Circular Food Systems Standards and Conformity Assessment in Rwanda: A Policy Summary

To support the delivery in March 2024 of a new policy paper *Circular Food Systems Standards and Conformity Assessment in Rwanda* the following summarizes the main contextual information and associated policy recommendations.

Introduction

The purpose of the main paper is to contribute, through key findings and recommendations, to the improvement of Rwanda’s food systems via a critical priority area: standards and conformity assessment. The methodological framework employed to deliver the 7 clear policy recommendations has identified this area as presenting a significant opportunity for improvement. If adopted, these policy recommendations will address opportunities to improve upon existing standards, codes of practice, and guidelines. The result will be an enabling environment for a more circular and sustainable food system in Rwanda.

Background

Rwanda, like many countries, faces multiple challenges in its agri-food sector, including land degradation, soil erosion, land use disparities, low agricultural productivity, and food loss and waste. Circular agri-food supply chains offer a viable solution to these challenges by reducing waste and fostering sustainability. Rwanda has demonstrated commitment to environmental protection through initiatives like banning plastic bags and incorporating circular economy principles into policies. The [Circular Economy Action Plan and Roadmap](https://www.environment.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=58556&token=1efafef04395aa568ceac5346426c5d29864bced) launched in 2022 outlines 17 policy interventions (pp.3-4) across various sectors to promote a circular economy.

Circularity emphasizes reducing, reusing, and recycling activities to achieve economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and social equity. The [Circular Food Systems for Rwanda](https://circularfoodsystemsrwanda.org/) project aims to transform the country's food systems by promoting circularity and environmental sustainability through [SME development](https://circularfoodsystemsrwanda.org/sme-overview) and [policy engagement](https://circularfoodsystemsrwanda.org/policy). A multi-stakeholder engagement platform facilitates collaboration and policy advocacy, focusing on sectors like food systems, packaging, and waste management to advance circular food systems in Rwanda.

The opportunities

Consumer demand for sustainable food has led to the adoption of circular economy practices in food production. Standards and conformity assessments are crucial for ensuring the reliability and sustainability of circular food products, bolstering consumer confidence, and enabling informed choices. Obtaining conformity approvals can enhance market access and profitability for producers. In Rwanda, rigorous conformity assessments are vital for sustainable economic growth, balancing international standards with local agricultural needs while creating markets for high-quality products. Compliance with standards strengthens connections between producers and consumers, expanding value chains and trade opportunities, and ultimately driving demand and market growth.

The comprehensive evaluation identified 7 gaps to address leading to the following policy recommendations. They are listed here in order of priority:

1. Integrate circular food systems into national capacity-building programs for SMEs.
2. Address the standards gap for specific circular food products.
3. Enhance capacity-building support for SMEs’ circular food systems standards.
4. Establish a certifiable circular economy management system.
5. Establish a recognition program for SMEs’ circular food innovations.
6. Establish a mutual recognition and harmonisation framework.
7. Establish and implement a tiered conformity assessment system.

Conclusion

The proposed implementation framework emphasizes collaboration between National Quality Infrastructure (NQI) entities, multi-stakeholder engagement, public-private dialogues, and ongoing consultation and feedback mechanisms. These components are essential for effective implementation and success in advancing quality infrastructure initiatives.

Contact

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