

D7.3

Action Plan for joint activities with other projects funded under the ZEROPOLLUTION-01-07 topic



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Index of Contents

1	Introduction.....	7
	• Overview of STAR4BBS and the two other projects awarded to address the HORIZON-CL6-2021-ZEROPOLLUTION-01-07 call	7
	• Purpose of the Action Plan.....	7
2	Integrated Strategic Collaboration	9
2.1	Structure of collaboration	9
2.1.1	Thematic areas for inter-project collaboration.....	9
2.1.2	Teamwork architecture	10
2.1.3	Cluster Exchange.....	12
2.2	Joint Strategic Areas.....	14
2.2.1	Explanation of the Joint Monitoring System (JMS) proposal and its development.....	14
2.2.2	Joint Expert Advisory Board	16
3	Joint Dissemination Activities and Action Plan Steps	18
4	Potential Barriers.....	20
5	Conclusion	21

Index of Table

Table 1	PCs representatives	10
Table 2	Inter-project teams	11
Table 3	Proposed timeline for the JMS planning and development.....	15



Partners short names

TUB	(Technische Universitat Berlin)
UNITELMA	(Università degli studi Unitelma di Roma)
UNI	(Ente Italiano di Normazione)
AUA	(Geoponiko Panepistimion Athinon)
USC	(Universidad de Santiago de Compostela)
APRE	(Agenzia per la promozione della Ricerca Europea)
NOVA	(Nova - Institut fur politische und Okologische Innovation GMBH)
BAM	(Bundesanstalt fuer Materialforschung und Pruefung)
RSB	(Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials Association)
ISEAL	(ISEAL Alliance)
BB	(Better Biomass)

Abbreviations

B2B	Business-to-business
CSLs	Certification Schemes and Labels
EU	European Union
IPTs	Inter-project Teams
JAB	Joint Advisory Board
JMS	Joint Monitoring System
PCs	Project Coordinators
PO	Project Officer
REA	European Research Executive Agency
SCS	Sustainability Certification Schemes
STAR4BBS	Sustainability Transition Assessment Rules for Bio-Based Systems



Executive summary

The **STAR4BBS** project (Sustainability Transition Assessment Rules for Bio-Based Systems) is a Coordination and Support action, which addressed the Horizon Europe call HORIZON-CL6-2021-ZEROPOLLUTION-01-07: *International and EU sustainability certification schemes for bio-based systems*. Two other projects – **HARMONITOR** (Harmonisation and monitoring platform for certification schemes and labels to advance the sustainability of bio-based systems) led by the SQ Consult, and **SUSTCERT4BIOBASED** (Sustainability Certification for Biobased Systems) led by the Stichting Wageningen Research, were also awarded to address the same call.

This action plan is a report that: i) summarizes the different clustering activities among the beforementioned three projects implemented during the first six months of the STAR4BBS project life; ii) provides an overview and explanation of planned joint activities in the upcoming months, to further strengthen the ties between the three projects. The action plan builds on close and ongoing collaboration among the three projects coordinators and the different inter-project teams.

The Action Plan identifies several strategic areas of importance to the three sister projects and related cooperation activities in each area. Most importantly, the establishment of a Joint Advisory Board, the plan for establishing a Joint Monitoring System, and collaboration in inter-project thematic areas.

The overall purpose of this Action Plan for joint activities with other projects funded under the ZEROPOLLUTION-01-07 topic is to establish a coordinated and collaborative approach among the STAR4BBS project and its sister projects, HARMONITOR and SUSTCERT4BIOBASED, to address the Horizon Europe call for sustainability certification schemes for bio-based systems, by outlining cooperation activities that align their goals, avoid duplication of efforts, maximize their impact, and facilitate the exchange of information and expertise.



1 Introduction

- Overview of STAR4BBS and the two other projects awarded to address the HORIZON-CL6-2021-ZEROPOLLUTION-01-07 call

STAR4BBS (www.star4bbs.eu) is a three-year multidisciplinary and multi-actor project with the overall aim to maximize the potential of Sustainability Certification Schemes (SCS) and labels to support a successful transition to sustainable bio-based economy. It entails the development of indicators and a monitoring system for assessing the effectiveness and robustness of existing international and EU SCS, B2B labels and related traceability systems applicable to biological feedstock and bio-based materials and products. This will create the foundations to support achieving the needed harmonization between schemes and transparency in global and EU trade flows.

