


Daily news and views from the FSC General Assembly, Kota Kinabalu 2011

CertifiedWoodUpdate

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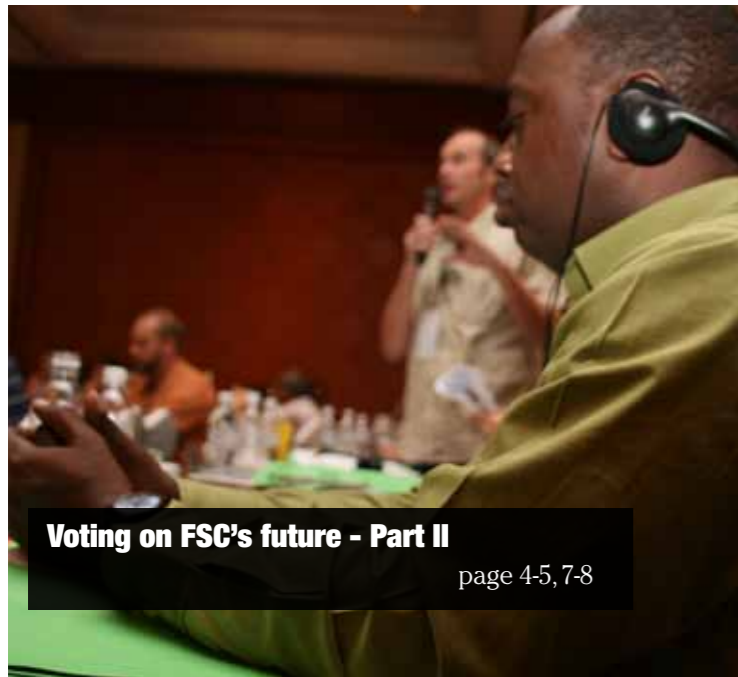
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In this Special Edition, we report directly from the 2011 FSC™ General Assembly on the official business and unofficial "word on the street". Newsletter design and layout by FSC Denmark. Join us online! www.nepcon.net/newsletter

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Assembling the future - 2011 jigsaw

On 1 July 2011 – the final day of the General Assembly – the last of the motions were passed, rejected or withdrawn in fast sequence. The final result of the two-day proceedings: 27 of the 56 motions were passed. The jigsaw for the next three years is carved out – now it is up to FSC and its stakeholders to piece it together.

Hot issues on Friday included Controlled Wood, public access to certification reports, inclusion of smallholders and communities, and plantations. See our coverage on page 4,5 and continue on page 7-9.

Democracy on display

Participating in an FSC General Assembly is to witness democracy before your eyes; a video recording would form a great addition to many dry curricula explaining to youngsters what democracy is all about. For one thing, a great emphasis is placed on the right to speak for and against a motion; members even vote on whether they want to proceed to voting on that motion or need more time for discussion.

Tower of Babel

Language barriers form a notorious challenge, and imprecise translations led to the rejection of several motions, as the members did not feel certain about what exactly they would be voting for or against. At one point, transparency debates evolved into a discussion on the usefulness of Google Translate (see page 4).

Throughout the formal Assembly proceedings, simultaneous translation was offered in several languages. The colourful diversity of languages within the FSC community came through beautifully when Brad Young of Canada's National Aboriginal Forestry Association spoke in his native tongue Cree, filling the room with mysterious and melodious Avatar-like words.

At the conclusion of this well-orchestrated event, FSC's General Director André de Freitas thanked the members for "a fantastic day". For all its challenges, the FSC General Assembly is indeed a unique and fascinating microcosm of global democracy.

Ramsay: "Facilitating the GA is like managing a jazz band"

He's facilitated every FSC General Assembly (GA) since 1999 with unequivocal professionalism and a dash of British humour. John Ramsay shares his view on the evolution of negotiations in this triennial event, where the extraordinary has become the ordinary but is by no means taken for granted.

Stakeholder engagement

How have the GAs changed over the years?

There are three main areas where there has been change over the last five GAs: where we do the negotiation, the profile of the event, and technically what we are able to do to support the conversation. But the ethos has not changed.

From notion to motion

The negotiations have evolved from a two-day meeting where everyone was in the room at once discussing and amending the motions. Today, the listening, negotiating, developing ideas, testing them out and building support across chambers have moved to three to four day meetings leading up to the two-day event which is now used to present the pros and cons of any particular motion and then there's the vote itself.

