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# Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative (ASCI)

## A platform for producer and consumer country partnerships

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The European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) marks a significant step toward de-linking EU commodity imports from deforestation. However, it is clear that ending deforestation requires broader engagement with producer countries and investment in sector transformation ([Bridging African and European trade through sustainable agri-food commodities | Africa-Europe Foundation](#)). Initiatives must build on existing experience and capacity to support this transformation. At the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), the EU representatives from Germany, the Netherlands, and France launched the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Deforestation-Free Value Chains to address global deforestation through inclusive partnerships with producing countries ([EU and Member States launch global Team Europe Initiative on Deforestation-free Value Chains | European Commission](#)).

To foster such partnerships between consumer and producer countries, engagement and dialogue are essential for developing mutual understanding and providing support systems and capacity building. Initiatives such as the Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative (ASCI) provide a model of existing partnerships in West and Central Africa. ASCI builds upon the 'Marrakesh Declaration for Sustainable Development of the Palm Oil Sector,' signed by seven African governments at CoP22 in 2016. This declaration acknowledged the role of agricultural commodity development as a driver of deforestation while emphasising the critical role of forests and forest conservation in addressing climate change. ASCI puts producer countries in Africa at the forefront of defining principles for the sustainable development of cocoa, rubber, palm oil, coffee, and other commodities in a way that improves livelihoods and protects natural resources, including forests ([Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative](#)).

ASCI has great potential to help bridge perspectives between consumer and producer countries. This briefing paper extracts insights and lessons from ASCI multistakeholder dialogues, as well as a study on Producer-Consumer Partnerships in Cameroon and the Republic of Congo (RoC), conducted by Proforest, WWF and TFA. It outlines key elements of ASCI that can serve as a model for the European Commission's (EC) Strategic Framework for producer-consumer country partnerships. The paper seeks to inform discussions within the Tropical Forest Alliance - EU Working Group (TFA EUWG), the European Commission (EC) Multistakeholder Platform, and other forums.

The key elements of ASCI are clustered into three aspects: structural components; issues addressed; and the role and function of ASCI.

## ASCI Structural Components

In essence, the structural components of ASCI underscore its commitment to fostering sustainable commodity development through inclusive partnerships, comprehensive approaches, and collective action across signatory countries in Africa.

### Key Element 1: Government Commitment

With signatories from 10 countries, including Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, ASCI underscores the commitment of producer nations to collaborate in fostering sustainable practices.

Government commitment stands as a cornerstone. The Regional Declaration, signed by these countries, and the subsequent national processes, tailored to individual national contexts, represent distinct aspects. ASCI operates as a regional initiative, rooted in principles recognised by member countries, while its design aligns with national policies and capacities. Essentially, governments' commitments to ASCI principles signify their endorsement and investment in the initiative's objectives.

### Key Element 2: Multistakeholder Approach

The multistakeholder approach is a fundamental aspect of ASCI, aimed at addressing the complex challenges and diverse environmental, social, and governance issues inherent in achieving responsible production of agricultural commodities in Africa. Each national platform has an inclusive membership comprising national government, traditional leaders, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs and civil society, private sector. This diverse group brings varied expertise and resources to effectively address challenges and collaborate towards common goals.

### Box 1: A Set of Shared ASCI Principles

By signing the Africa Sustainable Commodities Declaration, governments confirm that they:

- Recognise the shared vision for a prosperous agro-commodity sector in the region that brings jobs and wealth to local communities and indigenous people and which is environmentally and socially sustainable and protects Africa's rich tropical forests
- Note the importance of the agro-commodity sector in economic development and in contributing to addressing rural poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the countries involved
- Emphasise the critical role of forests and forest conservation in addressing climate change
- Acknowledge the role of agricultural commodity development as a driver of deforestation
- Understand the importance of public-private partnerships in sustainable economic development
- Conscious of the need to promote smallholders in the development of sustainable agriculture
- Conscious of the need to promote, foster and accelerate the economic and social development of African countries in order to improve the living standards of our peoples, and ensure their food security and nutrition
- Conscious of the need to promote efficient, inclusive, resilient agricultural and forestry systems
- Consider the relevant international and regional treaties and conventions that the signatories have ratified and reaffirming the need to deliver on the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Key Element 3: Inclusive Platform Governance

ASCI facilitators play a pivotal role in bridging diverse stakeholders at the country level, capturing varied priorities and addressing needs of key stakeholders. A government focal point ensures the platform is embedded in national policy and legislative processes. The combination of government focal points and independent facilitators forms the foundation for inclusive platform governance, ensuring coordinated exchange and collaboration.

### Key Element 4: Multicommodity Approach

The multicommodity approach emerged later in ASCI's development. Initially, ASCI operated with a single commodity focus, primarily on palm oil, as the Africa Palm Oil Initiative. However, stakeholders recognised that similar environmental and social issues apply in other commodities, and that ASCI had potential for wider applicability. Drawing from these experiences, it became evident that initiating efforts with multiple commodities, especially those sharing common characteristics such as landscapes or forest regions where palm and rubber coexist, is crucial for effective and comprehensive sustainability strategies ([partnershipsforforests.com](https://partnershipsforforests.com)).

### Box 2. Extending to Multiple Commodities

The TFA 4th Regional Workshop in Accra in 2018, an event organised in close collaboration with the Cocoa and Forests Initiative (CFI), brought together 35 cocoa and chocolate companies committed to ending deforestation and forest degradation in the global cocoa supply chain. This two-way exchange saw CFI members were learning lessons from the Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI), which could be applied to their own activities, and vice versa. It is through the success of the collaboration between these two commodity sectors that the ministers from the APOI countries decided to extend the remit of APOI to become the Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative (ASCI) in 2022, recognising that impact could only be achieved by working with other commodity sectors and initiatives towards a common goal.