SUSTCERT4BIOBASED (www.sustcert4biobased.eu) project is set on defining and promoting the adoption of effective and robust sustainability certification schemes and business to business labels for industrial biobased systems to support tracing the sustainability of biobased products along the value chains and trades within the EU and globally for responsible production and consumption.

The HARMONITOR (www.harmonitor.eu) project will improve the effectiveness of certification schemes and labels (CSLs) in different sectors of the EU Bioeconomy and therewith strengthen their use as a co-regulation instrument. Effective and robust CSLs can cope with some of the difficulties that public regulation faces and fill in policy gaps. The HARMONITOR project will also establish and test a participative review platform concept that allows CSLs to find commonalities and cooperation when operating in bio-based value chains within and across EU borders.

- **Purpose of the Action Plan**

The three projects (STAR4BBS, HARMONITOR and SUSTCERT4BIOBASED) form the cluster “International and EU sustainability certification schemes for bio-based systems”. To ensure that the three projects work together effectively, a coordinated and collaborative approach is essential. This action plan outlines several cooperation activities that the projects will undertake to align their goals, avoid duplication of efforts, and maximize their impact. The cooperation activities include planning thematic area discussions, potentially establishing a joint monitoring system, exchanging information, the establishment of a joint expert advisory board, coordinating common activities, and collaboration in the dissemination of the findings. By working together and coordinating their efforts, the three projects can ensure that their work is aligned, complementary, and contributes to the overall goal of promoting sustainability in bio-based systems.

The coordination and management of the cluster activities are overseen by the three Project Coordinators (PCs). The PCs will be responsible for ensuring that the cluster activities are carried out effectively and efficiently aligned with the goals and strategies of the three sister projects.



To facilitate the cooperation activities, **five thematic** inter-project teams have been established, each consisting of institutions and researchers from the three sister projects. These inter-project teams will focus on the five thematic areas identified in the projects (Selection and Review of CSLs; Bio-based value chain selection and Global Trade Flows; (Joint) Monitoring System; Analysis of costs and benefits and feasibility study; Communication and dissemination of the results), seeking out synergies and cooperation opportunities among the three projects within each area. By working together through the inter-project teams and under the guidance of the PCs, the three projects can ensure that their efforts are aligned and complementary, maximizing their impact towards the EU's sustainability goals.



2 Integrated Strategic Collaboration

2.1 Structure of collaboration

2.1.1 Thematic areas for inter-project collaboration

As mentioned beforehand, to facilitate the clustering activities, there are five identified thematic areas for planning meetings and discussions with sister projects teams, and for inter-project collaboration. Each inter-project team aims to look for synergies and cooperation opportunities among the three projects, within one of the identified thematic areas of interest.

In the continuation, each thematic area is described in more detail.

A. Selection and Review of CSLs (and review of the monitoring systems)

The team within this area is responsible for establishing synergies in the selection and review of existing SCS and labels. It also reviews existing monitoring systems and benchmarking platforms with the purpose of identifying building blocks for the design of the Joint Monitoring System.

B. Bio-based value chain selection and Global Trade Flows

Aims to identify synergies in the analysis of global trade flows of biological feedstock and bio-based materials and products. In addition, team working within this area is responsible for the coordination of the case studies selection, trying to identify a focus of each project.

C. (Joint) Monitoring System (JMS)

As a proposal yet to be accepted by the EU officials, the inter-project team started working on identifying synergies in the conceptualization, development and testing of a joint monitoring system. Initial decisions would follow as to how such a monitoring system will be structured, what levels it will cover and what kind of outputs it will produce. Further discussions will cover testing, interpretation and final design of the JMS.

D. Analysis of costs and benefits and feasibility study

The inter-project team collaborating within this thematic area will align findings of assessing the feasibility of the selected SCS and labels, as well as on quantification of direct and indirect costs and benefits of certification. One of the aims will be to test the feasibility of the proposed criteria and indicators and optimize the methodology in terms of comprehensiveness, transparency, and ease of operation.

E. Communication and dissemination of the results

Communication inter-project team works on the mutual planning and implementation of the joint communication, exploitation and dissemination activities. The aim is to capitalize on established outcomes, developing strong



network with joint activities and by participating at various events, reaching the highest impact.

In addition to previously specified thematic areas, the three projects are committed to support each other in the designing and implementation of the activities specific to each project, but are beneficial to other projects as well. For example, STAR4BBS and SUSTCERT4BIOBASED collaborated with HARMONITOR by providing inputs and disseminating the public consultation on sustainability certification of bio-based products launched at the end of February 2023.