This improved structure has led to two main changes. Firstly, motions come to the floor with a full backing from all three chambers and sub-chambers because people have built up a decent support base. If not, it's unlikely the motion will be passed. Secondly, motions that are put to the GA, in my view, are getting meatier and more substantive. I think it's an excellent thing in terms of use of time, and the opportunity that the event provides.

A high profile event

We now have a big collection of really interesting and challenging side meetings from people who want to talk about what is happening in the world of forestry and sustainable management, bringing new ideas and new technologies. The Forest Conference this year was a high profile event, bringing first rate speakers like Kingfisher's Group Chief Executive Ian Cheshire. It's the second time we've run a forest conference, it's been a real success and it's turning the GA momentum into an attractive once-in-a-three-year event.

Boring but important

This year we had more than 400 participants compared to the 150 when I first worked with FSC in 1999. The whole conference was facilitated and there was simultaneous translation for all days. We also now have a fairly clearly developed protocol on how you put forward,



amend and vote on motions that people understand. Although we like to use FSC's magnificent system of waving red, green and yellow cards, we can check quorum and votes anytime we want to as we now have computerised voting that helps us with FSC's very complex weighting system.

The "narrative" hasn't changed

The GA is a place in which people believe that compromise is necessary and possible, and that it will be done wisely and thoughtfully with due regard to everybody's interests. Everybody buys the story, the narrative arc of FSC: you come, you listen, you put your case, you negotiate, you need cross-chamber support, you don't misbehave, you don't block vote and you don't trade votes. People behave to a series of rules that aren't written down and that they don't need to follow, in order to preserve the nature of the place. It remains the same because people want it to.

What's it like conducting the FSC affair?

It's like managing a jazz band. As with any top bands, you have a group of supreme musicians who come together because they want to. Everyone recognises they have a part to play both individually and harmonically. And yes there are rules and structures as there are in a jazz band, but there are also individual riffs.

There's flexibility and listening, knowing when to make a contribution, not being too shocked or surprised when someone throws in something unexpected or changes key, living with them and making the whole thing coherent again. That is the kind of management theme of an affair like FSC: having enough rules that people can play together, but not too many that they can't create something surprising.

> Extended article at www.nepcon.net/newsletter



Simultaneous translation was offered in numerous languages this year for participants to follow discussions © FSC DK

Voting on FSC's future – Part II

Transparency

Transparency: thumbs up, thumbs down Transparency and stakeholder dialogue were in focus this year. On Friday, the members passed one motion and rejected another that aimed for transparency and dialogue.

Green light to motion on motions

"Every three years we, the FSC members, convene to discuss and negotiate motions. It is very difficult to reach consensus, but at the end of the week we approve a number of motions. Sometimes three years pass without any information about the implementation of the motions. And some motions are not implemented at all, or they are implemented in a different way than what was agreed by the members. This undermines the trust that we have in each other and in the system".

This is a great motion overall and the FSC staff is very favourable to it

This message was delivered by Mauricio Voivodic, Executive Director of Imaflo, as he presented Motion 4 to the audience. The motion asks FSC to ensure implementation of motions passed by the membership, and to engage with the motions' proponents in that process. A forest of green voting cards showed that it resonated strongly with FSC's members.

FSC's General Director André de Freitas expressed his clear support to Motion 4, "This is a great motion overall and the FSC staff is very favourable to it".

While industry representatives were concerned about confidentiality issues, others said that omitting translations does not help transparency.

FSC's members will now expect to see passed motions realised to their full extent.

However, the question remains whether FSC has the capacity to fulfil all the expectations. Currently, there is no system in place for ensuring that there is a good match between available resources and the actions required by all passed motions put together. In his final speech, Mr. de Freitas addressed the issue by asking how FSC can engage its members in prioritising activities.

Red card to enhanced data access

Greenpeace's Motion 30 asked for access to the full contents of FSC and ASI auditing reports, except for confidential contents. Jakob Ryding of Forests of the World highlighted the NGOs' role as credibility guards.

"We are in the fortunate situation that we have a lot of NGOs involved who are looking over the CBs' shoulder and trying to make sure that nothing dodgy is going on. But we don't have access to the full contents of Forest management reports and no access at all to Chain of Custody and Controlled Wood reports", said Mr. Ryding.

A clear trade-off to satisfy the economic chamber, the motion also proposed to remove the current requirement for

translation of forest management reports into one of the "FSC languages" (English or Spanish).

The motion led to lively debate. While industry representatives were concerned about confidentiality issues, others said that omitting translations does not help transparency.

