, then CB shall upgrade the Minor Non-compliance into Major Non-compliance with 3 months' time.
- e. Corrective action(s) for all nonconformities identified in audits shall be verified by the CB by site visit or other appropriate forms of verification.
- f. The standard requires that if specific natural conditions do not allow the implementation of corrective actions of Major non-conformities within the timeframes, the CB can give an exemption. The maximum time-period is 6 months and the justification shall be documented.
- g. The audit evidence to determine the conformity with the ToF certification standard shall include relevant information from external parties (e.g. government agencies, community groups, conservations organizations, etc.) as appropriate.

- h. If 5 or more Major Non-compliances are issued in surveillance audit, then CB shall suspend the Certificate of client and it'll be reinstated only after successful closure of all Major-Non-Compliances.

9.1.13 **Certification documentation**

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- a. The CB shall provide the client with formal certification documentation that clearly conveys, or permits identification of the following:
 - i.the name and address of the CB
 - ii. the date certification is granted (the date shall not precede the date on which the certification decision was completed)
 - iii.the name and address (s) of the client
 - iv.product(s)
 - v.the scope of certification
 - vi.validity of certificate
 - vii.normative standards reference
 - viii.signature or other defined authorization of the person(s) of the CB assigned such responsibility
 - ix.mark of scheme/scheme owner
 - x.mark of accreditation body

9.2 **Maintaining certification**

9.2.1 **Surveillance activities:**

- a. The CB has to organize an annual surveillance of the client's organization. The CB shall carry out a surveillance evaluation to monitor the certificate holder's continued conformity with applicable certification requirements at least annually.
- b. For a certificate having 5 years duration, at least four surveillance evaluations shall take place before the certificate expires.
- c. The surveillance activities must be planned in a way that representative areas and functions of the client's organization are covered.
- d. At each surveillance audit at least, the following aspects shall be included:
 - i. Compliance with legislation and regulations relevant in the areas and functions selected for the particular surveillance audit
 - ii. Review and follow up on all non-conformities raised during previous audit.
 - iii. Review of progress of planned activities
 - iv. Sample of ToF activities in the field.
- e. Surveillance audits shall be conducted at least once a year. The date of the first surveillance audit following initial certification shall not be more than 12 months from the last day of the stage 2 audit. 3 months extension can be given to the client for completing annual audit after justification and CB shall document it.

9.2.2 Re-certification

- 9.2.2.1 The CB may re-issue a certificate that has expired, based on the re-evaluation of the certificate holder's conformity with all aspects of the applicable NCCF and additional (e.g. contractual) certification requirements.
- 9.2.2.2 Re-evaluation shall follow the same procedures as for the main evaluation.
- 9.2.2.3 The reevaluation shall be completed, and decision taken before expiry to avoid the termination.
- 9.2.2.4 CBs can request NCCF (subject to request acceptance) to extend the validity of the certificate for one month if the audit is fixed. If certificate is not renewed within extended 30 days then Certificate will be terminated.

9.2.3 Special Audits

- 9.2.3.1 CB shall carry out short-notice and unannounced audits, if required, in case of any complaint received, Accreditation Body requirement, NCCF's compliance visit, etc.

9.3 Suspending, withdrawing or reducing the scope of certification

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- 9.3.1 The CB shall advise the NCCF in writing, within 2 business days if there are any changes in the validity and scope of the certification, certification is suspended or withdrawn, or where there are any changes in decisions relating to the status of certification of an organization, and the reasons for those decisions. When a nonconformity with certification requirements is substantiated, either as a result of surveillance or otherwise, the CB shall consider and decide upon the appropriate action.
- 9.3.2 If client has not resolved the cause of suspension within 12 months, then CB shall terminate the certificate.

9.4 Changes affecting certification

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- 9.4.1 When NCCF introduces new or revised requirements that affect the client, the CB shall ensure these changes are communicated to all clients. The CB shall verify the implementation of the changes by its clients and shall take actions.

9.5 Information exchange between CB and Clients

- 9.5.1 **Certificate Transfer:** In case of the transfer of a certification to a new CB, existing CB shall ensure that its clients provide information on any other CB they are enrolled with for ToF certification.
 - 9.5.1.1 CBs shall have documented procedures to handle certificate transfers including:

- the outbound transfer of their own clients to a different CB; and
- the inbound transfer of clients from a different CB.