2.1.2 Teamwork architecture

The cluster of the three projects includes: i) Project Coordinators (PCs); ii) Inter-project Teams.

- Project Coordinators (PCs)

The three Project Coordinators (PCs) are responsible for the overall coordination and management of the cluster activities. In addition, they are responsible for direct communication with the Project Officers at REA. Table 1 shows the members of the PCs from all three sister projects.

Project	Name of Coordinator	Institution
HARMONITOR	Sergio Ugarte	SQ Consult B.V.
STAR4BBS	Luana Ladu	Technische Universitat Berlin (TUB)
SUSTCERT4BIOBASED	Iris Vural Gursel	Stichting Wageningen Research (WR)

Table 1 PCs representatives

- Inter-project teams (IPTs)

The role of the five inter-project teams is to collaborate within the mentioned strategic areas on the topics for which they already have responsibilities leading tasks and/or WPs in their own projects, as well as looking for synergies and cooperation opportunities among the three projects. Table 2 show the current members of the Inter-project teams from all three projects, according to the thematic areas.

Thematic area	HARMONITOR	STAR4BBS	SUSTCERT4BIOBASED
Selection and Review of CSLs	For the review: Simon Moeller (Preferred by Nature)	Enrica Imbert (Unitelma)	Iris Vural Gursel (WR-WFBR)
	For the selection:		Loek Verwijst (CU)



	Stefan Majer (DBFZ)	Maira Devisscher (ISEAL)	
Bio-based value chain selection and Global Trade Flows	Martijn Vis (BTG)	Olaf Porc (Nova Institute) Apostolis Koutinas (AUA)	Sebastian Zapata Habas (CIRCE), (value chain selection) Myrna van Leeuwen (WR-WEcR), (global trade flows)
(Joint) Monitoring System	Martin Junginger (UU) Stefan Majer (DBFZ)	Luana Ladu, Nikola Matović (TUB) Kristin Komives, Maira Devisscher (ISEAL) Maria Teresa Moreira, Sara Lago (USC)	Mathilde Crêpy (ECOS) Iris Vural Gursel (WR-WFBR), (testing on scheme/labels) Loek Verwijst (CU), (pilot audit check)
Analysis of costs and benefits and feasibility study	Birka Wicke (RU)	Apostolis Koutinas (AUA) Enrica Imbert (Unitelma) Maria Teresa Moreira, Sara Lago (USC)	Lusine Aramyan, Luuk Vissers (WR-WEcR) Loek Verwijst (CU)
Communication & dissemination of the results	Sergio Ugarte, Costanza Rossi (SQ)	Serena Fabbrini (APRE)	Annie Kalimeri (WHITE)

Table 2 Inter-project teams

The collaboration among the three project coordinators and inter-project teams is an essential aspect of ensuring the success of the three cluster projects. The exchange of



information through emails, online meetings, and shared repository will aid in aligning key activities and reporting on progress to other inter-project team members. The ad-hoc and regular meetings within and among inter-project teams will facilitate the planning and implementation of outputs, thereby avoiding repetition, overlap, and loss of important information. The involvement of the Project Coordinators in the overall coordination and management of the cluster activities will be pivotal in ensuring effective communication with the Project Officers at REA. It is clear that the joint effort of the inter-project teams will lead to a more coherent and impactful approach towards achieving the objectives of the cluster projects.

2.1.3 Cluster Exchange

Meetings are an essential part of project management and coordination, especially when it comes to sister or cluster projects that have a common goal. Such meetings allow project teams to discuss and align their activities, avoid duplication of work, and identify potential synergies between projects. Regular communication through periodic online meetings and email exchange helps to ensure that all parties are working towards the same objective.

The three cluster projects have already established regular communication and coordination through periodic online meetings and extensive email exchange to ensure activities and outcomes are aligned. In addition, ad-hoc meetings are also being conducted when needed to discuss various thematic areas and to target potential synergies between the projects.

- **PCs and IPTs Meetings**

Since the cluster projects' start time, a series of meetings have been held with the aim of ensuring effective collaboration and coordination among the three projects, HARMONITOR, SUSCERT4BIOBASED, and STAR4BBS. These meetings involved project coordinators' calls, inter-project teams' calls and meetings with the Policy Officers and Project Officers, among others. The topics discussed in these meetings were diverse, ranging from the selection of value chains and sustainability criteria to the development of a Joint Monitoring System (JMS).

Meetings of coordinators:

Within STAR4BBS, TUB is responsible for the liaison with HARMONITOR and SUSCERT4BIOBASED. The three project coordinators agreed to meet every 6 weeks. However, ad-hoc additional meetings have been/will be organized when needed. To date, more than ten external virtual meetings with project coordinators have already been organized to discuss overall coordination and any impending questions, to smooth activities' alignment. In addition, the PCs are continuously exchanging emails to discuss ongoing activities of the cluster.

In this following summary, we provide a chronological overview of all meetings held between June 2022 and February 2023, outlining the purpose of each meeting:

- 16th June 2022: Joint kick-off meeting of three cluster projects and REA representative, in order to target synergies between them and align the work on



maximizing the potential of sustainability certification schemes and labels to support a successful transition to sustainable bio-based economy.

- 27th September 2022: First PCs virtual meeting.
- 7th October 2022: Coordinators' Catch-up call (after Project2Project meeting in Brussels, Belgium).
- 10th October 2022: First meeting of the team: Costs, benefits and economic feasibility.
- 12th October 2022: Development of the monitoring system meeting.
- 14th October 2022: First meeting on the bio-based value chain selection and analysis of trade flows.
- 17th October 2022: First meeting was made between HARMONITOR and STAR4BBS on SCS identification and selection discussion.
- 28th October 2022: Joint sister projects meeting on value chain selection with participants from the HARMONITOR, SUSCERT4BIOBASED and STAR4BBS, based on the development of the draft methodology taking into account the approach and results of the BTG value chain selection within the HARMONITOR project.
- 4th and 11th November 2022: Coordinators' meetings for organizing and efficiently planning the HORIZON-CL6-2021-ZEROPOLLUTION meeting of the 14th of November 2022 (with Policy Officers and Project Officer).
- 9th November 2022: Meeting between three inter-consortia teams for defining the purpose of the JMS.
- 14th November 2022: Meeting for value chains selection.
- 16th November 2022: Meeting related to the review and analysis of SCS criteria and indicators.
- 18th and 28th of November 2022: A coordinators' call to summarize the key points of the cluster meeting and to discuss the final list of the Joint Advisory Board.
- 5th December 2022: Meeting related to the costs, benefits, and economic feasibility of sustainability certification.
- 8th and 12th December 2022: Meetings between sister project core teams for preparation of the proposal for JMS.
- 19th December 2022: Placeholder discussion meeting with all three sister project teams working on the joint monitoring system.
- 11th and 19th January 2023: Final JMS proposal discussions.
- 16th January 2023: Coordinators' meeting to organize the meeting of the 17th January 2023 with the PO of REA.
- 17th January 2023: Meeting with the Policy Officers and Project Officer.
- 20th and 25th January 2023: Coordinators' meetings to finalize the strategy of the JMS, discuss the NDA to be sent to the Advisory Board members, and plan the first meeting with them.



- 8th February 2023: Meeting with all three sister projects on SCS criteria and indicators.
- 15th February 2023: Meeting for costs and benefits analysis.
- 16th February 2023: Meeting of the PCs to discuss how to organize the meeting of the 17th
- 17th February 2023: Meeting with the PO to present the strategy and idea around the JMS.

2.2 Joint Strategic Areas

2.2.1 Explanation of the Joint Monitoring System (JMS) proposal and its development

The goal of the three sister projects working together to develop a Joint Monitoring System (JMS) is to reduce confusion, divergences, and mistrust among stakeholders by creating a harmonized, overarching system. This would bring coherence to the space and clarity for policymakers driving the transition to a bioeconomy in the EU. Working together would allow the projects to build on each other's knowledge and experience, subjecting the JMS to a higher level of scrutiny, and maximizing the effective use of resources. The JMS would streamline stakeholder consultations and reduce fatigue while eliminating competition among the three projects and maximizing the synergies and impacts of the results. The creation of a JMS will require greater coordination, but it is believed to be feasible and worthwhile to work together to provide a more comprehensive and detailed tool, covering a wide range of bio-based sectors and products.

Action steps needed to be undertaken to achieve the previously mentioned goal were as follows:

- Defining and aligning the scope of the JMS: The first step is to define and align the scope of the JMS by clearly defining the products and sectors to be covered and the geographical regions to be included in the analysis. This will ensure that all the sister projects have a shared understanding of the JMS's scope.
- Proposing the structure of the JMS: Establishing a set of indicators for the JMS that will be built in three levels: System level, Content Level, and Outcome Level. System indicators will focus on system characteristics, such as how a scheme is governed and how the standards or labels are developed. Content indicators will clarify the requirements of the certification scheme or label vis-à-vis specific EU environmental, social, economic, and circularity priorities and targets. Outcome indicators will enable capturing the impact made by the schemes and labels.
- Developing a clear structure for the JMS, centered on the indicators, to collect key information about the robustness and effectiveness of the certification schemes and labels.
- Testing and refining the JMS: After the JMS framework has been developed, the next step is to test and refine the system by applying it to a range of



previously selected certification schemes and labels. This will involve analyzing data and the results, and refining the methodology as needed.

- **Building stakeholder engagement:** Throughout the development and testing of the JMS, it is important to build stakeholder involvement to ensure that the JMS meets the needs of all relevant stakeholders. Different categories of stakeholders will be involved in the development of the different elements of the JMS. This will involve engaging with policymakers, industry actors, NGOs, and other stakeholders to gather feedback and incorporate it into the JMS. In particular joint events are planned to be organized by the three projects (e.g. the STAR4BBS will organize specific co-creation workshop).
- **Developing dissemination and communication strategies:** Once the JMS has been developed and tested, the next step is to develop dissemination and communication strategies to ensure that the JMS is widely adopted and used beyond the life of the three sister projects. This will involve developing outreach materials and engaging with key stakeholders to promote the use of the JMS.
- **Planning resources for the project,** noting that there will not be a need for additional resources nor a shift of budget between partners. Internal shifts in the timing of the resources spent in specific tasks and possibly more effort in terms of coordination between the three projects may be necessary.

Overall, the key strategy for achieving the goal of developing a JMS is to collaborate closely among the three sister projects, leveraging their knowledge and experience to develop a comprehensive and effective system. By aligning on the scope, KPIs, and methodology for the JMS, and engaging with stakeholders throughout the process, the three sister projects can work together to develop a tool that will be widely adopted and used beyond the life of the projects.

The result will be a comprehensive and detailed tool that can be used to assess the sustainability of biobased products and support the transition to a bioeconomy in the EU. Table 3 summarizes the proposed timeline for the development and testing of the JMS.

Task	Timelines
JMS proposal development	Dec 2022 - January 2023
JMS proposal presentation to EC Project Officers	February 2023
JMS proposal refinement and finalization, based on POs input	February/March 2023
Development of draft criteria (system, content, outcome)	March 2023 – January 2024
First draft of the JMS	January 2024
Testing of the JMS	Feb 24 – May 25
Final version of the JMS	May 2025

Table 3 Proposed timeline for the JMS planning and development



2.2.2 Joint Expert Advisory Board

Formation of a Joint Advisory Board (JAB)

In an effort to streamline communication and receive feedback from a wider range of experts, the three projects have decided to form one Joint Advisory Board instead of separate boards for each project. The three PCs created a list of possible members of the JAB, considering the members already contacted during proposal preparation. The potential members have been contacted and asked for their availability and willingness to join the JAB of the project.

The board is comprised of recognized experts with relevant expertise in areas such as industrial bio-based value chains, sustainability systems, academia, and international organizations. The membership is voluntary and unremunerated, and the composition and members of the Joint EAB will be publicly acknowledged on the project websites, unless a member requests confidentiality. The Joint EAB will advise and provide guidance to the implementation of relevant activities and tasks of the projects, and specific tasks include monitoring and critically reviewing the projects' development and progress in meeting their objectives, advising on long-term and short-term strategic decisions, and facilitating connection with targeted stakeholder groups.

Purpose and benefits of the Joint Advisory Board

The JAB will serve as a valuable resource for the three projects. With a diverse range of expertise and representation of various stakeholder categories, the board will provide advice and guidance on a range of topics including sustainability certification schemes and labels for bio-based systems, monitoring systems for assessing the effectiveness of existing certification schemes and labels, and sustainability policy targets. Additionally, the board will help the Joint Consortia stay up to date with the latest developments related to the project and facilitate connection with targeted stakeholder. The JAB will bring alignment with ongoing international efforts and contribute to the wider dissemination of project results with relevant stakeholders via their network and thereby support sustainability of project outcomes beyond the project lifetime.

Coordination of activities related to the participation of the Joint Advisory Board

The Joint Expert Advisory Board will participate in board meetings (twice a year) and stakeholder engagement activities organized by the cluster projects, providing feedback on research findings and bringing input relevant for the research conducted. The Joint EAB will also provide critical reviews of the projects' development and progress, and provide feedback and advice based on their knowledge and expertise. The Joint EAB will be a voluntary and unremunerated member of the consortium, with no contractual obligation, but a commitment to cooperate, actively participate, and provide advice. The membership lasts for the entire duration of the projects (36 months), and members may request their membership to be terminated at any time in writing by email.

The board meetings will be organized online or on-site, with previous agreement among the sister projects PCs, with the first planned meeting already scheduled in an online setting on 24th of February 2023. This first - Joint Advisory Board kick-off meeting of the Horizon Europe ZP-01-07 Cluster projects: SUSTCERT4BIOBASED,



HARMONITOR and STAR4BBS, will have the aim to introduce inter-project teams and present the projects goals, followed by a short introduction to two topics of interest to obtain JAB's input and feedback: *development of a joint monitoring system and selection of biobased value chains*.

The inter-project Consortia, and most importantly the PCs will notify JAB about any upcoming meetings and events in advance (at least three weeks in advance). A draft agenda shall also be shared with the JAB members in advance.

The deliverable D8.1 from the STAR4BBS project includes all the terms of reference, rules, and confidentiality provisions related to the Joint Advisory Board.



3 Joint Dissemination Activities and Action Plan Steps

Effective cooperation among projects is crucial in achieving their shared goals and maximizing the impact of their work. The three projects can engage in various cooperation activities, such as strategic areas of importance (e.g., joint monitoring system), exchange of information, thematic area discussions, coordination of activities, and dissemination and communication. Through these activities, the projects can avoid duplication of efforts, align goals and strategies, share resources and expertise, and identify opportunities for collaboration. For all joint dissemination activities, Consortia of all three cluster projects are invited, members are equally present, and their feedback and opinion are highly anticipated and recommendable. By working together, the projects can enhance their sustainability performance, promote best practices, and enable more effective decision-making, ultimately contributing to the EU's sustainability goals.

1. Thematic Area Discussions:

Planning meetings and discussions with sister projects teams on the five thematic areas can be organized to share information, align goals and strategies, and identify opportunities for collaboration. The aim is to avoid duplication of effort and achieve greater impact through coordinated efforts.

2. Joint Monitoring System (JMS):

The three projects can work together to develop a JMS that will monitor and evaluate the sustainability performance of bio-based systems. The JMS will be designed to meet the needs of the stakeholders and to facilitate the exchange of information and data. The JMS will also help to identify best practices, monitor progress towards sustainability goals, and enable more effective decision-making.

3. Joint Expert Advisory Board:

The three projects established a Joint Advisory Board, which will provide guidance and recommendations on issues related to sustainability certification and labeling schemes. The board will consist of external experts from different institutions to ensure diversity of perspectives. The board will provide feedback on the development of the JMS and other key activities and ensure that the three projects are aligned with each other and with the EU's sustainability goals.

4. Exchange of Information:

The three projects can establish regular channels of communication, such as email exchanges, online meetings, and shared repository, to facilitate the exchange of information, resources, and expertise. This will allow the three projects to stay up-to-date on each other's progress, identify areas for potential collaboration, and avoid duplication of effort.

5. Coordination of Activities:



The three projects can coordinate their activities to ensure that they are aligned and complementary. This includes aligning key activities, such as research, data collection, and stakeholder engagement, and reporting on progress to other inter-project team members. This will allow the three projects to maximize their resources and achieve greater impact.

6. Dissemination and Communication:

The three projects can work together to disseminate their findings and results to a wider audience. This includes joint publications, presentations, and outreach activities to promote the importance of sustainability in bio-based systems. This will ensure that the three projects are aligned in their messaging and avoid confusion and inconsistency.

As part of the dissemination and communication strategy, the three sister projects will attend various events, such as workshops and conferences, where they will present their findings, activities, and outputs. Working together, they will create joint presentations that will showcase the collective impact of their work, highlighting the importance of sustainability in bio-based systems. This collaborative approach will ensure that their messaging is consistent and aligned. One of the first such events that the cluster projects will attend will be the EUBCE 2023 (the 31st edition of the European Biomass Conference & Exhibition), in Bologna, Italy, on 5-9th June 2023. We will jointly present the JMS, selection of the value chains and SCS and labels.