Some questioned the "rough and ready" Google Translate, while others found it unproblematic and said it was more important to get access to the full content of the reports. It was pointed out that the certification bodies have contractual obligations to protect confidentiality.

I have no problem with our own Chain of Custody reports being made public if the confidential parts are removed.

Peter Kristensen, Vice President of CSR and Environment at DLH, said: "I strongly support this motion. I have no problem with our own Chain of Custody reports being made public if the confidential parts are removed. With Google Translate I don't see the translation as a big issue. The reduced cost appears far more important than the minor implications for transparency".

The motion came close to approval but did not quite make it. It will be of no surprise if the issue re-surfaces during the next General Assembly.



The motions passed will help FSC to prioritise smallholders in their workstream

Controlled Wood: sealing the gaps and crevices

Controlled Wood Controlled Wood (CW) was the most important topic again this year. When the members prioritised the motions, the top three on the priority list all focused on Controlled Wood.

During negotiations, the three motions were integrated in a single "Controlled Wood package" (Motion 51). This motion tackles the most obvious credibility issues connected with the existing Controlled Wood system, while excluding several long-term aspects included in the original motions, such as exploring ways to phase out Controlled Wood and ensuring that the CW system is effectively increasing the uptake of FSC forest certification.

This motion tackles the most obvious credibility issues connected with the existing Controlled Wood system

In light of recent research showing that company-based risk assessments are unreliable, the motion calls for their cessation by end-2012. After this date, the risk assessments will be the responsibility of FSC or its National Initiatives. FSC is also required to assess all existing company-developed risk assessments. Furthermore, the motion requires FSC to strengthen specific aspects in the requirements for the companies' verification programmes for sourcing from areas of unspecified risk.

Motion 51 was passed unanimously, with just a single abstention.

Bigger incentives for smaller operations

Smallholders With overwhelming support, Motion 28 was endorsed, requesting FSC to enhance incentives for communities and smallholders to become certified. FSC is requested to provide a framework for training of communities and smallholders as well as auditors, and support the development of SLIMF standards and community management. The motion also asks FSC to support the marketing of forest products produced by SLIMF operations and communities.

The general feeling is that aspiration must be translated into action.

The need to provide more sustainable engagement for communities to move beyond dependence on donor support was made clear by Jens Holm Kanstrup from Forests of the World, who stated, "this motion helps solve some of the challenges that smallholders in the South are facing. Quite a lot of them are working actively towards certification, but if they don't have support from NGOs, it is almost impossible for them to move on with certification and market their products".

The members also endorsed a related motion (Motion 29) extending the eligibility for SLIMF rules (reduced requirements implying reduced cost, pertaining to Small and Low Intensity Managed Forest).

The motion offers operations the opportunity to demonstrate 'low intensity' in ways that are not depending on annual growth. Reliable growth estimates and data are lacking in some areas; based on the motion, operations can be eligible for

SLIMF if they can demonstrate low levels of harvest and if the haulage is non-mechanised.

