

# SAN/RA M&E Public System Report

## 1. Scope and Boundaries of the M&E System

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) capacity for the Sustainable Agriculture Network/Rainforest Alliance (SAN/RA) certification scheme is largely supported through Rainforest Alliance's (RA) Evaluation & Research (E&R) Unit. In this context, E&R's activities serve two principle purposes;

1. Designing and implementing (including training of implementing partners) survey tools for technical assistance projects to measure, document, analyze, and report sustainability levels pre-and post-certification.
2. Designing and implementing (including training of auditors) survey tools for auditing to measure, document, analyze, and report sustainability levels post-certification.

The E&R Program has a global reach and focuses on many commodities in the agricultural sector. The current geographic scope of the program includes landscapes where RA and partners are implementing training and technical assistance activities to ensure producers are in compliance with the SAN standard. The unit's reach also includes regions covered by the SAN Certification Bodies (<http://www.ioas.org/xlistsan.pdf>). It is the SAN Management Unit that sets the Accreditation Requirements and minimum auditing requirements through the Auditor Competence Program for the Certification Bodies (CBs).

The SAN/RA M&E approach focuses on measuring sustainability impacts of producers/production units that are in compliance to the SAN standard's Principles and Criteria. This is its core role. However, the E&R Program also provides support to develop indicators and accompanying data collection methodologies for technical assistance strategies focused on achieving discrete sustainability goals as opposed to, or in addition to, compliance to the SAN standard. These goals include productivity, sustainable financing, and climate resiliency. Furthermore, RA and the SAN, with support from ISEAL, is pioneering a new "supporting evidence framework" approach ("SEF") to demonstrate the possibilities and limitations to collect performance and outcome data through routine audit processes at minimal incremental cost, thereby supporting robust assurance and M&E. The SEF will be a framework of indicators and data points ("supporting evidence") to record information on field conditions and performance on certified production units. Supporting evidence fields will be associated with specific criteria within a standard, and these data substantiate auditors' compliance decisions and in many cases also hold value for monitoring and reporting on sustainability outcomes as defined in our theory of change. .

For both technical assistance and auditing, monitoring and evaluation activities focus on tracking on-farm results at both the production unit and the producer group/organization levels (including tea factories and coffee washing stations). For technical assistance projects, monitoring and evaluation approaches increasingly take into account off-farm, production landscape-level results such as set-aside areas for large producers and the impacts of smallholder producers on deforestation, forest degradation and biodiversity loss in and adjacent to protected areas. Increasingly, RA is adopting new spatial analysis tools to monitor and verify deforestation risk. Our evaluation approaches are also increasingly programmed to understand indirect results on communities.

The current scope of the SAN/RA M&E approach addresses all sustainability issues. The E&R Program has the right expertise to conceptually design an M&E approach that addresses SAN/RA's sustainability issues – biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

## 2. Roles and Responsibilities

The RA/SAN M&E System is developed and maintained by both staff in Rainforest Alliance's Evaluation & Research Program and staff in the SAN Management unit. In 2016, the main contact staff for the general public in regards to the overall SAN/RA M&E responsibilities was William Crosse, RA's Deputy Director of Evaluation and Research ([wcrosse@ra.org](mailto:wcrosse@ra.org)), and Andrea Valenzuela, Operations Specialist for the SAN Management Unit ([avalenzuela@san.ag](mailto:avalenzuela@san.ag)).

