



BRANDING IMPACT NEUTRALITY IN BUSINESS

[WWW.METTA-STANDAARD.ORG](http://www.METTA-STANDAARD.ORG)

Metta is a brand that indicates that the core activities, products or services of a company do not generate any negative impacts on the environment or nature: the air quality, water, soil, the landscape, and all the living plants and animals within that landscape.

The Metta Standard¹ and the process that leads up to impact neutrality of an organisation or company enables these organisations or companies to quantify and compensate their environmental impacts in order to become impact neutral in a responsible manner. If a company has been a 100% impact neutral over a certain period in the past, the Metta certificate is issued. In 1st instance, negative impacts are reduced and mitigated to the extent possible within the organisation or company itself. The residual impact that cannot be avoided are subsequently compensated by undertaking projects that conserve or restore nature, the environment and/or the landscape, ideally as locally as possible.

The Metta Index is a score that indicates the extent of the impacts an organisation or company has during a defined period of time on its environment: the air quality, water, soil, the landscape, and all the living plants and animals within that landscape.

The Metta Concept

Responsible business (often labelled as corporate social responsibility) is an important trend that is gaining momentum in general by companies, governments, and an increasing share of the consumers. But irrespective of how responsible a business is, there will always be an environmental footprint associated with the products or services; some residual environmental impacts are unavoidable. The Metta Standard facilitates the quantification and qualification of the residual environmental footprint, and offers the possibility to compensate those unavoidable impacts, ideally as close to home as possible - **think global, act local!** – by undertaking projects or starting up / supporting initiatives that have a positive impact of comparable (or

¹ The Metta Standard & Index Foundation oversees the independency and quality of the Metta brand. Metta is an initiative of Eveline Trines from Scope14+ and together with Steven de Bie from Conservation Consultancy the brand is being rolled out and further developed. Together, Trines and de Bie represent over 50 years of global working experience related to sustainability, wise management of natural resources, and nature and biodiversity conservation. Eveline Trines is specialised in forestry, climate change and certification; and, Steven de Bie (biologist, former senior environmental advisor with Shell International, and professor at the Wageningen University) developed, amongst other things the "No Net Loss" concept for the Dutch Task Force on Biodiversity and Natural Resources.

preferable larger) size and character. By doing so, the Metta brand contributes to the enhancement of companies' environmental performance and ambitions towards achieving impact neutrality, whilst simultaneously contributing to a better environment, nature conservation and restoration, and the integration of environmental values in the economy at large.

Companies or organisations can demonstrate with Metta that their core activities, services or products do not have any net negative environmental impacts during a certain period in the past; the net quality of air, water, soil, and the landscape remain at least the same and biodiversity is maintained. Environmental aspects that are included in the assessments are the following:²

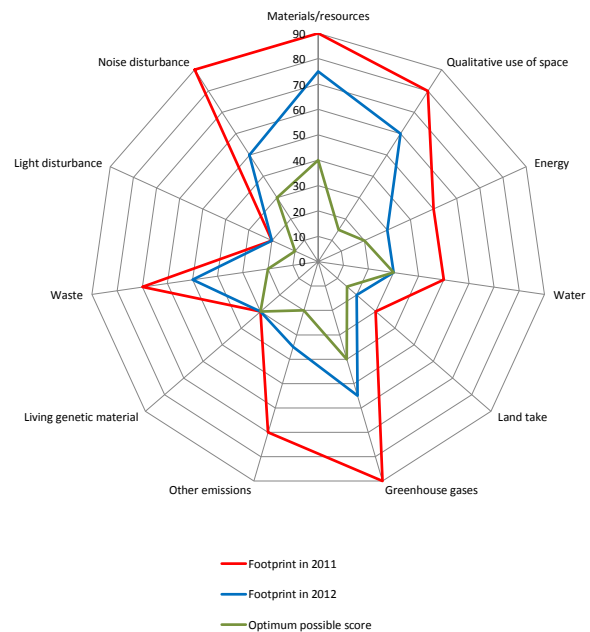
1. Use of natural resources, water and energy;
2. Use of space; quantitative (area, superficies) and qualitative (landscape), buildings, but also the use of land for the production of resources;
3. Greenhouse gases and other emissions to the air;
4. Waste: liquid and solid; and,
5. Disturbances: light, noise, dust, odour, and other sources.

To avoid the Metta certificate to be used for ("green washing") the basic principle is to avoid, reduce, mitigate and compensate impacts as much as possible within the company, and even within the gate, and only then compensate the residual impact off-site, outside the gate, or outside the influence sphere of the firm. The efforts undertaken in the 1st step, inside the influence sphere of the firm, often results in an efficiency improvement and sometimes even in a cost reduction. Only the residual footprint in compensated externally.

Metta step by step

The general concept of impact neutrality is reflected in figure A and B below.

Figure A reflects all environmental aspects that are taken into consideration by the Metta Standard and the performance of a company. The red line reflects the score in for instance 2011, whilst the blue line is the performance in 2012 in this example. The impacts³ are internally avoided, reduced and mitigated over time and to the extent possible, resulting in a decreasing residual footprint over time. The area within the red line is the impact that needs to be compensated in 2011; the blue one the footprint in 2012. The green line is the best achievable performance and the minimum that will always need to be compensated.