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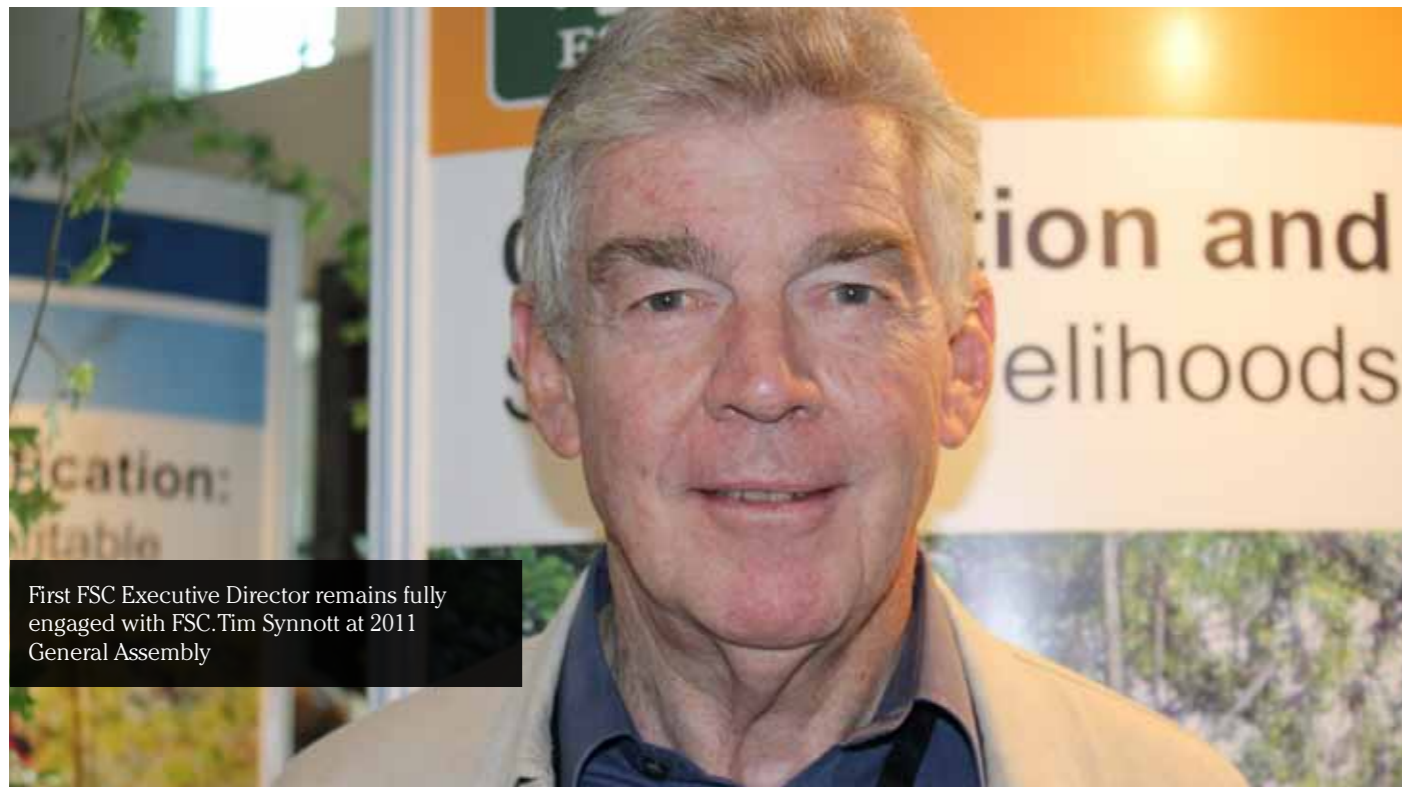
The bigger picture of larger operations

Impact With a narrow majority of just 50.05% within the economic chamber, FSC members passed Motion 20 that aims to address landscape level impacts of large-scale operations. FSC has been asked to commission a study that will also propose a set of recommendations for best practice indicators and procedures.

The room was somewhat divided.

Those opposed expressed concern over duplication of efforts by creating parallel processes. Those in favour explained that "in the same way that smallholders have special standards, we also need adapted rules for the largest ones". One member explained how Russia only has large-scale operations, "They are not bad, they're different".

Grant Rosoman from Greenpeace explained, "It is an important piece of work for FSC to do – to address the particular set of issues relating to very large scale, where operations are dominant in the landscape, and therefore have a huge influence on both the local communities and the environment".



First FSC Executive Director remains fully engaged with FSC. Tim Synnott at 2011 General Assembly

FSC movers & shakers:

Synnott: "The controversies have calmed down"

He was a constructive voice in the sustainable forestry debate, while the concept of FSC was still bubbling in its primordial soup. Twenty years later, he remains strongly engaged in sustainable forest management, and a firm supporter of FSC. Meet Tim Synnott, the first FSC Executive Director.

Interview

How did you get into FSC?

"I became involved sort of by accident. I was working at the old Oxford Forestry Institute, when some people from Friends of the Earth UK came to see me, to discuss some proposals linking timber trade with forest conservation. They launched several initiatives around that time and you may say that the concept of certification emerged from there. I saw the importance of the idea, and stayed involved in the further development".

You became the first FSC Director in 1994. What was the system like in the early days?

"The whole idea was a battleground! The position as Director was difficult, but I thought it was the most important job in the forestry world. There were wide differences of opinion about what the system should do. For example, some people vigorously attacked the idea of certifying logging in virgin forest, while plenty of people live within such forests and want to use them.

The whole idea was a battleground

Many industries did not like the idea of certification, saying that it was not feasible and that there was no market. And some went ahead and set up rival systems. My prediction then was that those systems would either disappear or would try to earn some credibility. I think time has proven me right on that point".

How have you experienced the development of the system?

"The controversies have calmed down considerably. Those advocating extreme positions - such as "no use of chemicals", "no certification of plantations" - are no longer leading the debate. The 1999 General Assembly marked this transition.