9.5.1.2 Should a client opt to change CBs at any point after certification (i.e., transfer of certificate during surveillance) the client shall:

- notify NCCF in writing of the details of the certificate transfer, including the reason for the transfer;
- provide the current CB with a notice of NCCF certificate transfer, identifying the new CB; and
- provide the new CB with a copy of their last assessment report.

9.5.1.3 Prior to accepting a client transfer, the new CB shall review all available information regarding previous conformity assessments.

9.5.1.4 Where the new CB has doubts or concerns about the status of non-conformities that were raised in audits by the previous CB, or any other material aspect of previous conformity assessments, the client shall authorize the previous CB to share additional audit history information with the new CB to ensure that all outstanding non-conformities are resolved.

Note: The new CB may determine, after having completed a desk-based review of the information, that it is necessary to perform a surveillance audit or conformity assessment of the transferring client before issuing a certificate.

9.5.2 Considering the requirements on impartiality, the CB may provide advice or knowledge to the client in case that information originates NCCF, such as FAQ's, guidance documents, etc.

9.5.3 The CB informs its clients about the conditions which result in short notice or unannounced audits.

Annex 1: Terms and Definitions

Annexes to this document provide requirements for or guidance on issues that are not enforced through the accreditation process.

Accreditation Body: An accreditation body is an organisation delegated to make decisions, about the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of a CB. In case of NCCF certification, an accreditation body should be signatory of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA).

Appeal: Formal request by client to CB or AB for reconsideration of a decision made.

Appellant: Individual or organization filing an appeal.

Application Reviewer: Person(s) that is (are) responsible for the application review, prepares the audit process and checks if an applicant for certification appears to be ready and prepared for an audit.

Audit: Systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact and other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which applicable requirements are fulfilled.

Auditor: A person competent to conduct an audit.

Audit team: It is made up of one or more auditors, one of whom is appointed to be the audit team leader. When necessary, audit teams are also supported by technical experts and/or further personnel (e.g. interpreter), who assist auditors but do not themselves act as auditors.

Audit Team Leader: An auditor who is competent to lead the audit and the audit team.

CB: Third-party Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) operating certification scheme.

Certification: Third-party attestation related to products, processes, systems or persons.

Certified Area: Area covered by a certificate. In case of a group certificate the area represents the sum of areas of the participants.

Chain of Custody Standard: PEFC ST 2002: Chain of Custody of Forest Based Products – Requirements.

Client: Organization, including a multi-site organization, that is applying for or whose area has been certified.

Certificate: A document issued under the rules of a certification system, indicating that adequate confidence is provided that a duly identified product, process or service is in conformity with a specific standard or other normative document.

Competence: The demonstrated ability to apply knowledge, skills and personal attributes in order to achieve intended results.

Complainant: Person or organization filing a complaint.

Complaint: Written expression of dissatisfaction (other than appeal) by any person or organization presented to a CB relating to the NCCF activities of that CB and/ or the NCCF activities of their clients. In the context of NCCF, a complaint includes the name and contact information of the complainant, a clear description of the issue and evidence to support each element or aspect of the complaint.

Conflict of Interest: Situation in which a party has an actual or perceived interest that gives, or could have the appearance of giving, that party an incentive for personal, organizational, or professional gain, such that the party's interest could conflict, or be perceived to conflict with, the conduct of an impartial and objective certification process.

Group Certificate: A document confirming, compliance with the standard and other applicable requirements of the certification scheme for the group organisation.

Group Certification: Certification of the group organisation under one group certificate.

Group Organisation: A group of participants represented for the purposes of implementation of the standard and its certification.

Note: The term "group organisation" is a specific form of a "multisite organisation".

Defendant: Person or organization against whom a complaint has been filed.

Dispute: Umbrella term covering the complaints and appeals submitted to/related to NCCF.

Major Non-Conformity: The absence of, or failure to implement and maintain, one or more applicable requirements of the standard, that may result in a systemic risk to the function and effectiveness of the forest management/ToF and/or effects confidence in the client organization's claims on certified raw material.

Note: A major non-conformity may be an individual nonconformity or a number of minor but related nonconformities, that when considered in total are judged to constitute a major nonconformity.

