



FORESTS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND FSC

Forests and climate change

Forests play a critical role in regulating the Earth's climate. By removing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere, they form the world's largest terrestrial store of atmospheric carbon. Conversely, when forests are cleared, large amounts of carbon are released into the atmosphere. The destruction and degradation of forests worldwide accounts for a higher share of global CO₂ emissions than the entire transport sector. These emissions contribute to the greenhouse effect, increasing the risk of catastrophic climate change.

It is therefore imperative for mankind to manage the world's remaining forests in a responsible manner. Protecting forests from conversion to other land uses such as agriculture, introducing management practices that maintain the integrity of the forest, as well as restoring degraded forests, all contribute to reducing the impacts of climate change. These activities should be in addition to, and not a substitute for, necessary reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from other sectors.

The Greenhouse Effect

Carbon Dioxide is one of the main 'greenhouse gases' responsible for trapping heat from the sun. Many greenhouse gases occur naturally in the atmosphere and ensure that the Earth is warm enough to support life. This phenomenon is known as the 'greenhouse effect'. However, most scientists agree that the world's climate is changing because the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is increasing due to human activities, mainly from burning fossil fuel.

The benefits of FSC certification

FSC certification is internationally recognized as the benchmark for responsible forestry. Well-managed forests provide a wide range of social and economic benefits and environmental services, such as livelihoods for people and habitats for animals and plants. FSC standards ensure that these benefits and services are realized and are not disregarded in favour of other management objectives, such as carbon sequestration or storage.

Research indicates that FSC certified operations deliver direct and indirect climate benefits. Direct benefits are generated from the environmental impact of FSC certification in the forest such as:

- Minimization of waste and damages from harvesting
- Increase in size and number of protected forest areas
- Retention of old trees and fallen wood for habitat so that carbon is kept longer in the forest

The social and economic impacts of FSC certification generate indirect climate benefits by providing a solution to some of the causes of forest degradation, for example:

- Resolution of conflicts with local communities
- Prevention of unauthorized harvesting and other activities
- Diversification of product range and encouragement of local processing

FSC uses certification and product labelling to engage the market, providing economic incentives to keep forests standing and make sure that they are well-managed.

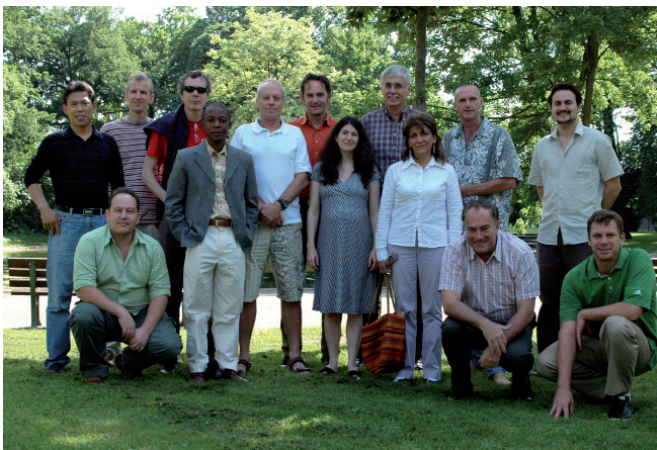
The impact of FSC certification

FSC was founded to provide effective tools to help protect forests against deforestation and degradation. FSC has a dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation Program that measures the impacts of FSC certification. In 2008, a review of more than 300 research papers and independent reports revealed strong evidence that FSC has a positive impact on forest management in numerous social, environmental and economic aspects. Results of this review were published in a report available at www.fsc.org/fscpublications.

FSC activities in climate change mitigation

A number of forest carbon projects and standards already use or require FSC certification as a guarantee of social and environmental safeguards. FSC is looking into the potential opportunities and risks associated with recently developed methodologies, standards, programmes and markets that allow claims on the management of forest carbon and related projects or products.

FSC is also participating in international discussions and negotiations on forests and climate change. At the 2009 UN climate conference in Copenhagen, FSC was present with a side event and a series of publications promoting FSC certification as an effective tool against deforestation and forest degradation.



Forest Carbon Working Group

The Forest Carbon Working Group (FCWG)

In 2009, FSC established the Forest Carbon Working Group (FCWG) to research and advise on all matters related to the formal engagement of FSC in climate change mitigation. The FCWG is supported by an Advisory Group of experts who provide technical, scientific and strategic input on issues under examination by the FCWG.

As a first result of their activity, the FCWG proposed several amendments to the FSC Principles & Criteria for responsible forest management. The recommendations aim at explicitly monitoring and managing forest carbon stocks to ensure their maintenance or restoration.

How FSC works

FSC is a membership organization governed by three chambers with equal vote and power. FSC Members equally represent social, environmental and economic interests, and are representative of the Global North and South.

Through strong multi-stakeholder process, FSC has defined 10 Principles and 56 Criteria that describe how forests have to be managed to meet the social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual needs of present and future generations.

Forest operations are assessed against FSC standards by independent certification bodies that are in turn subject to surveillance by FSC Accreditation Program. Each certificate holder is assessed at least annually.

The FSC label ensures that products are verified from the forests of origin, in accordance with the high FSC standards, and allows producers and manufacturers to benefit from added market value.

Further resources

For updates and more information on FSC and Climate Change, please go to:

www.fsc.org/climatechange or write to carbon.wg@fsc.org