The 1996 assembly was dominated by battles on the floor and came close to being a bit of a disaster. But three years

Life story snapshot

Tim Synnott grew up in the UK, enjoying his countryside life so much that he decided to become a forester.

He studied forestry at Oxford, and learned the profession in practice in Uganda from 1965. Following more than thirty years of work in forestry, Tim Synnott became the first FSC Executive Director between 1994 and 2002, based in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Today, he continues to work in support of FSC, for example as a member of the FSC P&C working group.

He still lives in Mexico, where he has a small NGO and has developed an Environmental Risk Assessment system to facilitate certification of tropical community forests.

Explore the concept at <https://sites.google.com/site/environmentalriskassessment>

later, the NGOs had clearly realised that it would be easy to destroy FSC and had come to a decision that that was not what they wanted to do. The mood had changed dramatically between these two GAs. Witnessing the change that had taken place over just three years was a monumental experience.

"Today, there are still strong arguments, but they tend to focus more on details. The NGOs have remained constructive. They are ready to negotiate, discuss the options, and reach consensus. It doesn't mean that they leave their agendas. But they are willing to live with the solutions agreed on, and continue the discussions the next time".

You are involved in the revision of the global FSC Principles & Criteria. What are the key proposed changes?

"There is very little that is completely new. Most of the changes are clarification, or they are proposed in order to bring the P&C up to date in relation to recent General Assembly decisions or current practices. One new item, of which I am personally proud, is the criterion 2.2 for Gender Equality. As far as I know, there have been no objections. Is that because everyone really likes the idea, or because no-one wants to be seen as objecting to it?"

Your recommendation for the further development of FSC?

"Sometimes I think that FSC should be run more like a corporate business, with long term professional staff working for a Board of Directors of people experienced in working on Boards. However, this runs the risk of losing some of FSC's most important values in that process.

FSC is unique in offering a platform where environmental people talk to trade unions, and indigenous people talk to big corporations. We must not lose the essence of being a live, dynamic, engaging organisation".



Stronger engagement by the retail and construction sectors

Retail Throughout the events at Kota Kinabalu, numerous discussions centered on FSC's role in market development and facilitation. On Thursday, two motions that may significantly increase FSC's importance on the marketplace were passed.

Motion 45 asks FSC to explore barriers and opportunities for enhanced collaboration with retailers, referring specifically to the chain of custody procedures; the current CoC system does not seem well adapted to the retail sector.

Motion 54 calls for continued lobbying for preference of FSC by green building standards, and for promoting certified forest products over alternative products with lesser credentials, such as steel, concrete and plastic, through a public database.

Study on FSC uptake in the supply chain

Tracking Although the economic chamber was divided over the issue, the members passed motion 47, asking FSC to make use of available data on the FSC-certified trade volume. FSC is asked to distinguish between FSC-Pure, Mix, and Recycled. The aim is to see whether there is an increase in the uptake of FSC throughout the supply chain, and to make market trend data publicly available.

The proposer of the motion, Jörg-Andreas Krüger of NABU, said: "There is evidence that the Controlled Wood system does not lead to acceleration of forest certification, as it was hoped. We know that there is growth in certification, but no data exists about volumes. Auditors are already asking their clients, 'how

much FSC-certified wood do you buy and sell?' So it is just a question of compiling and analysing the available data. Most of us would be happy with this sort of trend in data. What's going up and what's going down? It's both a credibility and a marketing issue. These are trend and marketing data - not confidential data".

Judy Rodrigues of Greenpeace said, "I support this motion. We got stuck on Controlled Wood; I'm happy with the quick fixes we agreed on for CW, but we still need to move forward on the issue of FSC uptake, and I hear from many companies that they have the data and that the certification bodies are collecting it. We need to see the data to be assured that continuous FSC uptake is indeed happening".

The motion may help foster more focus on the uptake of FSC-Pure and hence on FSC's impact on the ground through expansion of forest certification.

Consistency of interim standards

Credibility On Thursday, a motion was passed addressing the current issue of multiple interim FSC forest certification standards developed for the same country or region by different certification bodies, and the related inconsistencies (motion 25).

FSC needs to review and revise its policies associated with the use of interim standards to secure improved consistency. By passing the motion, the members also asked FSC to establish a set of generic standards that will replace or provide a framework for CB-developed interim standards.



Indigenous people are important stewards of the world's forests
© The Borneo Initiative

FSC to strengthen its link with indigenous peoples

Social The members voted in favor of setting up an Indigenous Peoples' committee, ensuring proper involvement of indigenous peoples in the FSC system's development and implementation.

