

The case for a moratorium on FSC certification in the Congo Basin

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Overview

The FSC logo is an important tool to guarantee that wood products come from companies that manage the world's forests in an ecologically responsible and socially-just manner.

However, rapid expansion of the FSC certification scheme in forest regions with poor governance and high levels of corruption is leading to a number of logging companies that fail to comply with FSC standards being awarded certification. This is undermining the FSC's global integrity and credibility and is a cause of serious concern amongst its members and stakeholders.

As a member of the FSC, Greenpeace¹ has been working constructively² within its system to maintain and improve the FSC's policies and standards. In light of a number of sub-standard certifications being issued recently, it now considers that the FSC must urgently take a more rigorous approach to avoid further damage to its global credibility.

Congo Basin - not ready for Certification

The Congo Basin is currently the FSC's key area of expansion in the tropics. At the same time, it is one of the most difficult and controversial forest regions in the world to operate in due to:

- a low level of civil society engagement – in some countries there are few independent civil society organisations even though it is home to thousands of forest-dependent communities;
- very poor levels of forest governance including a lack of transparency and institutional capacity, high levels of corruption, land tenure issues and little land-use planning and zoning;
- a high level of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs), including habitat for iconic species and millions of hectares of the largest unfragmented Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs³) in the world,
- a lack of an FSC regional or national standard (except Cameroon Small or Low Intensity Managed Forests (SLIMFs)).

¹Greenpeace is campaigning for ecologically responsible and socially-just management of the world's forests, including a global network of forest protected areas (PAs) prioritising the conservation of the world's Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs) and other High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs).

²<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/publications/reports/Holding-the-Line-with-FSC1/>

³More than 80% of Africa's large intact forest areas are in DRC. See <http://www.intactforests.org>

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These challenges, combined with the ongoing use of certification body's own interim standards are a recipe for inconsistent, poor quality and controversial FSC certifications. In January 2011, a FSC Chain-of-Custody (CoC) certificate was awarded to Sodefor, one of the largest and most controversial logging companies in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which has a track record of social conflicts that have resulted in violence, arbitrary arrests and human right violations⁴.

Greenpeace is calling on the FSC to instigate a moratorium on new certification of industrial-scale forestry in the Congo Basin, until a regional FSC standard has been established and the pre-conditions for robust certification in the region have been agreed.

Huge forest areas at stake – Quantity over Quality

Despite the necessary pre-conditions for credible certification in the Congo Basin not being identified, FSC is actively promoting that 4.5 million hectares are already certified in Congo Basin countries and that its goal is to reach an area of 10 million hectares⁵ certified in the coming few years.

Many of these areas are potential candidates for protection, conservation and/or alternative economies that do not have the negative impacts that industrial scale developments have.

Importance of Land-Use and Conservation Planning

A critical component of good forest governance is participatory land-use and conservation planning. This was a key feature of the process in British Columbia that resolved decades of conflict over logging of intact forests, and facilitated a credible FSC certification in the region. Similarly, both the Canadian Boreal Agreement and the proposed moratorium on new logging permits in Indonesia, have a land-use planning component.

The certification process in the Congo Basin is currently moving too quickly to give the space needed to sufficiently address the challenge of poor forest resource allocation. Moreover, it is compounding corrupt de facto land-use planning and resource allocation via discretionary procedures, instead of supporting proper conservation and land-use planning, with the involvement of local communities.

Before there is any further expansion of industrial scale forestry in the region, it is important that regional conservation and land-use planning processes, which prioritise the protection of biodiversity, carbon-rich values (including IFLs) and the development and/or promotion of local sustainable economies, are completed.

Pre-conditions for Credible FSC Certification:

FSC International recognises that certification in the Congo Basin is extremely challenging or 'high risk' and has agreed to develop a set of pre-conditions for

⁴ Société de Développement Forestier (SODEFOR) . FSC Certificate SW-COC-005316. Issued: On 26 January 2011 by the Rainforest Alliance SmartWood Program. For more information on Sodefor's social conflicts cases see: Greenpeace report *Forest Reform in the DRC, Leaving People Out, July 2010* <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/publications/reports/Forest-reform-in-the-Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo-Leaving-people-out/>

⁵ FSC proposed as a 'success indicator' in the introduction paper of the last Regional standard meeting in Brazzaville early October 2010 : 'the FSC certification of more than 4.5 millions of hectares, when more than 5 additional millions of hectares could be certified within 2 years'.

such 'sensitive' regions. This should include:

Adequate governance: Credible certification depends on a minimum level of governance to ensure that corruption; transparency and institutional capacity are adequately addressed and managed.

Due stakeholder processes: It is crucial that FSC ensures that communities understand their rights and the avenues they have to exercise them, as well as how FSC certification functions. On top of adequate capacity building, a full assessment on civil society and community participation opportunities and challenges is required, considering the complexity in Congo Basin countries⁶.

Regional/national standard established: FSC standards, when developed with proper stakeholder involvement, provide a good baseline for consistent and high quality on-the-ground forest management. Certificates issued using national and regional standards are less controversial and face a lower risk of being challenged in the FSC system and marketplace than the varying interim generic standards used by certifying bodies. At the FSC General Assembly in 2005, members agreed to a motion that certification body generic standards would be phased out within 5 years and would be replaced by national/regional standards or international generic indicators. FSC has failed to implement this.

High Conservation Value Forest guidance: There is currently a lack of guidance by the FSC on HCVF interpretation and implementation (apart from with SLIMFs). This needs to be urgently developed to increase the understanding of these values and how they can be properly managed. IFLs are large, unfragmented areas of forest and are classified as a HCV2. Their conservation is crucial, because they contain a majority of the world's biodiversity and terrestrial carbon and many forest communities are dependent on them for their livelihoods.

Call for a Moratorium on FSC Certification of Industrial-Scale Logging in the Congo Basin

An immediate moratorium on the new certification⁷ of industrial-scale logging in the Congo Basin is long overdue and urgently needed while the FSC:

- addresses the essential pre-conditions for credible FSC certification;
- completes the Congo Basin regional standard;
- ensures a comprehensive conservation and land use planning process is completed;
- reduces the risk that significant conflict over controversial certifications poses to its credibility.

A number of civil society organisations in the Congo Basin supported

⁶ 'Industrial logging in the Congo: Is a Stakeholder Approach Possible?'. Theodore Trefon. South African Journal of International Affairs Volume 13, Issue 2, Winter/Spring 2006.

⁷ This does not cover existing certificates; however, all existing certifications must be reviewed in detail for compliance with FSC standards, including the new regional standard when agreed. Any found not in compliance shall be suspended immediately.

this call in a letter to the FSC International Board in October 2010.

The coming months are a critical period in which the FSC must demonstrate responsiveness and professionalism in addressing these issues, thereby contributing to restore the confidence of its members and the public that the FSC system is credible and its certified forests are truly being well-managed. A moratorium is critical to ensuring Greenpeace support for FSC in Congo Basin.

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