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**WWF International Forest Team Response to the report -  
Social impacts of the Forest Stewardship Council certification:  
An assessment in the Congo Basin  
Conducted by CIFOR (2013-2014)**

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## **Introduction**

WWF commends CIFOR (Center for International Forestry Research) on the release of this study, which was jointly funded by WWF and CIFOR, with research conducted independently by CIFOR under guidance of an Independent Advisory Board. The complete report (in French and English) is available at [www.cifor.org/fsc](http://www.cifor.org/fsc).

Overall, CIFOR's research shows that since the first FSC certificate was issued in 2005, FSC certification in the Congo Basin has moved logging companies towards remarkable social progress for local communities. Below is the WWF International Forest Team's 1) response to the report 2) response to specific report recommendations and 3) recommendations based on study results.

### **1. WWF International Forest Team Response to CIFOR Report:**

The study positively answered the main research questions, demonstrating the positive impact of FSC on a broad range of social parameters in the Congo Basin. In doing so, it confirms the added value of FSC certification to the social impacts of responsible forest management in the Congo Basin. The study also shows indirectly that relying only on national legal norms and regulations can still lead to inadequate working and living conditions for employees of noncertified logging companies and limited or negative benefits for communities surrounding noncertified logging concessions. This means that a focus on legality only, such as in the EU Timber Regulation and FLEGT agreements, without significant improvements in law enforcement may not lead to satisfactory social conditions in and around logging concessions in the Congo Basin.

WWF has been active in promoting the FSC standard in the Congo Basin, notably through the Global Forest & Trade Network, WWF's initiative to eliminate illegal logging and drive improvements in forest management. These efforts and investments, as well as those of a range of other organizations, partners, and supporters in the region, have contributed to the Congo Basin currently holding the largest area of FSC certified natural tropical forest in the world, and the remarkable social progress it yields. Thus, continued progress towards FSC certification is considered to be an effective means to improve social conditions in the logging industry in the Congo Basin, while promoting sustainable economic development.

### **2. WWF International Forest Team Responses to CIFOR Report Recommendations:**

*a. More common training of auditors from different certifying bodies should be provided across the range of standards they currently use in each country.*

Agreed. The FSC regional standards for the Congo Basin which were adopted in 2012 (FSC-STD-CB-01-2012) should reduce the risk of different interpretations by different certification bodies or even auditors. Companies and certification bodies often report interpretation problems and until an updated regional standard or national standards based on version 5 of FSC's Principles and Criteria are

available joint training of auditors from different certifying bodies is indeed particularly important. The ongoing work to produce international generic indicators (IGIs) should reduce the space for different interpretations.

*b. Logging companies should establish clear, written procedures for resolution (including third-party arbitration) of professional and workplace conflicts.*

Agreed. The existence of written procedures for conflict resolution is one of the two most important variables identified in the study that requires attention. As the report states, since all certified FMUs already authorize associative bodies and include them in their internal procedures the implementation should not be difficult. We agree on the need for it, and we agree that it will further improve the social performance of FSC certified concessions. The current version of the FSC Internationally Generic Indicators also prescribe the need for such procedures (FSC International Generic Indicators FSC-STD-01-004 V1-0, draft 2, Criterion 1.6).

*c. Logging companies should form integrated social teams. Members should receive training in working with communities, hold regular team meetings and be knowledgeable about the company's social agenda.*

Agreed. Retention of key staff is an important problem, not only because there is a demand for skilled staff elsewhere but also because many of them are stationed in the field with rudimentary living conditions and often with their families elsewhere. Building and maintaining good relations with local people is key and these relations can quickly deteriorate. NGOs or consultants can fill a temporary gap but it can be a risky strategy because the NGO or consultant may not follow a company-approved plan and can sometimes make promises to communities that the company may later struggle to keep.

*d. Logging companies should adopt and implement more proactive strategies to hire women and train young managers. A few indicators should be added to the FSC Standard to monitor the adoption and implementation of such strategies.*

Agreed. This is proposed in FSC International Generic Indicators FSC-STD-01-004 V1-0, draft 2, Criterion 2.2. and we support that.