By undertaking these cooperation activities, the three projects can work together effectively to achieve their shared goals and maximize the impact of their work.

The **main steps** that will be undertaken by this Action Plan will include the following:

1. Planning meetings and discussions with sister projects teams on 5 thematic areas
2. Discussing and further developing the proposal of a Joint Monitoring System (JMS)
3. Exchanging information (through emails, during online meetings and via shared repository (cluster repository hosted and established by WR, for sharing files and folders, and working simultaneously on the same documents))
4. Aligning key activities and reporting on progress to other inter-project team members
5. Jointly coordinating activities related to the participation of the Joint Advisory Board
6. Organizing ad-hoc and regular meetings within and among inter-project teams, planning and implementing outputs, to avoid repetition, overlap and loss of important information
7. Elaborating potential future proposals for the EU Project Officers



4 Potential Barriers

In any collaborative project involving multiple stakeholders, there are bound to be potential barriers that may hinder the completion of the steps identified in the Action Plan. One potential barrier could be disagreements or controversies among the partners involved in the joint activities' execution. In such cases, it is important to have a clear dispute resolution mechanism in place that ensures a fair and equitable solution for all parties involved. This mechanism is agreed upon by all three project coordinators at the outset of the collaboration (based on consensus) and is outlined in the framework for collaboration.

Another potential barrier could be a lack of commitment from external stakeholders (e.g., Joint Advisory Board members). It is essential that all stakeholders are committed to the collaboration and are willing to contribute their time, resources, and expertise to the joint activities' execution. If one or more stakeholders are not fully committed to the collaboration, it could lead to delays, conflicts, and an inability to achieve the desired outcomes. To address this potential barrier, we aim to ensure that all stakeholders understand the value and benefits of the collaboration and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In addition, by joining forces, the three projects count on a broader network of stakeholders that could further support the cluster activities by providing their inputs and feedback.

A lack of adequate resources could also be a potential barrier to the successful execution of joint activities. It is important to ensure that there is sufficient human and other resources available to support the joint activities identified in the Action Plan. This could involve potentially reallocating resources from other areas of the project or in terms of human resources internal organizations' manpower. It is also important to ensure that all partners have a clear understanding of the budgetary constraints and are able to work within those constraints.

Finally, differences in organizational culture, communication styles, and working practices among the cluster project teams could also be potential barriers to collaboration. To address these potential barriers, it is important to establish clear lines of communication, set expectations for working practices and communication styles, and provide support to partners as needed. This could involve developing a shared vocabulary, providing cultural sensitivity training by the coordinators, and promoting open communication at all times.



5 Conclusion

The establishment of a framework for collaboration and communication and development of this Action Plan for joint activities between the STAR4BBS, HARMONITOR, and SUSTCERT4BIOBASED projects is an important step towards achieving the objectives of the Horizon Europe call on sustainability certification schemes for bio-based systems. The framework clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities and establishes lines of communication to ensure effective collaboration. The ongoing collaboration among the three projects' coordinators and inter-project teams is essential to the success of this framework.

The Action Plan provides a summary of the different clustering activities among the three projects implemented during the first six months of STAR4BBS project life and outlines the planned joint activities in the upcoming months to further strengthen the ties between the three projects. The plan identifies several strategic areas of importance to the three sister projects and outlines cooperation activities in each area. Notably, the establishment of a Joint Advisory Board and the plan for establishing a Joint Monitoring System will facilitate the sharing of expertise and feedback among the three projects and ensure the effectiveness and robustness of the sustainability certification schemes in the field. The inter-project teams are dedicated to the five thematic areas that were identified in the projects (Selection and Review of CSLs; Bio-based value chain selection and Global Trade Flows; (Joint) Monitoring System; Analysis of costs and benefits and feasibility study; Communication and dissemination of the results). Within each thematic area, the teams are actively pursuing opportunities for collaboration and synergy between the three projects.

Overall, the establishment of a collaborative framework between the three projects is a positive step towards achieving the objectives of the Horizon Europe call. The ongoing collaboration among the three projects' coordinators and inter-project teams is critical to the successful implementation of this framework. The identification of strategic areas and cooperation activities in the Action Plan will guide the development of the necessary steps to strengthen the ties between the three projects and achieve the desired outcomes.

“ Sustainable bio-based systems via effective certification & labelling ”

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