

Forest certification workshop

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Thirty five people, drawn from Government, NGOs, commercial companies, community organisations and intergovernmental organisations, participated in the workshop, which was organised by the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International, a regional network of NGOs under their EU funded regional eco-forestry project. Funding for the workshop came from ICCO, The Commonwealth Foundation, the UK Soil Association, PIF&TSP and the Pacific German Regional Forestry Project. The Pacific Island countries represented were Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Other participants came from Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom.

The workshop was held in Gizo, Western Province, Solomon Islands from the 9th - 13th November 1998 since there is considerable experience with certification in the Solomon Islands. The venue was relatively close to both Solomon Western Islands Fair Trade (SWIFT) and Kolombangara Forest Products Limited (KFPL) who hosted field visits. These showed how certification had been implemented in two very different organisations: a collective of community based timber producers managing natural forest and a large commercial plantation respectively.

Two days of field visits followed the first day's introduction, which gave background and basic information about certification and provided an insight into how certification was applied in practice in two very different situations. This stimulated some lively debate about the issues and constraints to certification, both during and after the field visits.

The workshop clearly showed that the primary motivation for certification was commercial, with demand for certified timber being driven by consumers in timber importing countries, particularly in Europe and North America, but with clear signs that certification would become a significant marketing advantage before too long in the traditional export markets for the region. Other reasons given for certification were that it improved the image of the timber producer and made their commitment to sustainable management clear; and that it could help to raise standards of forest management through the review and

inspection of field operations. In this way certification can complement the legislative and regulatory actions of Governments in working towards sustainable forest management.

There is a steadily growing interest in certification in the Melanesian countries, initially driven by NGOs and development projects working with small scale, community based producers, but now including some larger commercial timber producers. Most progress has been made in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea with around 96,000 ha and 20,000 ha respectively already certified under the Forest Stewardship Council system. Initial enquiries from timber producers in Fiji have not yet resulted in firm moves towards certification.

A number of barriers exist to the further development of certification in the Pacific. Workshop participants identified 20 possible constraints, ranking the nine most important as:

1. Low awareness of certification by forest owners, timber producers and Governments in Pacific countries.
2. No national standards for forest management agreed by a wide range of stakeholders against which assessments can be made.
3. High cost due to using accredited certifiers based in Europe or North America.
4. No market advantage perceived by timber producers with current markets (especially in Asia).
5. Lack of technical knowledge and training in certification requirements.
6. Poor resource owner commitment as they may have alternative land uses in mind.
7. Land disputes which, if serious preclude certification.
8. No stated Government position on certification means that forest managers may be cautious in their approach to certification.
9. Existing concessions tend to be short term. This means that even where the resource owners want to manage their forests sustainably, there is little incentive for the concessionaires to look to the long term.

Considerable differences existed between participants in their perception of the usefulness of certification, correlated with the degree of dependence of their country's forest industry upon exports and past exposure to the debate about certification. Participants from PNG and Solomon Islands generally viewed it as more important than a timber importing country such as Samoa. Representatives of producers dependent on the domestic market made the point that certification had little, if any relevance for them at this stage, but would just be an extra cost.

The consensus of the workshop was that there was a significant and growing role for certification in the development of a sustainable forest industry in the region and agreed the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. The workshop concluded that Forest Certification has a role to play in monitoring and improving forest management in the region.
2. The certification process in the region is hampered by a lack of technical capacity and financial resources to initiate activities that could become self-sustaining.
3. Each of the current certification approaches (from FSC, ITTO and ISO) has its own strengths and weaknesses. The workshop was unable to determine a single preferred regional approach. The workshop anticipates that more than one approach may be adopted.
4. The workshop agreed that further work was needed to evaluate the forest certification method most appropriate to the Pacific region. The workshop noted that a regional approach has been demonstrated to work well with other difficult or complex topics such as the development of a regional code of logging practice and more recently with genetic research through the SPRIG project.
5. One of the main needs is to evaluate and quantify the **costs and benefits** of the various approaches to certification. Given that the costs of certification are widely considered to be high and are often additional costs that organisations are unwilling or unable to pay without some clear benefit, it is vital that work be done to reduce the cost of certification for it to become more widely used.
6. One way to reduce the costs may be to develop a regional capacity for undertaking certification by people from within the region without having to call on expensive outside assessors.
7. Systems are needed to develop and facilitate certification. These could include:
 - simple and efficient inventory and management systems suited to the region's forests;
 - chain of custody systems (e.g. numbering, computers based systems);
 - networking - newsletters, workshops, e-mail, country focal points; and
 - group certification.
1. The workshop included a session on overcoming constraints of certification in the region. Issues were ranked in order of importance and some possible strategies identified for developing solutions that may help guide further work. A summary of outcomes of this session showing the top six issues is given below.

Table 1: Overcoming constraints to implementing certification in the Pacific region

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Identified problem or constraint to</i>	<i>Possible approaches to solutions</i>

	<i>certification</i>	
1	High costs involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop regional assessment capacity • Adapt certification to regional conditions • group certification
2	Low awareness of certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold workshops with all stakeholders • Nationwide awareness campaign • Develop publicity materials, pamphlets etc.
3	Land disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation e.g. Native Land Trust Board in Fiji, or proposed Land Recording Bill (Solomon Is.) • Local land conferences • Mediation by traditional authorities (Council of Chiefs) • Get MOU signed by Chiefs representing disputing parties • Church participation
4	Lack of technical knowledge and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance • Intensive training at all levels from regional, national, provincial and local
5	Commitment from resource owner for good forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness program on sustainable certification and environmental issues • Financial incentives through timber sales and project assistance • Form co-operatives to operate as a unit on a long-term basis
6	Major timber industries do not see market advantage in certified products (e.g. SE Asia Australia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in future markets may change attitudes to certification - e.g. Fiji's mahogany markets may be to US and Europe and this may increase the need for certification • Improved market and outlook information is needed and may lead to higher interest in certification • Research and dissemination of information on higher prices for certified products

FSPI would like to thank all the participants for their enthusiasm over the week and hope that the outcome of the workshop will be useful in developing certification and in particular a regional certification capacity, which makes certification more affordable and more appropriate.

Copies of the full report are available from FSPI at the address below.

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