Minor Non-conformity: A single failure to fulfil the requirements of the standards that may result in no systemic risk to the function and effectiveness

Observation: An evaluation finding that does not warrant nonconformity but is identified by the audit team as an opportunity for improvement.

Note: The definitions given in ISO 19011, ISO/IEC 17000 and PEFC ST 2003:2012 are applicable.

Annex 2: Accreditations accepted by the NCCF

- a. NCCF requires that ToF certification shall be carried out by certification bodies who are accredited by an Accreditation Body (a member signatory of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) and implements procedures described in ISO 17011 and other related documents.
- b. The scope of the accreditation shall explicitly cover the NCCF scheme/standard(s) in its valid version and/or with reference to any future changes and amendments adopted by the NCCF and presented at the NCCF official website (www.nccf.in) . The scope of accreditation shall also explicitly state ISO/IEC 17065 or ISO/IEC 17021 (as applicable), this document and other requirements against which the certification body has been assessed
- c. The certificates issued by the AB to accredited Certification Body (and its affiliates) shall bear the accreditation body logo/symbol.

Annex 3: Notification of Certification Bodies

- a. For performing the certifications against NCCF scheme(s), the Certification Bodies shall be notified by the NCCF and its certificates, recognised by the NCCF (refer NCCF procedures notification to certification bodies)
- b. The NCCF notification requires the CB to pay NCCF-PEFC Notification Fee and NCCF and/or PEFC Logo Fee (to be collected from Certificate holder) as specified by the NCCF. Fee Policy is available at NCCF website.
- c. The notified CB shall ensure control of PEFC and NCCF logo/trademark usage.

In order to ensure the independence of certification bodies, NCCF notification conditions decided by the NCCF shall only cover:

- a. administrative conditions (e.g. communication of CB with NCCF, transfer of information, etc.)
- b. financial conditions (fees imposed on certified entities)
- c. compliance with requirements for certification bodies verified through accreditation as described in this standard.

The NCCF notification conditions shall not discriminate against certification bodies or create trade obstacles.

Note: For the issuance of PEFC chain of custody Certificates, CBs are required to refer PEFC 2003:2012. NCCF does not set additional, scheme specific requirements for CBs intending to operate CoC certification.

Annex 4: Examples of Documentation and Records

Note: *This not a complete list nor is the certification body required to inspect all documents listed here. Document review process may vary from ToF occurrence and management type*

- Copies of applicable laws
- Management plan / working plan
- Concession agreements
- Documentation showing tenure and land use rights
- Land revenue map
- Work instruction
- SOPs for contractor; contractor contract
- Agreement with communities
- SOPs for silvicultural activities
- Harvesting and production records
- Chemical use records
- Communications with stakeholders
- Purchasing and sales documentation

Annex 5: Examples of Sites

Note: *This not a complete list nor is the certification body required to select all the sites listed here surveillance. Sites selection may depend on various factors including - ToF type, silvicultural operations, management type, etc.*

- Tree plantation sites
- Harvested sites
- Areas under harvesting/Harvesting sites
- Nurseries
- Areas with high conservation area
- Workmen facilities – accommodation, amenities, drinking water
- Areas used by local communities and others within or near the area
- Water catchment – within the boundaries
- Sites where chemicals – pesticides or fertilizers have been used and storage area
- Monitoring sites
- Trial plots
- Adjoining agricultural fields
- Local mandi
- Nearby villages
- Urban forests
- Avenue plantations
- Parks and gardens

Bibliography

- a. *FSC-STD-20-001 V4-0 EN: General Requirement for FSC® Accredited Certification Bodies*
- b. *VRIKSH EPCH-VRSH-STD-02: General Requirements for Certification Bodies operating “VRIKSH” Scheme for Timber and Timber Products*
- c. *AWS Certification Requirements version 1.0*
- d. *CDM Accreditation Standard CDM-EB46-A02-STAN Version 06.0*
- e. *PEFC ITALY Annex 6 ITA 1003-1: SFM and SPM Accreditation Minimum Requirements*
- f. *ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards V1-0*
- g. *ISEAL, Managing conflict of interest in standards and assurance, 2013*
- h. *ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015-07 Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems*