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“Development on the margin”

Forest Certification as Basic Requirement for Payments for Environmental Services

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Abstract

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is the leading forest certification system with over 140 million hectares of forests certified in some 80 countries. FSC principles and criteria provide an internationally recognised standard for responsible forest management. Although FSC has made great progress since its creation in 1993, it remains largely focused on certifying “wood” products entering international timber markets. Therefore a programme of applied research will be undertaken to test certification in broader ecosystem applications, including carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation and watershed protection. The paper will point out the necessary steps for implementation and outline required research.

Payment of environmental services (PES) is becoming a principal element in strategies for mainstreaming forest biodiversity conservation and maintaining essential support services. Nevertheless forest populations, often marginalised economically, derive little benefit from PES. The reasons postulated include bias towards large-scale forest operations, the complexity of market tools, and exclusion from participation.

An effective certification system can help to address some of these problems. As a market mechanism, it can help generate new sources of income for forest populations, while promoting biodiversity conservation and forest resources sustainability. It can facilitate responsible resource use and empower social and entrepreneurial organisations to achieve it. FSC certification gains over other more limited systems because of its extensive coverage and can bundle a range of forest products and services together in one evaluation, thus both saving costs and widening market opportunities.

For the reasons abovementioned, FSC and its partners have created an innovative project to test ES certification over a 4-year period. The project will be implemented in four pilot countries, Chile, Indonesia, Nepal and Vietnam.

Integral to the research is developing measurable compliance indicators for FSC standards. Such indicators at national level, while conforming to FSC principles and criteria, must relate to the diverse local conditions. Thus stakeholder participation in the process, including by marginalised communities, is essential. Moreover the indicators need to be based on sound scientific and practical bases, requiring expert advice. Therefore the involvement of experienced researchers is invited, not only for indicator development but also to consider market aspects.

Keywords: Forest management certification, FSC, indicators, participation, Payment for environmental services, PES

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