In a moving speech, Brad Young of the National Aboriginal Forestry Association Canada presented the background for Motion 19: "We wish to explore how to build FSC in partnership with indigenous peoples, and to speak for the ones that can't speak – our forests. In Canada, 80% of our indigenous communities are in the forest. Now is the time for FSC to take advantage of this opportunity and act. There is an interdependency of our spirituality, our sacred ways of relating with each other, our businesses, our livelihoods, and our lands. Let's work together to build on these relationships. We are asking for your good minds and your good ways to move forward with indigenous peoples".

Several comments from the audience welcomed the motion and called it forward-looking. Some questioned the real need for the motion, while others felt that FSC was missing its mark by not reaching out properly to indigenous peoples.

The idea of establishing a fourth chamber for the indigenous peoples was suggested, but others noted that many indigenous groups lack sufficient capacity – such as language skills, a working knowledge of FSC, and resources to participate – to make this meaningful and effective.

Facilitating and finding the right mix of indigenous participation for diverse peoples will be the indigenous committee's main goal. Reflective of this, the indigenous peoples' caucus held at the event identified scoping, resourcing, FSC knowledge extension, and regionally based capacity building in indigenous communities as some of the most pressing priorities to be considered.

There is an interdependency of our spirituality, our sacred ways of relating with each other, our businesses, our livelihoods, and our lands. Let's work together to build on these relationships.

Plantations revisited

Plantations As noted by one FSC member, the issue of plantations is a great divider. This was clear during negotiations, where Motion 18 on plantations was changed substantially. The original motion specifically asked FSC to consider "under what circumstances and conditions post 1994 converted plantations may be able to be FSC certified".

The final motion passed by the membership merely calls for completion of the Plantations Review that was left uncompleted in 2009, and does not refer specifically to the conversion criterion. The change reflects the controversies surrounding plantations in the FSC system,

as well as the fact that the conversion criterion is not the only point of concern hovering over the plantations issue.

During discussions, the need for clear messages from FSC about its approach to plantations was highlighted. The issue is very emotional among stakeholders, and not only within the FSC system. Prior to and during the General Assembly events, FSC's perceived moves on plantations were closely watched from the outside by several observers and NGOs.

While the one-stop website on forest conservation Mongabay presented both sides of the current discussion, the NGO Ecological Internet went ahead with a campaign against what they perceived as "a worsening of FSC's Ecocidal greenwash" prior to the General Assembly discussions on this topic.

The membership passed Motion 18 along with a related motion (Motion 21), asking FSC to provide guidance on how to mitigate the impacts of intensive management, in line with the recommendations by the FSC Plantations Policy Working Group.



The 1994 cut off date for plantations has sparked heated debates in the FSC community

Plantations: FSC's step-child

Berty van Hensbergen takes a nuanced stance on FSC's requirements for plantations including the infamous criterion on post-1994 conversion. Does the current rule lead to social injustice?

Plantations FSC was originally established in order to ensure proper management of natural tropical forest. Conversion of such forests to plantations is regarded as an important contributing factor in deforestation and biodiversity loss. No wonder that the exclusion of post-1994 converted plantations, as outlined in the FSC Principles & Criteria (P&C) 10.9 is a core issue for many FSC members.

But as with most controversies, the issue of plantations isn't black and white. According to the tropical forestry expert Berty van Hensbergen, the conversion criterion urgently needs to be revisited.

Potential disadvantage for poor people

"The present rule about post-1994 conversion is leading in some cases to perverse outcomes that were not considered by the ones who made it", says Mr. van Hensbergen.

"The rule states that certification of forests can't take place if the current managers are responsible for post-1994 conversion. However, it is perfectly possible for a company to buy land which has already been converted, and then have it certified".

"In Northern Mozambique, companies are buying agricultural land – originally Miombo woodland – for the planting of trees. The poor local population are selling this land and then moving on to the forest on the other side of the road where they clear natural forest to open up new fields without any consideration for the negative environmental impacts of their activity. Because they are clearing a part of those forests for their livelihoods, they can't ever have them certified if they were to establish their own plantations there".

"Natural forests in Europe were converted to other uses decades or centuries ago and landowners in these countries do not suffer from this problem. Thus the conversion criterion is causing social injustice".