## ASCI Target Issues

Under the umbrella of ASCI, several critical issues and topics are addressed, each contributing to the overarching goal of sustainable commodity development. The focus revolves around sustainability, encompassing key areas such as forest protection and conservation, smallholder inclusion, as well as land use planning for food security.

### Key Element 5: A Focus on Social and Environmental Sustainability

The ASCI aims to foster a prosperous agricultural sector while ensuring environmental and social sustainability, in line with evolving consumer demands. While emphasising the critical role of forests for climate and environment, social issues are given equal prominence to environmental sustainability. Supporting smallholders and ensuring Free, Prior and Informed Consent are priority themes across ASCI.

#### Box 3. Ensuring Free, Prior and Informed Consent for agricultural development

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a process that ensures that Indigenous Peoples and local communities with customary land rights are informed and consulted about proposed development on their land, and that it only goes ahead with their full informed consent. ASCI has been instrumental in promoting the use of FPIC in member countries including Liberia and Republic of Congo, through support to policy and regulation, national guidelines, communication and capacity building.

### Key Element 6: Forest Protection and Conservation

The signatory countries have significant influence over much of Africa's tropical forest, particularly in the strategic Congo Basin. This highlights ASCI's ability to address key environmental and social challenges linked to agriculture in the region. With the ten countries within ASCI accounting for 25% of the world's tropical forest and 75% of Africa's forests, ASCI's role becomes even more crucial.

The institutionalisation of ASCI has not only created significant opportunities but also marked pivotal milestones. In the Republic of Congo, where palm oil production is currently minimal but holds immense potential, a ministerial order has been signed, which guides all future palm oil plantations to be developed in the country's savannah regions, thereby easing pressure on forests in the Congo Basin.

#### Box 4. Supporting New Policy Frameworks on Forest Restoration in ASCI Countries

In Edo State, Nigeria, the establishment of the Forestry Commission in 2023 through the Edo State Oil Palm Programme signifies a strong commitment to halt deforestation and restore degraded forests. The Produce-Protect-Rehabilitate concept in Nigeria mandates private companies to allocate resources equivalent to 25% of their landholding to restore degraded forest areas. ASCI also emphasises the inclusion of smallholders in development efforts and adheres to principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for local communities and Indigenous Peoples during land allocation processes.

### Key Element 7: Food Security and Equitable Food Systems

As Africa's population is projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050, agriculture's pivotal role in securing food while minimising environmental harm is key. The availability and efficient utilisation of land are critical concerns. ASCI's initiatives, including land use planning and smallholder development strategies, aim to ensure equitable and effective food security for the continent's growing population. Inclusion of smallholders in equitable markets is an essential cornerstone of sustainable food systems.

## ASCI Roles and Functions

The ASCI platform plays a pivotal role in advancing sustainable commodity development, with its multifaceted roles and functions contributing to transformative change.

### Key Element 8: Policy and Institutional Changes

ASCI's focus on policy and institutional changes paves the way for transformative impacts, ensuring sustainability efforts extend beyond short-term interventions. This strategic emphasis includes integrating innovative policy approaches such as Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and High Conservation Value (HCV) assessments at the production landscape level, to drive sustainable practices forward.

### Box 5. Ghana's ASCI Facilitates Tree Crops Development Authority and Regulation

The Ghana's ASCI stakeholders facilitated the establishment of Tree Crops Development Authority (TCDA) as a new legal entity to regulate six commodity supply chains – oil palm, coconut, mango, shea, rubber and cashew - enabling a \$100m facility from the World Bank. The ASCI National Platform also supported the Tree Crops Regulation 2023 (LI 2471), which operationalises TCDA functions.

### Key Element 9: Knowledge Exchange Platform

ASCI operates as a dynamic knowledge exchange platform, facilitating collaboration, networking, and capacity building. By convening stakeholders from both producing and consuming nations, ASCI provides a forum to explore partnership benefits and opportunities.

The existence of national platforms and regional exchange meetings underscores the significance of sharing insights and experiences. Facilitating dialogue and collaboration between national platforms enhances collective learning and fosters synergy in sustainable commodity initiatives.

### Key Element 10: Building Capacity

ASCI acts as a catalyst for capacity building in its member countries, providing support for the adoption and implementation of new policy frameworks and approaches. Through focused training, workshops, and knowledge sharing, ASCI enables stakeholders to adopt innovative strategies that enhance sustainability and resilience in commodity production and trade.

### Box 6. Building Capacity for Action

Through the ASCI, training has been delivered to smallholders, government representatives and other partners in key practices and tools. This includes training on the HCV/HCS Approach in Central African Republic, Gabon and Sierra Leone, as well as training on the FPIC process in Sierra Leone and Republic of Congo.

## Moving Forward with Producer-Consumer Country Partnerships

ASCI's approach, grounded in multistakeholder engagement, a focus on sustainability, and commitment to policy change, provides a robust framework for addressing complex challenges in agricultural commodity production across Africa.

ASCI's significance lies in its ability to convene diverse stakeholders and foster collaborative efforts to promote responsible production practices. By advocating for a multistakeholder approach and embracing a multicommodity perspective, ASCI demonstrates its commitment to inclusive dialogue and comprehensive sustainability strategies.

ASCI offers a model for future partnerships between producer and consumer countries. It demonstrates that there is pre-existing, installed capacity in producer countries in Africa, which can provide a foundation for strategic partnerships with consumer countries, to deliver and go beyond the requirements of legislation like the EUDR.

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