

Stakeholder Consultation Guidelines

April 2025



- Document name: CottonConnect Stakeholder Consultation Guidelines
- Version: V 2.0
- Issue Date: 1 April 2025
- Effective Date: 15 May 2025
- Last updated: NA
- Previous Version: V1

Stakeholder Consultation Guidelines

1. Introduction

CottonConnect's stakeholder consultation process will collect information and insights from a wide range of stakeholders and experts to feed into the development and continuous improvement of REEL Programme and the REEL Standards system. In line with ISEAL's Code of Good Practice for Sustainability System, CottonConnect proactively engages with stakeholder groups that are likely to have an interest in its standards or that are likely to be affected by their implementation and provides stakeholders with mechanisms for participation that are appropriate and accessible.

An inclusive consultation process is a key characteristic of the implementation programme and regular improvement of standards and systems. The stakeholder consultation process will be:

- ❖ **Comprehensive** - allowing all stakeholders to express their views.
- ❖ **Balanced** - ensuring that the consultation is representative.
- ❖ **Timely** - allowing sufficient time for stakeholder inputs and contributions.
- ❖ **Tailored** - ensuring that the needs of specific target audiences are met; and
- ❖ **Incorporated** - taking into account all feedback and input.

A stakeholder consultation document created at the start of the consultation will:

- ❖ set out the objectives and scope of the consultation.
- ❖ map key stakeholders; and
- ❖ establish consultation methods and tools which ensure a comprehensive, balanced, timely, tailored and incorporated stakeholder consultation process.

2. Stakeholder consultation objective

The objectives of the stakeholder consultation process are:

- a. To ensure that relevant stakeholder groups are represented in CottonConnect's system design activities
- b. To collect information, ideas, opinions and insights from a wide range of stakeholders.
- c. To revise and upgrade the system to address all the sustainability issues and risks

3. Engaging stakeholders

Stakeholder consultation provides an opportunity for CottonConnect to engage with stakeholders and to share and promote an understanding of the standard and system. This may include exchanging views on risk mitigation, impact and opportunities. It provides a valuable opportunity to exchange information to improve the programme design, outcomes and help CottonConnect to identify and control external risks.



Figure: Diagrammatic representation of stakeholder consultation steps

3.1 Internal review and feedback

An internal cross-departmental review and feedback process will be organised with subject matter specialists on social issues, gender issues, cotton production, supply chain and MEL. Internal review and feedback will be organized prior to the external stakeholder consultation process.

3.2 Mapping external stakeholders

Stakeholder representatives and people with experience in prior consultations can help to determine the most appropriate methods for specific groups. Stakeholders are engaged and selected based on their qualifications and contribution to the sector and relevant subjects. To establish this list, initial desk research will be conducted to identify relevant stakeholders in the following categories:

- a. **Impact measurement/Certification bodies-** Relevant international organisations involved in impact measurement and programme verification of sustainability, cotton production, textile supply chain, social rights, human rights, environmental protection, climate change etc.
- b. **Cotton farmers/producers** – Relevant farmers involved in sustainable cotton/linen production as per the guidelines of REEL. Farmers will be selected from all the regions/countries.
- c. **Organisations working for sustainability** – Relevant international organisations

- involved in sustainability, social rights, human rights and environmental protection.
- d. **Implementing partner/Civil society** – Relevant regional/country-specific non-governmental organisations, human rights organisations, women’s rights and gender equality organisations and other relevant civil society groups involved with farmers, social rights, human rights and environmental protection.
 - e. **Academic/Research institutes** – Relevant university and research institutions involved in sustainability, CSR, cotton production, environmental, climate change, biodiversity, agroforestry and human rights from the region/country.
 - f. **Supply chain** – Relevant cotton processors like ginners and integrated units of ginning and spinning will be involved from all the regions.
 - g. **Brands and retailers** – Relevant brands and retailers involved in supporting and using sustainably produced cotton-like organic, organic regenerative, REEL Cotton and any other equally relevant programme.

3.3. Public stakeholder consultation

A public stakeholder consultation will be held for 8 weeks. The consultation will be announced via the CottonConnect website and social media platforms. All feedback received during this period will be carefully reviewed, and relevant inputs will be incorporated into the standards.

3.4. Consultation and feedback procedure

While designing and planning stakeholder consultations, various consultation approaches can be considered. The use of electronic media and the internet can have a relatively low cost while reaching a large number of stakeholders. However, it is important to assess the extent to which access to the internet may be limited for some stakeholders, and consider using electronic methods as a tool that complements other consultation methods.

CottonConnect’s stakeholder consultation will be organised via two methods which can be used to collect feedback as per the requirement and accessibility.

- a. **Written feedback** - Stakeholders will provide their written input/feedback via electronic mailing. A survey form and leading questions will be used to collect feedback from

stakeholders.

- b. **Interview** – One-to-one interviews or electronic discussions can be organized for the stakeholders who are not able to access e-mail or difficult to submit written feedback.

4. Timeline

We will schedule an appropriate timeline for the completion of each stakeholder consultation process, for example:

#	Activity for stakeholder consultation	Timeline
1	Preparation	
1.1	Stakeholder finalization and onboarding	2 weeks
1.2	Formal invitation for consultation	1 week
2	Hold consultation	4 weeks
3	Feedback and review collection	2 weeks
4	Incorporate feedback	1 week
5	Public stakeholder consultation	8 weeks
6	Incorporate feedback from public stakeholders' consultation	1 week
7	On-field testing of feedback	4 weeks
8	Feedback report	2 weeks

5. Guiding questions and surveys for stakeholders

As part of the consultation process, guiding questions and a survey form will be circulated for submitting feedback and suggestions.

6. Stakeholder Consultation Report

A detailed summary of the stakeholder consultation report will be developed and published on the CottonConnect website. This summary will provide insights into the feedback gathered, ensuring transparency, accessibility, and engagement with all stakeholders interested in the outcomes of the consultation process.