



# **RSB Standard Setting Public System Report**

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Version 1.0

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# 1. Background

## Scope of the RSB Standard

The RSB Standard is applicable globally and to all types of biomass and its derivatives. It can be applied to legal organizations or natural persons producing, converting, processing, blending, trading, using or otherwise handling biomass or biomaterials (or both). The RSB Standard also applies to auditors, Certification Bodies (CBs), Accreditation Bodies and other assurance providers engaged in the RSB assurance system.

## Sustainability outcomes

The RSB Standard aims to improve the production and processing of biomass and biomaterials towards higher a social and environmental performance. RSB certified operators are required to respect human rights and keep their environmental impacts to an acceptable level. Sustainability outcomes are expected to spread beyond the boundaries of certified projects and benefit local communities more broadly.

RSB aims to improve the production and processing of biomass and biomaterials, and to ensure that it:

- Complies with all applicable laws and international conventions.
- Is undertaken following a proper environmental and social impact assessment.
- Is undertaken with the free prior and informed consent of local communities, especially regarding land and water rights.
- Achieves significant greenhouse gas savings compared to the fossil-based products used for similar purposes (e.g. gasoline, plastics, coal, etc.).
- Is respectful of workers' rights and human rights.
- Contributes to the economic development of rural and underprivileged areas, especially in developing countries.
- Does not affect local food security.
- Does not occur at the expense of areas with high biodiversity value or areas providing important ecosystem services.
- Does not deplete water resources and preserves its quality, as well as the quality of soil and air.
- Makes a moderate and controlled use of hazardous technologies such as chemical inputs, genetically modified material and waste.

More specifically, the expected medium and long-term outcomes, as found in the RSB Theory of Change, are:

- Poverty reduction spreads over to the broader area of RSB certified operations and benefit indirectly to other stakeholders.
- There is a decrease in the number of disputes around land rights and water rights in regions of RSB certified operations.
- An increasing number of workers benefit from fair treatment and safe conditions.
- There is a general improvement of food security in food insecure regions where RSB certified operations are located.
- The income for local people is stabilized or increased in regions of RSB certified operations.
- An increasing amount of degraded lands are restored through biomaterial production.
- Cases of invasion by weeds decrease in regions of RSB certified operations.
- The quality and quantity of water is less impacted in regions of RSB certified operations.
- No important conservation value areas are lost in regions of RSB certified operations after 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2009.
- Conservation areas increase in regions of RSB certified operations.
- Further GHG emissions savings by the biomaterial industry.
- There are no highly hazardous pesticides used in RSB certified operations.
- The resilience of RSB certified operators increases.
- The income of RSB certified operators increases.

### **Why the RSB Standard is needed (justification)**

The RSB was launched in 2007, following the backlash against biofuels in the early 2000's. From a very promising alternative to energy, biofuels became increasingly criticized for their potential environmental and social impacts, especially the risk for biofuels to compete for the same feedstock as food production. The hunger riots and mass communication from civil society organisations engaged in this topic drew the public's attention on this issue.

In the meantime, climate change was becoming an ever growing issue and the need to decarbonize the economy as soon as possible made biofuels an immediately accessible option to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as their processing and distribution do not require significant new infrastructure.

Following the model of FSC, RSPO and other renowned initiatives, the RSB was initiated to offer a credible means to differentiate sustainably produced biofuels (and later biomaterials) from others. It was decided to develop an international standard, following a multi-stakeholder consensus-building process.

In 2007, the landscape of biofuel standards was relatively empty. Besides the RSB, a few initiatives were focused on specific commodities (e.g. RSPO for Palm, BSI – later Bonsucro – for Sugar) but a wide range of feedstocks and end-products were not covered by standards. Hence the need for a global standard able to address sustainability issues for all feedstocks and all end-products.

This landscape changed dramatically after the entry into force of the EU Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC), for which the main implementation mechanism is the use of voluntary standards. As of June 2015, 19 voluntary standards and certification systems are recognized by the European Commission as proof of compliance with the land-use and greenhouse gas saving criteria of the Directive.

It is important to note that a large majority of the voluntary standards only addresses the minimum environmental requirements in the RED whereas the RSB system addresses a much broader range of issues, including social aspects. The RSB Standard has been continuously and repeatedly evaluated as the most robust and comprehensive for sustainability of biomass and biomaterials, in particular on social issues (e.g. land rights, food security), by IUCN<sup>1</sup> and WWF<sup>2</sup> for example. The RSB Standard is often described by the industry and civil society as the “Gold Standard” for biofuel and biomaterials. Given that no other EU recognized biofuel standard is considered as robust and credible as the RSB for a similar scope, the RSB enjoys considerable support from its members and partners. The initial needs and justifications are further detailed in the RSB White Paper<sup>3</sup>

## Performance level

RSB Participating Operators (POs) must comply with various standards and procedures, depending on their scope of operations, size, location, risk class and whether or not they wish to use on-product claims.

