
Certifying the Uncertifiable. FSC Certification of Tree Plantations in Thailand and Brazil

By the World Rainforest Movement

Concern over the spread of tree monocultures and their certification is at the centre of this book. However, this concern is merely one part of much broader concerns concerning forests, forest peoples' livelihoods and communities of living things.

Forests perform a number of functions which are vital to both people depending directly on them and to humanity as a whole. The Earth's climate is directly related to the conservation of forests and so is the availability of water. Forests contain most existing terrestrial biodiversity and help feed and cure millions of people. Countless cultures depend on them for their survival. All this has been acknowledged in theory by the world's governments, but too little is being done to put theory into practice. The result is that forests continue to disappear.

Against this background, forest and forest-dependent peoples are fighting an unequal battle to recover community ownership over territories taken away from them to serve other interests. Because such peoples tend to have a special interest in forest conservation, as well as the knowledge needed to use them wisely, their empowerment should be at the core of forest conservation.

Is the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) contributing to this end or not? Is it strengthening community forest management or playing into the hands of logging corporations? Is it paving the way for the equitable use of forest resources or helping the North maintain and increase its overconsumption?

This book aims at contributing to the debate over such questions by looking specifically at the certification of large-scale tree monocultures. Under the guise of so-called "planted forests", entire ecosystems – forests, grasslands, wetlands – have been wiped out to make way for large-scale tree monocultures feeding an ever-increasing appetite for wood and wood-based products, especially in the North. None of those ecosystems was empty of humans.

On the contrary, local people have been dispossessed of lands and forests which were the basis of their livelihoods. Entire regions – even in areas not themselves converted to monoculture – have suffered the impacts of plantations on the availability of water, fish and wildlife resources crucial to their inhabitants' survival.

Many of those plantations have now been certified by the FSC, thus weakening the struggles of local communities to recover their territories or restore previous ecosystems. Through certification, the FSC is also telling the world an untruth: that plantations are forests. By doing so, it is also weakening the international movement against the spread of industrial monocultures.

By documenting and analysing the problem, this book, it is hoped, will help convince FSC that much

needs to be changed in its approach to the certification of plantations.

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