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“Development on the margin”

Assessing the Impact of Forest Management Certification - Options for Research

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Abstract

International trade in forest products is affected by environmental and social concerns. Growing environmental awareness and consumer demand for more responsible businesses helped third-party forest management certification emerge in the 1990s as a tool for assessing and communicating the environmental and social performance of forest operations. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international non-profit membership-based organisation which develops standards for responsibly managed forests. FSC's nationally adapted standards are widely accepted among a broad cross-section of stakeholders as being consistent with the principles of good forest stewardship. The FSC logo is a powerful incentive for forest managers and decision maker to improve their forest management continuously: As of April 2011, FSC has certified more than 1.000 forest management companies in more than 80 countries.

In conducting forest audits, FSC-accredited certification companies do not certify that a forest management unit has ‘achieved sustainability’, nor do they require or imply the implementation of uniform sets of forest management prescriptions: they certify that FSC requirements for forest management have been met. Over the years different authors and research networks analysed public certification reports and reviewed literature about certification impacts, and found that certification has the potential to and actually has for example - helped to secure or improve environmental services in certified forests; - improved workers' conditions within certified forests; - acted to reduce social conflict in and around certified forests; - helped in securing land tenure of certified community forests; - improved the image of the forest management enterprise; - provided better access to premium timber markets (where they exist); and - helped to promote sustainable forest management more generally through dialogue between the private sector, government bodies, non-governmental organisations and civil society.

The poster shows where an update of the evaluation of impact is needed, and where individual researchers and research institutions can provide assistance to improve the strength of compliance with FSC's Principles and Criteria, so that the certification of sustainable forest management in a changing world meets the growing demands for transparency and accountability of the many forestry stakeholders.

Keywords: Certification, forest management, impact, research needs