*e. Logging companies should adopt and implement clearly written career paths, including opportunities for skills upgrading and further training. A few indicators should be added to the FSC Standard to monitor the adoption and implementation of career paths.*

Partially agreed. The exodus of young people from rural areas is a reality. Adoption and implementation of clear written career paths and opportunities is a good suggestion but we feel these fall outside the scope of the FSC standard, although it does attempt to encourage this. These are better integrated elsewhere, such as in corporate social responsibility policies.

*f. Logging companies should adopt and implement a clear roadmap for all villages to be represented in active institutions.*

Agreed. The use of existing institutions for all stakeholders to express their complaints is very important. The inclusion of villages in these is often good but not always. Logging companies should adopt and implement a clear roadmap for all villages to be represented in active institutions, or any other form of consultation mechanism.

*g. Certifying bodies should increase the number of random visits to villages and institutions, and casual questions to the populations, to check whether legitimacy problems are left unaddressed. Visits should occur without companies' representatives.*

Partially agreed. It is very difficult to handle the legitimacy and representative issues in rural areas in the Congo Basin where local institutions are generally not formal. An increased number of random

visits and casual questions to the populations on legitimacy however seems to add value, as this research showed.

*h. Certifying bodies should check that institutions supported by companies are sufficiently related to the local context (e.g. existing institutions), in order to avoid the proliferation of local institutions.*

Partially agreed. There is a real risk of overlap of responsibilities of various local institutions but it is not the authority of the logging company or the auditor to determine through which local institution collaboration should be channeled. Logging companies should be able to explain to auditors why they had to initiate a new institution when they do.

*i. The FSC and certifying bodies should create and populate national or regional comparative tables with a list of the various carrot-and-stick approaches used in different FMUs for several different problematic situations. Updated tables should be provided to all auditors.*

Partially agreed. While such a list could be very useful, this would seem to exceed the mandate and capacity of FSC representative bodies and certification bodies. Possibly the regional FSC representation could collect this data and make it available as a service.

*j. Local institutions should adopt clear written procedures that include rules on the reporting of complaints, possibly with examples of cases where one-to-one agreements with the company are acceptable and when they are not.*

Agreed. WWF will take this recommendation into those projects where WWF assists local communities in engaging with logging companies. It should be noted however that the power of such clear procedures is not always a given in the field.

*k. Individual or small-scale investments should be made possible with the money received through redistributive schemes, both public and private. Funds should be managed by micro-credit institutions. Safeguards and strict management criteria should be adopted.*

Agreed. It is unclear, however, who would be responsible for monitoring of safeguards and strict management criteria.

*l. Logging companies should establish social baselines against which certifying bodies, other companies and consumers could monitor changes in social performance.*

Agreed. This should not be restricted to social aspects alone and should involve publishing the Corrective Action Requests and the status of remedial actions taken by the logging company.

### **3. WWF International Forest Team Recommendations:**

- WWF will continue to support the FSC standard for responsible forest management in the Congo Basin and collaborate with companies that want to achieve FSC certification.
- Social impact studies of FSC certification should be undertaken in other (tropical) forest regions as well, such as South America and Indonesia.
- Government and other agencies involved in promoting the use of FSC standards, such as the German KfW and the Dutch IDH fund, should also invest in assessing the impacts of certification.
- In addition to social impacts, studies should be undertaken to determine ecological and economic impacts of FSC certification. Currently WWF is assessing deforestation and forest degradation in FSC certified and noncertified concessions in Cameroon and Peru, while CIFOR has initiated similar studies. We call on others to support us in this cause.

- A global joint FSC impact assessment program where partners such as CIFOR, WWF, donor agencies, universities and industry collaborate would be an efficient way forward in assessing the social, economic and ecological impacts of FSC.
- WWF calls upon other forest certification schemes, such as the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification systems (PEFC) to initiate studies to determine the actual impacts of forest certification in concessions certified under their standards.
- Governments in the Congo Basin should 1) look at the FSC standards for inspiration and then improve national legislation; 2) when attributing new forest concessions, make public declaration of intention to go for FSC certification a key selection criteria; 3) encourage forest companies holding concession rights to get FSC certified; 4) consider granting tax benefits for forest companies that show they are responsible and have FSC certificates to prove it.
- The continued social benefits from FSC depend on continued financial support by logging companies. Therefore governments in consumer countries should take responsibility by implementing responsible procurement policies to increase the demand for FSC certified timber, while consumers should seek out products made with FSC certified materials in the marketplace.