



tracking supermarket
progress towards a fairer and
greener food system



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the Race to the Top project is to help the key players in the UK supermarket sector enhance their social, environmental and ethical policies and performance over a five-year period. We will achieve this through a process of engagement between supermarkets and civil society organisations with interests in a variety of social, environment and ethical issues.

The project will use the following **methods**:

1. Benchmarking

- Defining key social, environmental and ethical issues on which supermarket companies can act;
- Through dialogue, developing a framework of representative indicators that measure each company's policies and performance on these issues;
- Collecting data from each company and from other sources in relation to these indicators; and
- Scoring and publishing the results on an annual basis, showing each company's performance and progress over time.

2. Good practice case studies

- Publication of case studies of good practice by supermarkets on the issues covered by the project.

3. Ongoing dialogue

- Ongoing dialogue between supermarket companies, civil society organizations and government bodies, to explore contentious issues, to refine the benchmarking process and to find ways of overcoming barriers to improved company performance.

The key **principles** of the project are:

- Constructive engagement and dialogue;
- Respect for confidentiality;
- Focus on positive examples of good practice;
- Rigorous research; and
- Efforts to build on and coordinate with other initiatives to minimise duplication of effort in data collection.

These principles are implemented by strong project governance **procedures** involving:

- Project management by an independent research institute (IIED);
- An executive Coordination Group consisting of IIED and the coordinator of each of seven project modules;
- Meetings and workshops with supermarket company representatives;
- An Advisory Group which provides project guidance and strategic advice;
- A Memorandum of Understanding that identifies which supermarket companies and other organisations are working with the Race to the Top project, and sets out what these organisations can expect from others, and what is expected of them;
- A Confidentiality Protocol; and
- A Scientific Review Panel, which provides peer review and scientific scrutiny on methodological issues.



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PROJECT BENEFITS

Benefits for supermarket companies

- Gives public recognition of good practice on corporate social and environmental responsibility, informing the investment community, government, consumers and other key stakeholders;
- Provides guidance on which key social, environmental and ethical issues companies might be expected to address from the perspectives of a cross-section of civil society organisations;
- Gives insights into how these issues can be addressed;
- Allows companies to demonstrate a willingness to engage with civil society stakeholders;
- Creates space for constructive dialogue and mutual learning on contentious issues;
- Gives opportunities to inform and shape data collection methodologies such as self-assessment questionnaires;
- Provides a mechanism for highlighting the boundaries of corporate social responsibility, and supportive actions required of other actors including government and civil society organisations; and
- Has the potential to reduce the transaction costs of engaging with a range of civil society organisations.

Benefits for civil society project partners

- Provides a mechanism for informing supermarket companies about key issues;
- Enables learning about business models and practical solutions, and the constraints faced by companies in relation to these issues;
- Provides credible data on corporate performance which can inform strategic organisational priorities;
- Reduces the transaction costs of engaging with a number of companies; and
- Frames single issues within a broader framework of 'supermarkets and sustainability'

Benefits for government

- Provides a mechanism for implementing strategic objectives, including conservation of natural resources, inclusive rural development, achieving public health goals, and ensuring the integrity and ethical standard of the food supply, at home and abroad.
- Provides a means to support policy goals such as the DTI Code of Practice on relationships with suppliers, and the Department of Health 'Five-a-day' fruit and vegetables consumption campaign.
- Tracks the implementation of policies such as the Competition Commission Code of Conduct through independent data collection;
- Helps government to understand and define the role of policy in supporting supermarket best practices, particularly in the context of policy developments following the Policy Commission report