The core of the RSB Standard is constituted by the RSB Principles & Criteria (RSB-STD-01-001 for the global version, RSB-STD-11-001-01-001 for the EU RED version), which describe the environmental, social and economic performance operators are expected to achieve. There are 12 sustainability principles encompassing all identified direct social, environmental and economic impacts that may be caused by biomass and biomaterials. Some of the requirements are to be complied with immediately (“minimum requirements”) while “progress requirements” must be complied with after 3 years. Principle 5 and 6 only apply to operators located in areas of poverty and/or areas of food insecurity. Some requirements do not apply to small-scale operators.

The RSB Principles & Criteria (P&Cs) apply to the four major types of operators in the supply chain (biomass producers, biomass processors, biomaterial/biofuel producers and biomaterial/biofuel distributors and blenders) whereas intermediaries (traders, transporters, storage companies, etc.) do not have to comply with the P&Cs.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iucn.nl/en/news/publications/?14101/Betting-on-best-quality>

<sup>2</sup> [http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/all\\_publications/?212775/WWF-analysis-Searching-for-Sustainability--Comparative-analysis-of-certification-schemes-for-biomass-used-for-the-production-of-biofuels#](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/?212775/WWF-analysis-Searching-for-Sustainability--Comparative-analysis-of-certification-schemes-for-biomass-used-for-the-production-of-biofuels#)

<sup>3</sup> [http://rsb.org/steering\\_board\\_pdfs/White-Paper\\_ForWebsite.pdf](http://rsb.org/steering_board_pdfs/White-Paper_ForWebsite.pdf)

The RSB Chain of Custody Standard (RSB-STD-20-001/RSB-STD-11-001-20-001) applies to operators intending to sell products with an RSB-compliant claim attached to it (Some companies only use off-product claims and thus do not require CoC certification).

All operators are required to comply with the RSB Standard for Participating Operators (RSB-STD-30-001/ RSB-STD-11-001-30-001) and the Risk Management Standard (RSB-STD-60-001/RSB-STD-11-001-60-001).

Additional standards exist for specific cases such as the use of waste and residues, or the manufacture of non-energy bio-based products.

The specific requirements found in the RSB-STD-70 series are applicable to Certification Bodies and Auditors. The accreditation programme is ruled by RSB-STD-65-001.

The full list of RSB standards/procedures is available on the RSB website<sup>4</sup>.

## Adaptations

Within the RSB system, procedures in the RSB-STD-15 series detail how to adapt the RSB Principles & Criteria to crop-specific, geographic and biomass production conditions. The RSB Secretariat may, upon request from Participating Operators or Certification Bodies, issue specific guidance notes to adapt certain requirements to a given situation, following the procedure described in RSB-PRO-35-001. All guidance notes are published on the RSB website and serve as jurisprudence until the corresponding standard or procedure is updated accordingly.

## 2. Standard-Setting and Revision Process

### When standard was first written and by whom

The RSB was launched in May 2007, under the auspices of the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). The first draft version (Version 0) of the RSB Principles & Criteria was approved in August 2008, following several rounds of consultation involving Working Groups and international in-person outreach meetings. Working Groups were open to any stakeholder without any entry criteria. Several hundred participants provided inputs to the RSB Secretariat to draft Version 0, which was ultimately approved by the RSB founding Steering Board. Version 0 can still be found on the RSB website; intermediary working versions (“towards Version 0”) are available upon request to the RSB Secretariat.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://rsb.org/pdfs/standards/15-05-19%20RSB%20List%20of%20documents.pdf>

## Stakeholder categorization and geography

Since January 2013 and following a transition out of EPFL, RSB is registered as an association under Swiss Law. Its governance system relies on members, who are split into seven chambers, each chamber representing a specific category of stakeholders as follows:

Chamber 1: Farmers and growers of biomass

Chamber 2: Industrial biofuel/biomaterial producers

Chamber 3: Retailers/blenders, the transportation industry, the bio-product industry, banks/investors

Chamber 4: Rights-based NGOs (including land, water, human and labour rights) & Trade Unions

Chamber 5: Rural development or food security organisations & smallholder farmer organisations or indigenous peoples' organisations or community-based civil society organisations

Chamber 6: Environment or conservation organisations & Climate change or policy organisations

Chamber 7: Intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), governments, standard-setters, specialist advisory agencies, certification agencies, and consultant experts

As written in the RSB Articles of Association<sup>5</sup> the RSB strives to achieve a reasonable balance between North and South. The private sector is represented by Chamber 1, 2 and 3 whereas Chamber 4, 5 and 6 represent the civil society. Chamber 7 is composed of research organisations, governments and inter-governmental organisations, thus being considered more neutral.

