
[FSC: Certifying accumulation markets](#)

For a long time, WRM, along with other organizations and social movements, has denounced the certification of projects that are destructive to forests and their web of life. These projects have also proven to be detrimental to communities living in and depending on forests. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification not only legitimates industrial logging in tropical forests and vast areas of monoculture plantations, but has also been associated with carbon markets, by certifying trees planted for "carbon capture". Furthermore, by the end of 2015, the FSC aims to have a comprehensive plan to certify so called "ecosystem services". Without addressing the underlying causes of deforestation, FSC promotes the idea that "nature" can be quantified and commodified, while encouraging increased consumption of timber and wood products - provided they have their label.

Forest certification systems are voluntary market-based schemes to assess "forest management" through a set of indicators related to the economic, environmental and social "sustainability" level of a given project. Thus, certification labels are regarded by consumers as an "insurance" that those products have been produced or extracted with "sustainable forest management" practices. In the early 1990s, various certification systems were created through "public private partnership"-initiatives between governments, companies and conservation NGOs. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was one such initiative, which currently enjoys widespread recognition and credibility.

The FSC, established in 1993, has a set of principles and criteria to certify wood extraction as "ecologically, socially and economically viable" and thus, consumption of these labelled products is believed to be "responsible". But, how can logging at industrial level be awarded a label ensuring a "socially beneficial and environmentally appropriate" management? How can one ignore that the growing demand for tropical timber has driven corporate expansion at all stages of the production process - from raw material extraction, through manufacturing, marketing and distribution? The reality is that social disintegration and destruction of forests are common consequences of industrial logging and this often violates the territorial rights of indigenous peoples and other traditional communities – the same groups who have been major defenders of their forests and territories for generations (see [WRM Bulletin of October 2014](#)). Besides, the FSC defines monoculture plantations as "forest areas", which allowed the possibility of certifying monoculture tree plantations, adopted since 1996. Despite countless criticism and strong resistance in the affected territories, millions of hectares of monoculture tree plantations are considered by the FSC as "certified forests". In practice, the FSC approves and certifies land grabbing worldwide for the economic benefit of few forestry companies (see [further information on the FSC](#) at WRM's website).

Later on, the FSC also decided to support the carbon market by certifying forest and plantation areas that are marketing themselves as "carbon sinks". With this decision, the FSC not only helps to legitimize a false solution to global warming, but, again, sides with large forestry industries, at the expense of local populations (see WRM publication "[REDD: A Collection of Conflicts, Contradictions](#)

[and Lies](#)”).

Increasing the market, intensifying the plunder

The FSC aims to provide the global market as much certified timber as possible. Although at first glance this sounds like a laudable goal, the only way to achieve it is to certify as many large-scale operations as possible. The goal then is not to stop excessive consumption of timber and wood products - demand fueled by corporations that profit from excessive consumption of paper and timber products, mainly from the industrialized North - nor is it to question the steady increase in logging and industrial monoculture plantations. By contrast, FSC wants its “green” label to be increasingly consumed. So, who is benefiting?

Behind the label and attractive marketing campaigns are the countless communities that are directly and severely affected by this insatiable demand. Monoculture plantations throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America are sweeping away forest territories that are home of communities, biodiversity, water sources and complex webs of life, and leave behind dispossession, poverty, destruction and social repression (see [cases of resistance against monoculture plantations](#) on WRM’s website). And besides, how many of the communities that have been evicted to make room for monocultures on their territories, who are sick due to pesticide pollution, impoverished by the loss of their livelihoods or criminalized for attempting to hinder those projects, have been ignored while the big forestry companies worldwide have been certified?

The WRM, along with many local and international networks, has consistently criticized the misleading description of tree plantations as “planted forests” due to their harmful environmental and social impacts (1). The FSC reinforces this idea when certifying large areas of monoculture plantations under a “forest” certification label. From certified forestry companies to auditing companies (which are paid by the same companies who want to be certified), there is a network of interests that seek to maintain and expand the model of excessive consumption of pulp and wood products. More recently certified plantations include those for possible ethanol production and/or wood pellets for burning in power plants (2).