The present rule about post-1994 conversion is leading in some cases to perverse outcomes that were not considered by the ones who made it

Mr. van Hensbergen points out that this sort of development is most likely occurring at a large scale. "According to the Oakland Institute, 60 million hectares of forest land was sold by African countries in 2009 alone.

Responsible companies go unrewarded

"In Tanzania, the company KVTC leased 28,000 hectares of mainly miombo woodland in 1991. Between 1991 and 2008 they converted 7,000 hectares, and decided to protect 21,000 hectares as per their own policy. Because the conversion took place after 1994, they can't have the plantations certified, although what they have done to conserve biodiversity is way above what most plantation companies are doing. In the absence of KVTC protecting their natural forest, it is very likely that most of it would have been lost to subsistence agriculture or charcoal making. But another company may now buy the converted land and reap the benefit of having it certified".

National Offices key to balanced solutions

"I feel that we are dodging the real issues, and we will see forest loss continuing on that account. Ideally, the National Initiatives should be able to guide the conversion issue at national level. In some countries the living standards are high or the natural forests lend themselves well to responsible timber production, in which case there is no good reason for conversion. But then there are countries with starving people and an awful lot of forest of low economic value."

"Plantations may be one way of improving that situation. In any case, wherever conversion occurs, proper safeguards should be in place to secure biodiversity. The current amount of biodiversity set-aside included in plantation projects is completely inappropriate".

Mr. van Hensbergen is Regional Coordinator for Africa at SSC Ltd. SSC has conducted training on forest certification for over 500 forestry experts from more than 70 countries.

FSC P&C Criterion 10.9

FSC P&C Criterion 10.9: Plantations established in areas converted from natural forests after November 1994 normally shall not qualify for certification. Certification may be allowed in circumstances where sufficient evidence is submitted to the certification body that the manager/owner is not responsible directly or indirectly of such conversion.



REGIONAL OUTLOOK



7.7 million ha of forest are certified in Africa, clustered in the Congo region and Southern Africa © FSC Africa

Change of tack in Africa

Africa, home to the world's second largest tropical forest – the Congo Basin – is a largely untouched potential for FSC. Participatory approaches and alignment with the EU FLEGT scheme form part of the recipe for FSC expansion in Africa.

Growth

Although significant progress with FSC certification has been achieved in the Congo Basin, much remains to be done. Stakeholder support is important and promoters of FSC certification in Africa are convinced that logging and timber trade carried out in compliance with the rules of sustainable management can play an important role to the local environment, communities and governments.

In April 2009, FSC relocated its Africa Regional Office to Cameroon in order to be better positioned to forge strong partnerships with key players and respond to challenges faced in its two priority regions on the continent: the Congo Basin; and South Africa.

Barriers are very real

There are substantial barriers to forest certification in the Congo Basin. These include the support for "status quo ante" by some members of the private sector because of their hidden agenda; competing schemes using lower standards; insufficient communication on the progress of FSC certification, especially in the market areas in Europe, China and North America; controversies over Certification Bodies and logging companies' performance standard, with the belief by some international NGOs that logging in tropical forests can never be sustainable.

Breakthroughs

Participatory multi-partner approach was instrumental to promote FSC certification in Africa and this must continue and extended to new partners.

The next step would be to incorporate the VPA standards into the FSC standard at national levels.

Several governments have also made legislative provisions for voluntary certification. This has established a clear link between national regulations and international criteria for sustainable forest management.

FSC certification helps address illegal logging and associated trade, but it is unlikely to be effective as a "carrot" without a complementary "stick" in the form of government control.

Synergies with other initiatives

Many stakeholders believe there's a risk that the current attention given to addressing illegal logging through the European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) will divert the attention of timber producers in Africa from sustainability to a lower level of performance.

On the contrary, there is mutual synergy and overlaps between FLEGT and FSC that can be exploited to support the expansion of FSC. To ensure that FSC timber is recognised by FLEGT-VPA, FSC is engaged with the EU and EFI to analyse the gaps between FSC standard and the VPA agreements. The next step would be to incorporate the VPA standards into the FSC standard at national levels.

Multi-actors bring multi-benefits

Given the complex social and institutional context in Africa, it was realised that FSC alone cannot have all expertise and resources needed to promote responsible forestry in this region. This open, multi-actor approach has been and remains instrumental for the success of FSC certification in this region.

For instance the governments are setting up favourable conditions for the promotion of responsible forestry. These include enacting policies and legislations that favour certified products and influence responsible performance by increasing support of certification as a solution.

In February 2005 in Brazzaville, they validated the "Convergence Plan for Conservation and sustainable management of Central Africa forest ecosystems" that includes forest certification among its key components.

