

Getting Small Forests into Certification

Final Technical Report

DFID Project Number: R7589

Project Leaders: ProForest

This publication is an output from a research project funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily the views of DFID

Executive Summary

Forest certification has become a major issue for forest managers globally. It is becoming a prerequisite for access to many markets, particularly in Europe and north America. It is also being demanded by a growing number of investors, insurers and donors.

However, by the end of the 1990s it was clear that the owners and managers of small forests faced particular constraints in understanding and implementing certification. This in turn was leading to possible exclusion from markets and reduced access to investments and grants.

In many countries, small forests play an integral role in providing sustainable rural livelihoods. They are also often essential in the provision of local environmental services and often have social values beyond the simple provision of incomes. Therefore, any threat to their continued viability is a serious threat to sustainable development and needs to be addressed.

ProForest, the project leaders, have extensive experience of working with forest certification and the development of forest standards. The main project partner, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), is the leading international forest certification scheme, and the only global scheme to be active throughout the developing world. Other project partners included certification bodies and leaders of standard-setting processes in a number of tropical countries.

This project began with an analysis of some of the potential constraints faced by small forest owners, in order to identify the key issues. This included a detailed analysis of the FSC certification scheme, including the elements of standards, certification process and accreditation. It also included an assessment of the problems faced by small farmers producing wood outside a forest matrix – an important subgroup of small producers.

Based on the results of this research, as well as other issues which had been identified during the research process, the project then sought to find practical solutions to some of the problems, either through recommendations to the FSC and other certification bodies for changes to their system or through provision of practical guidance. This included:

- Recommendations on changes to the standard to make it more appropriate for small forests, which are now forming the basis for work being undertaken by the FSC to put this into practice.
- Guidance on setting up and running a group certification scheme which is being widely used globally and translated into Spanish and Portuguese.
- Guidance on assessing forest certification schemes, which is being used by purchasers in many countries, particularly for government procurement policy.
- Guidance for harvesting contractors, an important subset of small producers, who usually only have control over the forest during harvesting operations but not as long-term managers, thereby making certification very complex.

Background

The concept of forest certification appeared at the beginning of the 1990s and by the end of the decade had become an important issue for the entire forest products industry. The area of certified forest grew steadily over this period, as did the demand for certified products in the market, particularly in the valuable European and north American markets.

However, by the end of the decade it had also become clear that small and community-run forests, particularly in developing countries, were strongly under-represented in the total certified area. These small and community-run forests often play a critical role in contributing to sustainable rural livelihoods, as well as potentially providing a wide range of environmental services. Therefore, it was a matter of considerable concern that such forests were apparently being excluded from certification and therefore, from the new and growing market opportunities available for certified forest products.

A linked problem which had appeared was the problem faced by producers producing timber outside a traditional forest matrix, for example in woodlots, agroforestry or even as single trees on farms. In many developing countries these are some of the most sustainable landuse

systems, but currently it is not possible to certify them since the standard is designed for forest, rather than landuse, management.

Finally, a growing number of forest certification schemes was becoming available, and buyers were becoming confused about which schemes to support or accept and communicating this confusion to small forest owners. One of the causes of the confusion was the lack of any objective analytical tool to allow purchasers to assess the schemes available and identify acceptable ones. Provision of such a tool seemed likely to reduce the confusion in the market and thereby remove one constraint faced by small forest managers.

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This combination provided not only the depth and breadth of experience needed to undertake thorough research and analysis, but also the opportunity for the results of this work to be incorporated directly into a functioning certification scheme. At the same time, while the focus of the project was the FSC certification scheme, the results of such a study are relevant to all the other forest certification schemes currently under development.

Project Purpose

The project was designed to make a practical contribution to overcoming the problem faced by managers of small forests in accessing certification. To do this, it had two linked purposes.

Firstly, to carry out the necessary analysis to establish are what the main constraints faced by small forest managers and to summarise these results in clear, easily accessible reports.

Secondly, building on the analysis made, to begin the process of recommending or even providing practical solutions in order to enable small forest managers to overcome the problems identified.

Research Activities

As discussed above, the project involved both baseline research and analysis and, based on the results of this, the development of recommendations and tools to provide potential solutions. This entire process was divided into six linked but discrete activities.

The first baseline study (Activity 1) involved an analysis of each element of the certification system to identify the potential constraints. This included:

- the standard which forest managers are required to meet;
- the certification process which certification bodies are required to follow;
- the accreditation process which certification bodies must undergo.

The analysis was based on a combination of document review, discussions with practitioners and the experience of the project partners.

The second baseline study (Activity 3) involved an analysis of the particular problems faced by small producers producing timber in a non-forest environment. This focused particularly on two case studies from Kenya and India, but also brought in experience from elsewhere.