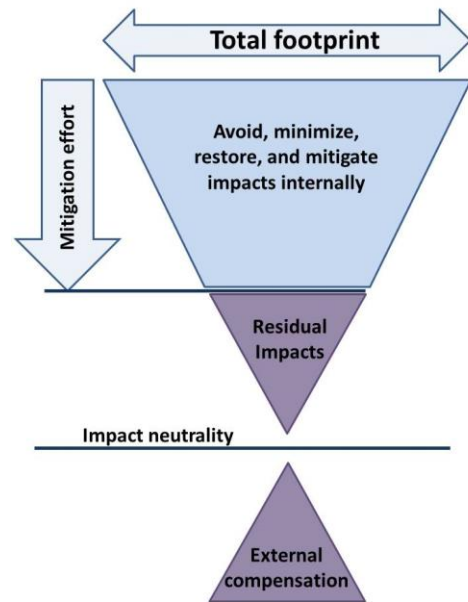
² Metta takes existing and ongoing initiatives to compensate impacts of the company/organisation such as the use of renewable energy or recycling into consideration.

³ Quantified: in absolute terms and on the basis of Critical Performance Indicators.

Figure B

In Figure B the top triangle – that exists out of two parts – is the total environmental footprint of a company or installation. That footprint is reduced as much as possible within the firm (the top part of the top triangle), after which the residual impacts (the bottom part of the top triangle) remain. The area covered by the bottom triangle, under the line that indicates impact neutrality, has to have at least the same size as the bottom part of the top triangle: the residual footprint, but preferably be larger than that.

The objective of Metta certification is to facilitate companies to achieve impact neutrality. Obviously the determination of the system boundaries before the audit commences is of critical importance.



Three levels of Metta certification

The residual impacts that a company still had during a certain period in the past, e.g. in 2012, are determined per location or installation. *Like for like* options will be identified by Metta and certified experts to compensate those impacts. Subsequently the activities will be initiated that will compensate the residual footprint over that period of time. If the firm that has been audited has commissioned the work and the activities can indeed be undertaken to realise the compensatory activities, the company is awarded a Metta certificate for the audited location or installation for that year or chosen period of time. The company can decide to continue this process in subsequent years.

In case companies have multiple locations or installations, or want to obtain an impact neutral supply chain, this can be achieved by applying the different levels of certification: **Metta, Metta Gold, and Metta Platinum:**

1. The **Metta** certificate applies to a specific location or installation of a company or organisation;
2. **Metta Gold** is awarded if an entire company or organisation has achieved impact neutrality; and,
3. **Metta Platinum** applies to a company and its suppliers if impact neutrality is achieved.

These three levels of certification offer the opportunity for companies to phase-in Metta into their operations and their supply chain. Before the audit takes place the system boundaries are determined and those will be reflected in the audit report.

In case companies want to include installations or parts of their company abroad, or have agreed with their suppliers to go for Metta Platinum, the parts of the company or its suppliers abroad cannot be involved in any legal procedures or court cases related to: child labour; slavery; discrimination or unfair treatment; limitations in the freedom of speech, religion, or sexual orientation of the employees; unfair treatment of employees or poor working conditions; limitations in the rights of employees to organize themselves; or unfair wages and excessive working hours.

The Metta certification trajectory has 6 steps:

1. **Application** of the Metta quick scan and **advisory services**
2. **Audit:** impact analysis and determination of compensatory needs
3. **Validation** of the audit report: peer review
4. Commissioning of the **compensation**
5. **Registration** of the company as 'impact neutral' during the period to which the audit applied
6. **Monitoring** of and **reporting** over the compensation

Limits to impact neutrality

Some locations or situation are so special that detrimental impacts cannot be compensated. If the impacts are that severe, based on the advice of certified experts that compensation is not possible, no Metta certificate can be issued. If that is determined once, that specific location is also excluded from future attempts to achieve impact neutrality.

There are also aspects that can only be assessed qualitatively. For instance, is one modern windmill acceptable in the landscape or not? And are 10 modern windmills together okay, or not? Are they more acceptable when put in a row on a dike or in a polder, or is a windmill park at sea a better solution?

Such situations call for “best professional judgment”; not only for the assessment but also for the identification of *like for like* options. This cannot be circumvented but consensus will be sought by the inclusion of a period of public consultation and the highest possible degree of transparency in reporting: each audit report that also contains the identified compensatory activities will be published on the Metta website for a fixed period of time to invite comments of any interested stakeholder.

The Metta Index & Innovation

Metta is the first integrated standard for environmental impact neutrality. There are initiatives for particular aspects that are also included in the Metta standard, for instance climate neutrality, but no integrated standard like Metta. With Metta, we try to **promote an intensified relationship** between the participating companies, their employees, the customers, local authorities, and nature conservation organisations: jointly they can identify projects and initiatives to optimise the local environment and quality of nature.

With Metta we also want to go back to the basics: **a clear and recognisable standard against reasonable costs** that is accepted by the users and the market. Certification is a means to an end and not an objective in itself. Bureaucracy and administrative costs will be avoided as much as possible without losing the robustness of the standard. That robustness will also be accomplished by a **high degree of transparency**: audit and monitoring **reports will be in the public domain** before certificates are issued, and **stakeholders and stakeholder groups will be invited to comment** on them.

Finally, it is important to stress once more that the **Metta certificate reflects a period in the past**; it is issued “**ex-post**”. This is to avoid illegitimate claims of companies about their environmental performance. Certified companies can, if they so wish, be included in the **Metta Index: a score board of companies that reflects their environmental performance**.

Want to know more? Feel free to contact us!

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