



FSC certified charcoal: a marketable product from small forest enterprises
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Forest certification aims to promote sustainable development. However, critics argue that it is simply a marketing tool for big logging companies. To overcome this perception, forest certification must address the concerns of small-scale foresters North and South.

Getting small forests into certification

In the 1980s and 1990s, a new wave of consumer consciousness, epitomised by the "Save the Rainforest" slogan, swept across the Western world. Timber harvesters were accused of destroying forests and companies dealing in timber and paper products found themselves the focus of campaigns and boycotts. Out of these concerns arose the policing of forest management by means of forest certification schemes.

Certification schemes were designed to encourage the responsible management of forests and to improve the marketability of sustainably produced wood products. The schemes are accountable to an international standard, of which the most widely used is the international set of Principles and Criteria of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Since its establishment in 1993, the FSC has stressed the importance of certification for small forest owners. However, by January 1999, of the 15 million hectares of

forest certified, only about 1% were "small, private" forests.¹ This discrepancy can be attributed in part to the fact that larger companies have better resources to understand and implement the requirements of certification. However, the FSC and certification bodies admit that the problem also stems from certification systems being too complex and expensive for small forest owners.

The exclusion of small forest enterprises from forest certification is at odds with Target 12 of the UN Millennium Development Goals; namely that nation states should "develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system". In order to address this contradiction, the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) Forestry Research Programme (FRP) funded the research consultancy, ProForest, to investigate the main barriers facing small forest-based enterprises wishing to join a forest certification scheme.



Project R7589
Funded by DFID through the Forestry Research Programme

Project conducted by ProForest

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Analysing the problem

The ProForest team analysed the problems posed by forest certification from two angles. Firstly, it looked at certification and accreditation systems and standards, in particular the Principles and Criteria of the FSC, to identify the barriers facing small-scale foresters.²⁻³ The team considered how such barriers could be lifted without jeopardising the credibility of certification as an assurance of good forest stewardship.

Secondly, the ProForest team looked at forest certification from the perspective of local people who harvest trees and timber in the wider landscape rather than only in a recognisable "well managed forest".⁴ Although such small-scale production is often both sustainable and essential to the rural poor, it is currently excluded from most markets seeking certified sources.

Informing policy

This analysis of forest certification schemes has pushed forward international debate among governments and organisations including the FSC, which recently published its own strategy for action.⁵ In particular, the FSC is now considering publishing two new forms of its international standard; one written specifically for small-scale forest enterprises and another separate set of criteria for non-forest wood products.

"The ProForest research has been fundamentally important in developing FSC policy to meet the needs of small forest enterprises. It has enabled us to understand the situation and to begin to implement solutions, such as making information more accessible for small businesses."

Anna Jenkins, Director FSC-UK National Initiative.

The three requirements of a credible certification scheme are often represented as the three sides of a triangle.



Any forest enterprise wishing to display a certification label (such as the FSC symbol below) must comply with the requirements of a **certification** body. These certification bodies are themselves certified by an independent **accreditation** body (such as the FSC). The accreditation body or an independent agency sets the international **standard**, which forms the basis for the national and regional standards to which certification bodies refer.



The organisation is also assessing the recommendation that small forest enterprises be exempt from audit requirements relating to transparency, such as peer review and public summaries of management plans. In addition, the FSC may now develop a generic certification system that national bodies can replicate at relatively low cost, particularly in those countries where no certification body exists.

Over 500 organisations world-wide have received ProForest's policy reports, which include a practical guide to assessing forest certification schemes.⁶ This report is proving useful to governments (including the UK and the Netherlands) who wish to develop ethical and environmentally-friendly purchasing policies that do not discriminate against small forest owners and enterprises.

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The practical guide is also informing NGOs, such as the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Forestry and Environmental Resources Network (FERN), as well as certification bodies themselves. For example, in April 2002, the report provided a basis for constructive discussion among certification bodies represented at the *Certification Conference and Showcase* run by the Certified Forest Products Council of North America.

Providing guidance to small forest enterprises

To complement its policy reports, the ProForest team has provided direct assistance to those involved with small-scale forestry on the ground. The team produced two practical guides; one providing step by step advice on how to run a group certification scheme, seen as one of the most practicable means of overcoming the barriers facing small forest enterprises,⁷ and the other for small-scale harvesting contractors interested in seeking certification.⁸

The document on group certification is available as a web-based report in English and Spanish at www.proforest.net, making it easily accessible at no cost to interested parties across the world. As a result, it is being widely used in South America, Asia and Eastern Europe. Now in its second

“The guide on how to implement a group certification scheme is very helpful to forest managers. We have recommended the guide to various parties and have recently decided to produce a Portuguese version to distribute in Brazil. An excellent document!”

Tasso Rezende de Azevedo, Institute for Management and Certification of Forests and Agriculture (Imaflora).



Markets such as the cosmetics industry exist for a diverse range of certified forest products. © FSC

edition, the guide has been distributed in print form and an abbreviated version is likely to be incorporated into the second edition of *The Certification Handbook*, to be published by Earthscan.

Creating sustainable livelihoods

The ProForest team carried out its research in compliance with the six core principles of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) advocated by DFID. Firstly, the research is **people-centred**, attempting to ensure that small forest enterprises have equal access to national and international marketing systems. Secondly, the ProForest team emphasises that any forest certification scheme should be **responsive** to the needs of small commercial players who should also **participate** in the development of such schemes.

Thirdly, the ProForest research is **multi-level**, providing valuable information both to policy makers, including governments, certifying bodies and NGOs, and to small forest enterprises themselves. Fourthly, the importance of **partnership** working is emphasised, for example in the recommendation that existing accredited certification bodies extend their work by linking up with organisations in other

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The ProForest findings and practical recommendations have been communicated globally in readable documents.
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countries. The researchers themselves echoed this sentiment by working with accreditation and certification bodies including the FSC, the Soil Association, the Rainforest Alliance and SGS Qualifor, when drafting the report, *Assessing forest certification systems*, and the two practical guides for small forest enterprises.

Sustainability is a key feature of the ProForest research. In particular, the team endeavoured to make recommendations that do not undermine one of the FSC's original aims, protecting international biodiversity. Achieving genuine sustainability was also the motivation behind ProForest's recommendation that the FSC widen its promotional remit to include wood products made from non-forest sources. Such sources include recycled materials, the use of which could help relieve



A rubber tapper in the Brazilian Amazon: a small forest enterprise in action. © Greenpeace/Felipe Goffman

This research summary was written by Becky Hayward.

Printed on paper from responsibly managed forests certified by the Forest Stewardship Council

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 those of DFID. R7589 Forestry Research Programme.

pressure to intensify forest management or expand plantation areas at the expense of natural forests.

Finally, the ProForest group recognised that, for many small forest enterprises, managing woodland is one part of a **dynamic** livelihood strategy that maintains flexibility in order to contend with natural disasters or economic or political change. Often these small-scale entrepreneurs combine forestry with other activities such as agriculture and are not necessarily professional foresters. It is for this reason that the ProForest team recommended that the FSC develop a forest standard that is written in simple language and is presented in a short and accessible format.

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