## Summary of the revision process

The full procedure for standard development and revision is described in RSB-PRO-15-001 (available at [www.rsb.org](http://www.rsb.org)).

All RSB standards, procedures and guidance can be revised at any time, pending approval by the Board of Directors. At present, all documents are revised at least every 5 years.

Revisions are based on the feedback collected by the RSB Secretariat among POs, CBs, the RSB Accreditation Body, the membership and other key stakeholders. The RSB Secretariat will initiate the revision process by issuing an updated draft of the standard/procedure of concern. Standards dealing with sustainability aspects undergo a public consultation process, as per the ISEAL Standard-setting Code, followed by several rounds of member consultation before final approval by the RSB Assembly of Delegates. For technical standards and all procedures, public

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<sup>5</sup>[http://www.rsb.org/pdfs/documents\\_and\\_resources/14-09-23%20Amended%20Articles%20of%20Association.pdf](http://www.rsb.org/pdfs/documents_and_resources/14-09-23%20Amended%20Articles%20of%20Association.pdf)

consultation is not compulsory and only RSB members are consulted. Procedures receive final approval from the Board of Directors, not the Assembly of Delegates.

Whenever inputs from members or the public is required, stakeholders are made aware of the revision process several weeks in advance via email announcements, the RSB newsletter and an online workplan, which outlines generally when revisions will take place. Additionally, Terms of Reference (ToR) are posted on the RSB website which further details the standard revision process. Stakeholders submit comments using a specific Word document, which is provided on the RSB website and distributed via email. Consultations are generally held virtually, but the RSB also holds an annual General Assembly and in-person side events during conferences.

The feedback collected from the public and RSB members is used by the RSB Secretariat to further improve the draft document until a consensus is found, followed by approval by either the Board of Directors or the Assembly of Delegates. Documents are then published and circulated to POs, CBs, the RSB Training manager, ISEAL and, if relevant, the European Commission. A phase-in procedure exists (RSB-PRO-01-001), which describes how and under which circumstances POs are expected to implement revised versions of the documents.

## Governance

The governance structure of the RSB relies on its members and is detailed in the following figure.



Figure 1: RSB Governance System

Each RSB Chamber elects up to 3 delegates to represent the position agreed upon at the chamber level at the Assembly of Delegates. The Assembly is responsible for approving standards, approving Members' rights and duties (including membership fees), changes to the Articles of Association (which outline responsibilities of RSB Membership), appointment of auditors and approval of financial reports. The Assembly elects the Board of Directors (up to 9 seats total), who is responsible for approving the RSB strategy, finances and accepting new Members. The RSB Secretariat sees to the day-to-day operations, implementation of RSB strategy, implementation of Assembly and Board decisions and the preparation of draft standards and procedures.

## Decision-making process

As described in the Articles of Association (Article 12.3), RSB strives to achieve consensus on all decision points. The Secretariat is generally in charge of developing reasonable compromises, taking into account the opinions of all parties.

Decision-making thresholds are defined in the Articles of Association (Article 10.3). The quorum for a Chambers' meeting to be validly constituted shall not be less than 25% of the Members of the Chamber, or three Members of the Chamber, whichever is higher.

In absence of consensus, a voting procedure exists, involving either the simple majority or a 2/3 majority of participants, as outlined in the Articles of Association (Article 12.4). In cases where a Chamber consensus cannot be reached, the meeting is adjourned, and reconvened with at least 14 days' notice. In the event that it is again not possible to reach a consensus, the meeting will be adjourned and reconvened for a third time. If consensus fails on the third attempt, a resolution is immediately voted upon and may be carried by a simple majority of Members present.

## Review and Revision process

This public system report will be revised (at minimum) prior to any independent evaluation of compliance with the ISEAL Standard-setting Code. For more information, please contact the RSB Secretariat:

### **Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB)**

International Environment House 2

7-9 Chemin de Balaxert

CH-1219 | Chatelaine (Geneva) | Switzerland

[info@rsb.org](mailto:info@rsb.org)

**Tel:** +41 22 796 40 37