Expanding market certification: “Ecosystem services”

A project called “Forest Certification for Ecosystem Services” (ForCES) is focused on assessing how the FSC can become the global leader in the certification of “ecosystem services”. The project involves implementing ten pilot projects to “evaluate and reward the provision of critical ecosystem services such as biodiversity conservation, watershed protection and carbon storage/sequestration” (3).

Trading “ecosystem services” transforms nature into quantifiable units that can be translated into marketable assets, also called “certificates”, “titles” or “credits”. It is based on the idea that nature, with its “ecosystem services” can be destroyed provided that such destruction is “compensated” with “protection”, “recovery” or “improvement” somewhere else. “Ecosystem services” trade is something radically different from the way in which people who depend on forests value them (See WRM [Bulletin of February 2012](#)).

According to ForCES’s website, FSC is “well positioned to extend its market-based approach and promote ecosystem services”. Within this context, by the end of 2015, FSC plans to have “an enhanced global system which targets key ecosystem services with present or future market potential”, as well as “successfully certified demonstration sites for ecosystem services”. The ten

projects currently carried out by ForCES are located in Chile (3 projects with a total of 320,000 hectares), Indonesia (3 projects with a total of 290,000 hectares), Nepal (2 projects with a total of 57,000 hectares) and Vietnam (2 projects with a total of 37,000 hectares).

ForCES's website highlights that the pilot sites in Chile aim to expand FSC certification at the "landscape level". This will help to promote "sustainable forest management" around "natural and planted forests" (4). In a context of opposition to extensive monoculture plantations, the FSC has granted its approval to plantation companies which are facing serious social conflicts over land disputes and evictions. One of the ForCES pilot projects in Chile, Bosques Cautín, has as a partner Forestal Mininco, a company that in 2011 was reported for having many of its certified hectares on Mapuche indigenous territories (see article WRM [Bulletin of January 2015](#)).

In the case of Indonesia, ForCES promotes it as the biggest timber production country in Southeast Asia, while at the same time asserting that deforestation has dropped sharply in the past seven years. How could deforestation drop "sharply" in a country that has, to the detriment of forests, the largest area of industrial oil palm plantations worldwide, an area which is still expanding, alongside other extensive areas of tree monocultures? Such a conclusion can only be drawn if a plantation is regarded as a forest. ForCES affirms however that even though deforestation is still a problem in Indonesia, the cause is that "ecosystem services" are not being economically accounted for (5). Once again, the FSC emphasizes the ideology that nature has to be turned into market units.

In Nepal, planned activities include "guidance to policymakers and stakeholders in drawing up rules, laws, regulations and policies [to certify ecosystem services]" (6). And in Vietnam, ForCES plans to contribute to national programs in the field of "natural resource management" and "sustainable forestry" (7).

All these plans and pilot projects clearly illustrate that the FSC legitimizes the expansion of accumulation markets, not only with large forestry companies and their logging operations, but also creating projects and laws for the so-called "ecosystem services". As pointed out by Zenzi Suhadi from the Indonesian NGO Walhi, "Decisions on forests in Indonesia are still in the hands of powerful institutions. The Government fails to mention land ownership issues or deforestation causes, such as the model of production and consumption. These topics are intentionally excluded from discussions to avoid the enormous responsibility that the State and corporations would need to take for their crimes." (8)

It is time to listen and respect people who live in and depend on forests, the communities who have defended and depended on their territories for generations. This should start by radically transforming the plantation and energy production model which is fed by corporate expansion and the generation of increased profits. To certify this expansion is to certify ongoing environmental and social devastation.

1. See some WRM materials in: <http://wrm.org.uy/?s=FSC>; "FSC: Unsustainable certification of forest plantations", WRM, September 2001, <http://wrm.org.uy/oldsite/actores/FSC/libro.html>; and also see FSC-Watch: <http://fsc-watch.com>
2. <http://www.isealalliance.org/online-community/news/forest-plantation-first-to-receive-rsb-and-fsc-certification>
3. <http://forces.fsc.org/index.htm>
4. <http://forces.fsc.org/chile.11.htm>
5. <http://forces.fsc.org/indonesia.26.htm>
6. <http://forces.fsc.org/nepal.27.htm>

7. <http://forces.fsc.org/vietnam.28.htm>

8. <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/indonesia-forests-are-more-than-land/>