

FSC® List of suggested research 2017/2018

The Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC) is interested to research and gather research findings on the effects and impacts of responsible forest management certification, both positive and negative, intended and unintended. We use this information to assess to what extent we achieve what we set out to do in the beginning: promote responsible management of the world's forests, and how to overcome weaknesses, and build on strength of the certification system.

Since FSC certification processes cover a complex and broad range of topics, FSC draws heavily on academic research. Please find below a list of research topics that – from FSC perspective – are interesting, relevant and represent current research gaps.

Some notes to start with:

A) Forest management covers different disciplines – environmental, social, economic, legal etc. Therefore researchers should be aware that the topics suggested below – even though categorized in 'general', 'environmental', 'social' etc., are often interdependent and multi-faceted. In addition, forest management certification standards reflect the diverse and often conflicting interests different stakeholders have in forests and forestry. Research can therefore greatly benefit from interdisciplinary approaches.

B) For most topics suggested below the following general questions are relevant: *What does the relevant FSC standard require, and how are the relevant standard requirements implemented in forest management plan and practice? How does the management of certified forests compare with forests managed as "business as usual" /uncertified units?* To answer such questions, it is preferable (if possible) to undertake long term studies or use counterfactuals.

C) Some research can be based on quantitative or on qualitative evaluation of data collected in field work, in interviews or from literature. Experience shows that application of mixed research methods is often a constructive way to address complex issues. FSC's public forest management certification reports open a relatively unique additional source of information to address impact related questions: Through the analysis of "corrective action requests" (CAR) issued, and the description of the CAR implementation to maintain the certification status, we offer a proxy indicator for relative improvements of the forest management, to support findings from other research methods applied.

FSC welcomes research for example on the following topics:

General:

- Corrective Action Request (CAR) analysis as a proxy for improvements in forest management (FM) (*To what extent do forest management entities change their operations' practices due to FSC certification requirements?*)
- Unintended impacts (*Are there any impacts of forest certification that are not specifically intended by FSC standards? Can be at the level of the forest management unit, but also at country or system level*)

Environmental:

- Effects of forest management interventions on population dynamics, on soil and water systems through improved management practice, - comparison between "business as usual" and management adapted to FSC standard requirements.
- Natural forest management: Reduced impact management (to what extent are negative effects of harvesting activities and degradation of natural forests in certified forests reduced (reduced impact logging, set aside areas etc.? How to measure "biodiversity"? What is the tolerable "minimum" of disturbance to allow classification as "intact forest"?)

- Plantation forest management: Enhanced biodiversity in plantations (To what extent and by which means follows the management of plantations the FSC principle of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity?)
- Ecosystem services (To what extent do certification requirements and benefits contribute to the maintenance or improvement of diversity, quality and quantity of ecosystem services in/around certified forests/plantations?)
- Harvesting activities and sustained yield (To what extent does the actual harvest activity in certified forests not exceed mid- and long-term average legal and/or otherwise defined allowable harvesting rates?)
- High Conservation Values (HCV) (To what extent do the system of HCV and set aside areas, and their management according to FSC standards, contribute to maintain or enhance biodiversity in certified operations? Are HCV and set aside areas managed appropriately over time? How effective is the stakeholder consultation process with regards to HCV? To what extent are HCV areas excluded prior to certification from the scope of the certificate?)

Social:

- Access to forest resources and benefit sharing mechanisms (To what extent do stakeholders in the FSC certified FM operations perceive their access to forest resources to be fair? To what extent do these stakeholders perceive the sharing of benefits to be fair? How does this develop in the course of certification? How does this differ between different management regimes or types (private vs. public; tropical vs. boreal, large scale vs. small holder, natural vs. plantation forest management, etc.)?
- Participation of stakeholders (How well does stakeholder participation function in certification processes and how do forest management operations respond to FSC's requirement to enhance stakeholder engagement? What are common obstacles and loopholes? What are the benefits of stakeholder participation for different groups? How does this develop over time? How does this differ across regions, management regime and forest type?)
- Number and quality of social services in FSC certified operations (What does the relevant FSC standard require? To what extent do social services exist in FSC certified operations and how do they develop over time? How is their quality perceived by recipients? To what extent are these social services different as those provided in non-certified operations or in operations certified under different schemes? How many CARs exist on social services and how do they develop over time?)
- Gender and work force (incl. those hired through contractors) in forest management operations (What is the gender balance of the workforce in certified operations? What, if any, are limiting factors to employment for women in the different positions? How are the relevant International Generic Indicators (IGI's) negotiated and defined on national levels?)
- Working and living conditions for staff of certified operations (In general and specifically for large scale concessions with staff living in compounds: How have working and living conditions for staff of certified operations developed over time? How do staff of certified operations perceive their working and living conditions? How do these conditions compare to those in comparable non-certified operations or comparable operations certified under other FM schemes?)
- Occupational health and safety in certified operations (How efficient are the occupational health and safety strategies that are implemented as part of certification? Are certified operations 'safer' places to work than non-certified operations?)