The E&R program consists of 7 staff. Specifically, the program supports the mission of the Rainforest Alliance and the Sustainable Agriculture Network by:

- Building institutional and partner capacity to demonstrate results of programs and projects through Results-Based Management (RBM) systems, including support for programmatic and institutional Theories of Change, strategic planning, and monitoring and evaluation;
- Acquiring and synthesizing third party and internal data on the outputs, outcomes and impacts of RA activities, including best management practices promoting by the SAN, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sustainable Tourism Standards;
- Creating scientifically rigorous methodologies and data collection systems for evaluating livelihood and conservation results, and delivering training in the application of such methodologies at the field level through project interventions and auditing;
- Participating in the development of an industry-wide data exchange standard, so that RA programs can compare data internally and RA can more easily leverage data on activities and impacts to external partners, including funding agencies;
- Advising private sector collaborators on supply chain sustainability strategies and the design of monitoring and evaluation systems;
- Facilitating prioritization exercises, including geographic mapping;
- Communicating results of projects to RA staff and key external stakeholders.

None of these 7 E&R staff members work exclusively on SAN/RA M&E activities. The program's scope of work is cast widely across the three major sectors that RA works on – agriculture, forestry, and tourism – and all staff interface with RA programs, corporate partners, external research partners, and other key stakeholders. Approximately 50% of the program's total operating budget is committed to developing and maintaining the SAN/RA M&E System.

That said, the SAN Management Unit has staff also focused on key elements of the SAN/RA M&E System. At a technical level, Tom Divney, head of Assurance and Support, facilitates design of tools and processes that help bring farm and group level data into operational and strategic decisions for the benefit of the program and its stakeholders. Oliver Bach, Director of Standard & Policy, leads revisions of the SAN Principles and Criteria, including those that address farm and group level data collection and management. Conrado Guinea, Policy Coordinator, leads development, revision, and execution of the SAN's Accreditation Requirements to help clients meet key indicator data requirements, and Policy for CBs to conduct sufficient data quality control. Enzo Jimenez, Systems Analyst, leads design and configuration of the SAN Certificate Database (SCD) for managing data and supporting documentation requirements for M&E purposes. Silvia Rioja, Learning and Support Manager, leads training of auditors. Finally, Andre Defreitas, SAN Director, provides leadership and oversight from the perspective of the SAN Management Unit.

In addition to these staff, the E&R program also works with consultants to deliver on specific aspects of the SAN/RA M&E system. Our continued collaboration with Wright State University results in analyses of audit compliance data to publish reports looking at non-conformities of Rainforest Alliance Certified tea, cocoa, and coffee producers to determine whether improvements were made and non-conformities addressed over time. These supply chain analytics are in most cases tailored to the particular risk assessments needs of companies. The E&R program also collaborates closely with research institutions, where funding exists. In 2016, two third-party impact studies were formalized and up and running; 1) Research by the University of Greenwich (Natural Resources Institute) on the impacts of cocoa certification on productivity and labor issues in Ghana, and 2) Research by Wageningen University on the sustainability impacts of Banana certification in Costa Rica.

### 3. Defining the Intended Change

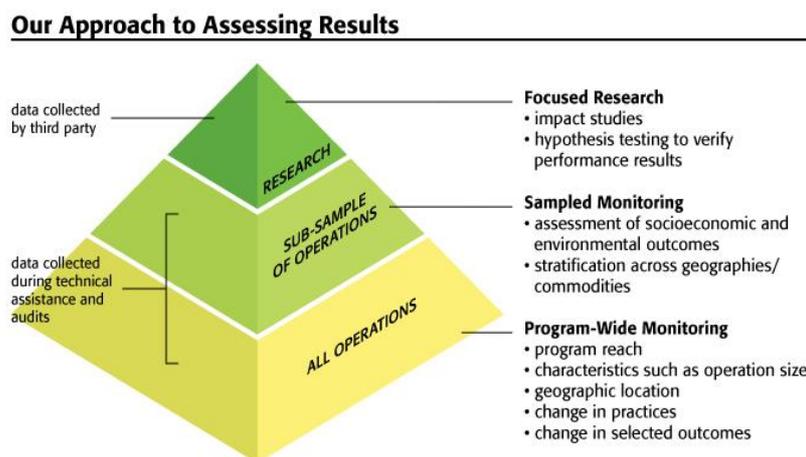
A detailed description of how the SAN/RA Scheme defines intended change can be found in the 2015 SA/RA Impacts Report, pages 15-20.