Building on these two baseline studies, the project include for other activities:

Group certification guide (Activity 2) One of the most promising routes to certification which was identified for small forests was group certification where several managers are certified as part of a single 'group'. While the mechanism for doing this had already been developed by the FSC, it became apparent that a serious barrier to its uptake was the lack of practical guidance on how to set up and run a group in practice. Therefore, this practical guidance was developed based on the wide experience of the project partners.

The standard (Activity 4). The standard which forest managers are required to meet in order to be certified was identified as a key issue from activity 1. Therefore, further work was carried out to look at the precise causes of problems both at the generic level of the FSC's international Principles and Criteria, and at the national level with the analysis of national standards in Bolivia and Brazil. This was then used as a basis for formulating recommendations for change.

Harvesting contractors (Activity 5). Harvesting contractors are a very specialised subset of 'small forest managers' since they often only have cutting rights and no long-term management rights or responsibilities, yet provide an essential component of both sustainable forest management and sustainable rural livelihoods. One of the issues to emerge as a result of the research for output 1, was the problem faced by this subsector, and so further research and development was undertaken to provide guidance on possible ways forward.

Assessing forest certification schemes (Activity 6). One of the issues which came up repeatedly in early research was the level of confusion about which of the available certification schemes should be preferred. The lack on any type of tool to provide guidance on this appeared to be a serious constraint to market access for some forest managers. Therefore, a process was undertaken, involving experts from a number of different forest certification schemes, to develop this guidance.

Outputs

Each of the six activities of the project resulted in a research paper or a practical guide, all of which have been made available widely as web-based documents and, for four out of the six, as printed hard copies.

All web versions are available from the ProForest web site at www.ProForest.net in the Publications section and can also be accessed through the FSC and GTZ websites. All printed versions are available from ProForest, 58 St Aldates, Oxford, OX1 1ST, UK. They are also available from the GTZ forest certification project, the FSC and many WWF offices. Copies of each of the outputs are attached to this report as annexes as indicated below.

Output 1 (Annex 1): Nussbaum, R., Garforth, M., Scrase, H. and Wenban-Smith (2001) An analysis of current FSC accreditation, certification and standard-setting procedures identifying elements which create constraints for small forest owners. Printed version and web version. 20 pp.

Output 2 (Annex 2): Nussbaum, R., (2001) Group Certification: A Practical Guide. Printed and web versions. 60 pp.

Output 3 (Annex 3): Wenban-Smith, M., Nussbaum, R., Garforth, M. and Scrase, H (2001) An analysis of the barriers faced by small-scale farmers and communities producing timber outside a conventional forest matrix, and recommendations for progress. Printed and web versions. 20 pp.

Output 4 (Annex 4): Higman, S. and Nussbaum, R. with Aguilar, F., Nardelli, A and Scrase, H. (2002) How standards constrain the certification of small forest enterprises. Web version. 21 pp.

Output 5 (Annex 5): Gray, I., Nussbaum, R., Higman, S. and Jennings, S. (2002) Involving harvesting contractors in forest certification. Web version. 31 pp.

Output 6 (Annex 6): Nussbaum, R., Jennings, S. and Garforth, M. (2002) Assessing forest certification schemes: A practical guide. Printed and web versions. 60 pp.

Contribution of Outputs

The outputs of the project have proved very successful, and the decision to make the documents widely and freely available on the web, rather than seeking to publish as books or periodicals seems to have been justified by the wide use and enthusiastic response.

The work on constraints caused by standards has led directly to the formation of a subgroup within the FSC which is now developing proposals for a 'small and low intensity management' version of the forest standard. This will provide guidance on the production of a version of national standards which, while not lowering the requirements of the standard, will present them

in a way which is appropriate and implementable for small forest managers. This is widely seen as an extremely exciting and innovative approach which will make certification far more easily available to small forest owners thereby promoting sustainable development through the combination of access to markets and delivery of environmental and social services locally.

Interestingly, the two reports addressing this issue have proved to be useful not only for developing countries but also in the UK itself, where work is now underway to make certification more accessible to small forest owners.

The Group Certification Guide is now widely used throughout the world, with a translation available in Spanish and a Portuguese version being made.

The practical guide to assessing forest certification schemes is also being widely used by purchasers, particularly within government departments, but it will take some time to see how this feeds back into markets for small forest owners.

Annex 1: An analysis of current FSC accreditation, certification and standard-setting procedures identifying elements which create constraints for small forest owners.

Annex 2: Group Certification: A Practical Guide.

Annex 3: An analysis of the barriers faced by small-scale farmers and communities producing timber outside a conventional forest matrix, and recommendations for progress.

Annex 4: How standards constrain the certification of small forest enterprises.

Annex 5: Involving harvesting contractors in forest certification.

Annex 6: Assessing forest certification schemes: A practical guide.