Economic:

- Income sources for forest-dependent, forest managing communities (To what extent do people belonging to forest-dependent, forest managing communities benefit directly / indirectly from

certification? (Market access, improved management skills, reduction of losses, price premiums, etc.) ? What is the cost-benefit ratio of FSC certification for these communities (benefits vis-à-vis certification costs), also compared to non-certified forest-dependent forest managing communities? Options and challenges for potential of conservation easements to cover the costs of certification?)

- Forest-dependent, forest managing communities, marketing skills and FSC certification (To what extent does certification help people from forest-dependent, forest managing communities to improve their forest management and marketing skills) .
- Lesser Known Timber Species (LKTS), Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and ecosystem services (To what extent do certified operations diversify their portfolio of forest products over time? Why, or why not do they diversify? How do the markets for certified LKTS, NTFPs and ecosystem services develop? What are constraining factors for these markets to develop?)
- Market for certified products (How is the market for different certified products developing? What are market shares of certified products in different sectors? How does this reflect on forest management strategies?)
- Benefits of certification (What are the perceived and manifest benefits and disadvantages of certification for businesses? How is this changing over time? What are direct and indirect costs and benefits of certification across regions, sectors, management regimes?)
- Power balances and imbalances in wood product supply chains (Which actors in the supply chain benefit most from certification and which ones bear the costs/efforts?)
- The financial sector and certification (How do different financial sector actors perceive the role and benefits of forest certification? To what extent could financial sector actors drive the uptake of certification and how could that role be extended?)
- **Operational:** Forest management level (How do certification requirements influence the operational status and organizational setting of certificate holders?)
- Legal compliance by FM operations (Are there any general challenges or incompatibilities between certification requirements and legal requirements, and how can this be overcome (e.g. ratio of protection and production forest, conversion of land use, tenure conflicts, illegal activities within certified operations, etc.) How many Corrective Action Requests are issued in relation to criteria addressing legal compliance and illegal activities and how are they addressed over time?)
- Sub topics of the above may be: What is the impact of FSC certification on a) respect for human rights, b) protected areas, c) Rare Threatened or Endangered (RTE) species and trade, d) land grabbing and e) ILO convention implementation in/by certified operations?
- Indigenous people's (land) rights (What is the impact of certification on the (land) rights of indigenous people? How can participation and involvement of indigenous peoples be ensured/enhanced? What is the role and effect of FSC's Permanent Indigenous People's committee (PIPC)?)
- FSC's requirements for conflict management: How well is the local, for certificate holders required dispute resolution protocol developed and applied? Which existing conflicts in forest management are addressed through certification processes? How does the international Dispute Resolution System (DRS) contribute to satisfying complainants needs? Which kind of further adequate guidance needs to be developed by DRS?

Other ("beyond the certified forest management unit"):

- Public regulations (How do public regulations impact the uptake of forest certification? What public regulations could promote the uptake of forest certification specifically in tropical forests? Implications for policy, law and trade re public procurement and certification.)
- Synergies and compatibilities: (How do FSC and REDD+, carbon credit markets, FLEGT and other regulatory instruments complement each other? How do they compete with each other? What are options for integrating FSC in other conservation tools? Build evidence / case studies for positive, negative cases, and recommend next steps.)

- Synergies of joint FairTrade and/or organic certification and FSC certification (*Evaluation of case studies, to come up with recommendations for the certification schemes, how to improve benefits for certificate holders*),
- Dynamics of forest management certification globally (*How do FSC, PEFC and other schemes develop over time, in different regions, in relation to political settings? Area of double certification, motivation of certificate holders to opt for the one or the other or more than one certification scheme. Compare effectiveness of the different schemes.*)
- Spill over effects: *FSC's influence on setting standards for conservation easements? Synergies of government tax incentives and promotion of good forest management practices? Is there evidence for changes in forest legislation triggered by the interest to facilitated certification processes?*)

Please regard this non-exhaustive list as a source of inspiration. And feel invited to connect + share your plans and any relevant research work (finished or in progress) with us!

For more information -including information and data on FSC- please contact FSC's Monitoring & Evaluation Program Manager, Marion Karmann at m.karmann@fsc.org.

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