<http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/impact-studies/impacts-report-2015>

### 4. Performance Monitoring

The overall goal of the SAN/RA M&E approach is to track progress towards outputs, outcomes, and impacts, and evaluate the causal relationships among these levels to understand overall effectiveness of the SAN/RA system in conserving biodiversity and improving livelihoods. However, due to inherent tradeoffs among indicator cost, scope, detail, and accuracy, there is no single set of indicators that can test and validate SAN/RA's Theory of Change across the entire SAN/RA portfolio. For instance, outcome and impact indicators that are needed to evaluate the medium- and long-term effects of certification are usually too costly to apply across all production units, or may require specialized research designs. On the other hand, indicators on program delivery, reach (outputs), and best management practice adoption are informative and may be feasible to collect for all production units, but are not capable of attributing desired outcomes and impacts to certification. With this in mind, RA's E&R Program developed a three-tiered M&E System (the "pyramid"; Figure 1) to provide the full depth, breadth, and scope required to look at SAN/RA's Theory of Change.

**Figure 1:** M&E pyramid indicating the three levels at which monitoring and impact assessment are conducted



The bottom level of the pyramid is RA/SAN Key Performance Indicators (Program-wide Monitoring). Data for these indicators are collected through the audit application process and measured across all certificates, and, to the extent possible, are applied and tabulated in a standard way across commodities and geographies for high level reporting and management decision making. These indicators focus on certification performance in terms of program delivery, reach, and best management practice adoption. These indicators, intended to be assessed for all certificates through auditing and traceability processes are listed in Annex C (page 115) of the SAN/RA 2015 Impact Report. The report also shows results of our program-wide monitoring efforts.

[http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/SAN\\_RA\\_Impacts\\_Report.pdf](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/SAN_RA_Impacts_Report.pdf)

### 5. Outcome and impact evaluation

The middle level of the pyramid consists of Sampled Monitoring (SM). The main purpose of this level is to provide more rigorous and detailed information focusing on medium-term social, environmental, and economic outcomes, as well as track unintended effects of RA/SAN certification. SM is intended to be conducted on a subset of certified production units that are representative of the range of geographies, crop/forest types, and contexts (e.g., plantation vs. smallholder group) in which SAN/RA works. As with the Key Performance Indicators, the SM indicators are monitored systematically and indefinitely to reveal change over time, including slow-moving changes (e.g., forest restoration) and cumulative results (e.g., changes in livelihoods assets). Periods between assessments for SM indicators varies depending on sensitivity to change and cost. Typically, SM would be thematically comprehensive, including assessments of selected social, economic, and environmental outcomes and analyses of the ways in which these outcomes relate to SAN standard compliance over time. Currently, SM exceeds the scope of what can be collected

through certification and annual audits; thus, data is typically collected by trained in-country field staff, consultants, local universities, or community-based groups, following standard protocols developed and tested by the E&R team. This comes at a cost and the only current means of funding is through grant funded projects. However, with new support from ISEAL E&R will be testing a new scalable approach that integrates outcome-level M&E requirements into existing assurance activities. This project will demonstrate the possibilities and limitations to collect performance and outcome data through routine audit processes at minimal incremental cost. The project is expected to be complete by the end of 2017 and it is expected that many learnings will be integrated into the 2017 SAN Scoring tool for use by auditors.

The apex of the pyramid is Focused Research (FR), comprising individual studies, often conducted by third-party scientists that focus on outcome and impact evaluations. Although the entire SAN/RA M&E approach is, in essence, testing the hypotheses represented by the Theory of Change, the FR level uses rigorous research designs to evaluate specific hypothesized pathways within the TOCs. Such designs are helpful for attributing observed results to specific practices or interventions. The FR tier also includes studies evaluating linkages between outcomes and impacts—that is, the long-term, large-scale, cumulative, or indirect effects of SAN Certification (e.g., on watershed health, landscape connectivity, or poverty reduction).

