

Summary of the BSI Standard Version I Stakeholder Outreach, Ethiopia.

By Mark McCarthy.

Coinciding with the 2nd Annual Bio-energies Conference which was held in the United Nations Conference Centre, UNECA, Addis Ababa from June 16 -18, 2009, David Willers general manager of Better Sugarcane Initiative (BSI) chaired an entire afternoon session dedicated to a stakeholder outreach discussion on the BSI Standard.

Willers commenced with a preamble on the history of the BSI and followed up with a description of the BSI Public Consultation Standard Version 1.

Following a lengthy discussion on technical aspects of the Standard, and questions and responses to same, a number of other important issues were raised, viz;

Nathanial Naane, Board member of Silversands Ethanol Ltd, South Africa, raised the issue of the European Union (EU) and the EU's focus on a set standard that was a fully traceable system (where the sugar comes from and is traced the entire way through the supply chain to the ultimate consumer). Mr Nanne felt this was the best option for a full evaluation and monitoring system required to set a standard for this industry.

Other issues included questions on how to measure the social indicators such as the rights of the child in terms of child labor. Marc Schut, PHD of Wageningen University and Research Center, The Netherlands , raised the example of family members working, and in particular a child working to help their family in the production stage, and how this would be evaluated within the BSI Standard.

Representatives from the Brazilian Embassy were also at hand and raised some valuable concerns regarding the length of experience many countries have within Africa in sugarcane production, the modern technology that would be required to bring countries to an equal standard, the cost of the equipment that would be required for Auditors of this BSI standard to conduct their measurements and with these increased costs, how will the money be generated for such activities. As the delegate from Brazil explained, Brazil has been working in the sugarcane and ethanol Industry for over 60 years and it would be far easier for a country with their experience and knowledge to reach the standard required by the BSI compared to countries that are relatively new to this industry.

Mr Willers acknowledged all of these points as valuable ones and that there is no one quick step method to resolve some of the issues which would need to be addressed over a period of time. The need for a certification process is in response to the market and the multiple actors involved. Many of the major players in this industry have pushed for a set standard such as Shell, BP, Coca Cola, etc.

Various delegates raised the issue of this certification process acting as a barrier to trade especially for developing countries that have yet to penetrate the market, and the establishment of such standard could eliminate their potential role in this industry. Willers explained that the certification process was being established precisely to facilitate trade and encourage better targeted investment and development in this area. Currently there is no one set standard for sugarcane and the BSI standard was therefore being designed with the aid of the Sugarcane industry with various representatives worldwide in order to create a clear and adaptable single standard.

The Roundtable discussion ended on a general consensus that while there is indeed a need for a set standard, the implementation of such a standard will require time and flexibility. Each country is different and that is why such discussion is crucial to get a clear understanding and a fair representation of different countries and regions views and concerns on the standard.

The Sudanese delegation in particular were concerned that the social indicators in the BSI standard amounted to a form of politicization regardless of the fact that they were designed specifically for a sugar cane environment in accordance with ILO guidelines. Willers reminded the meeting that there were indubitably certain non negotiables on the social and other environmental fronts that were unacceptable to the market, and that ultimately it would be the customer base that would determine acceptability of source S and E conditions. That was why there was such a broad and growing support for the BSI Standard.

(Report by Mark McCarthy, University College, Cork, Ireland, Addis Ababa, June 18, 2009)