Elie Hakizumwami
FSC-Africa Regional Director.

Another great year, now let's steam ahead

The FSC's 6th General Assembly in Malaysia sent the message, once again, that whether the issue is tree plantations and conversion, intact forests, Controlled Wood, or integrity of work by Accreditation Services International (ASI) or FSC-accredited certification bodies, the FSC continues to listen to the issues and take them on, in its unique and different "FSC way".

The interplay between the 400+ participants in the General Assembly in Kota Kinabalu illustrated, once again, how the members – and even observers – come together, vehemently debate in civil fashion, often disagree, and then ultimately put forward consensus driven ideas for change, in the form of motions. These ideas are then voted on – a straight up-down process that has very clear, quantitative chamber balanced results.

The critical issues addressed by this GA included Controlled Wood, transparency, the robustness of FSC's policy & standards system, the impacts of large scale forest operations in natural forests and plantations, and more effective engagement with indigenous peoples and retailers. None of the above seems to be done by FSC as a palliative, i.e. make a symbolic statement and move on...as if talking alone is enough.

Whilst some observers act as if they know exactly what the solutions to forest degradation, deforestation and community livelihoods are, FSC members (with what I sense an enormous amount of humility) just don't believe the answers are as simplistic or straightforward. They don't see certification as the silver bullet, but they also don't see anything else as a silver bullet.

I had many conversations with numerous members about this – collectively and individually, FSC members acknowledge the system is far from perfect and we will make mistakes. But FSC members – representing social, economic

and environmental individuals and organisations from over 70 countries – seem just as committed as ever to action and change, and they see, based on their own experience on the ground, FSC certification as part of the toolbox to address forest issues. They seemed to be saying to the outside world – keep criticising, keep indicating concerns and suggesting solutions – the system will listen, take new ideas on board, push for change, and change will happen.

FSC is unique in that, even as we were meeting in Kota Kinabalu, forest audits were going on in the field; FSC staff and network were working on moving forward with long-awaited FSC's modular certification effort, etc. In other words, FSC isn't just a "talk shop". As a certification system and multi-stakeholder initiative, FSC does the "governance" piece better than any others I have been exposed to.

It is certainly lively. The end results are balanced. However frustrating it is to hear about some issues again and again (such as interim standards, certification body quality), in Kota Kinabalu FSC did the governance piece well, again. It now needs to do the "management" and "impacts" aspects better. The scale of FSC efforts is hugely different today from 6 Assemblies ago; but so is the potential for positive impact. Now, building on the results of this 6th GA, let's get on with it...

Richard Donovan,
Vice President of Forestry,
Rainforest Alliance
rdonovan@ra.org

What's being said about....

FSC and the GA

Twitter gives meaning to breaking news!

We are covering the FSC GA not only in the hardcopy and electronic edition of the Certified Wood Update, but also via twitter (www.twitter.com) with real time updates on meetings, video interviews, and all the action taking place at the GA. Let the rest of the world know what's taking place by following our account @CWU_GA_Daily, and mentioning us in your tweets!

Rubert J.Hrubes

All too quickly, it's time to start the trip home to California. As with all the others, I leave this GA with a good feeling.

Andrew Heald

Amazing party in a torrential storm closes the #fscga11 - thanks everyone for an amazing week - its been inspirational...

CWU_GA_Daily Motion 50 withdrawn by Soil Association, to prioritize Motion 51 also on CW #FSCGA11

June Rubis We have to electronically check in and out with our conference badges every time we leave the ballroom. I feel like certified wood

FSC GA

Motion 15 does NOT pass at #FSCGA11: "Investigate GMO science in forestry"



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I was thinking thoughts that fit me
Walking in the forest, raindrops dropping on me from the trees
I found myself arriving here and there
And always, everywhere, I knew, was the right place for me.

P. Saarikovski: I wander where I wander (1965)

Borneo Facts:

Did you know?

In Borneo's rainforest, vines may grow 300 meters (1,000 feet) tall, and bamboo stalks may measure 80 cm (30 inches) around.

Whose nose is this?



Issue 5's nose belonged to:
Uwe Sayer

The winner was:
Unfortunately there was no winner this time.

Thank you

We would like to thank all who kindly contributed to our news covering the 6th FSC General Assembly. Special thanks to the FSC Network for contributions, pictures, and facilities; and FSC Denmark for layout of the printed newsletter.

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NEPCon and Rainforest Alliance editorial team