Those indicators intended to be assessed for a sample of certified operations, or as part of outcome and impact evaluations are also listed in Annex C (page 115) of the SAN/RA 2015 Impacts Report.

[http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/SAN\\_RA\\_Impacts\\_Report.pdf](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/SAN_RA_Impacts_Report.pdf)

A list outcome and impact evaluations supported by SAN/RA since 2011 can be found at

<http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/latest?tag=68&page=1>

All planned and in-progress studies conducted or commissioned by RA can be found at

<http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/impact/upcoming-evaluations>

## 6. Improving the Effectiveness of the M&E system

Over the past few years we have improved how the collection and recording of monitoring data through auditing occurs when new certificates are issued and subsequently updated through annual audits. This is a major advancement. Data requirements for both the SAN/RA Key Performance Indicators and ISEAL's common indicator set are embedded in the certification client application process (For the list of current ISEAL common indicators which have data requirements met see Appendix (Appendix\_5\_Global Indicators and ISEAL Common Indicators for SAN\_RA M&E System). This form, and the accompanying guidance, specifies what SAN-accredited certification bodies (CBs) are required to collect from clients as part of the audit planning process. Its purpose is to improve the integrity of the audit process and overall effectiveness of the SAN system by ensuring that key information about certified producers is consistently and accurately collected and verified. SAN accredited CBs must require all current and prospective certification clients provide the information indicated in this document prior to each certification audit (year 1 of the three-year SAN audit cycle) and prior to each annual audit (years 2 and 3 of the three-year SAN audit cycle). These forms (farms, groups, cattle certification), along with the client guidance are provided in the Appendix (Appendix 9a-9f). To further improve the quality of this data, this year updates to the SAN Certificate Database were also made. The SAN/RA data guidelines outlining these new SCD data fields are provided as an Appendix (Appendix\_3\_SAN-R-2-2 Data Guidelines Field Definitions).

Institutionalizing good adaptive management requires establishing the appropriate data infrastructures for entry, storage, management, and analysis of data sets. This is now in place in the form of the SAN Certificate Database (SCD). Customized reporting will now enable us to conduct routine analytics on a quarterly basis to evaluate and report on the Key Performance Indicators as well as a subset of ISEAL Common Indicators. This quarterly reporting will begin in June 2016 once all certification clients have completed their most recent audit and submitted their most recent data. In addition, group level compliance data, by SAN Standard Principles and Criteria, can also be immediately exportable from the SCD to conduct tailored and more real-time supply chain analytics for companies.

## 7. Opportunities for engagement

In 2016, the main contact staff for the general public in regards to the overall SAN/RA M&E responsibilities was William Crosse, RA's Deputy Director of Evaluation and Research ([wcrosse@ra.org](mailto:wcrosse@ra.org))

There is also now a link for external stakeholders to provide comments on the SAN/RA M&E System. This can be found at <http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/impact/monitoring-evaluation>. In 2016 the E&R team also continued with three communication and learning initiatives. Firstly, our internal SharePoint site to share the

latest information on who we are and what we do – as well as a wealth of resources to help RA staff deliver, document, understand, and communicate key program impacts. Secondly, our internal email series called "News You Can Use" to share salient program impacts and other research results in a simple, concise format to all RA staff (See Appendix 7). Thirdly, bi-annual webinars to share results and learning from our performance monitoring and outcome and impact evaluation work. In December an all staff webinar was given on the results presented in the 2015 SAN/RA Impacts Report (See Appendix 8) and in April 2016 a webinar on our 2015 SAN/RA Impacts Report was also given to external stakeholders (<http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/events/SAN-impacts-report-webinar2016>). This report has also been distributed to our wide network of partners and stakeholders.