

# SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CERTIFICATION- AN ASSESSMENT IN THE CONGO BASIN

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## SNAPSHOT

### KEY FINDINGS:

- ▣ PROCEDURES THAT ENSURE WORKER HEALTH AND SAFETY ARE BOTH MORE ABUNDANT AND MORE COMPREHENSIVE IN CERTIFIED VERSUS NON-CERTIFIED LOGGING CONCESSIONS
- ▣ ACCESS TO MEDICAL FACILITIES ARE SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER WHEN WORKING WITHIN CERTIFIED VERSUS NON-CERTIFIED CONCESSIONS
- ▣ FSC- CERTIFICATION LEADS TO BETTER EXTERNAL RELATIONS WITH SURROUNDING LOCAL COMMUNITIES, WHICH LEADS TO LESS CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS
- ▣ CUSTOMARY USES OF FOREST RESOURCES (HUNTING, AGRICULTURE, NTFP GATHERING) ARE NOT AFFECTED BY CERTIFICATION



*Discussions on the Local Consultation Framework in a Baka community. ©Norbert Sonne / WWF-Central Africa Programme Office*

## BACKGROUND

The Congo Basin is one of the most ecologically important regions on earth. At 500 million acres, it stands as the world's second-largest tropical forest and is home to a variety of endangered wildlife, including chimpanzees, elephants and mountain gorillas. There are approximately 10,000 species of tropical plants, of which, 30 per cent are unique to the region<sup>1</sup>.

As of 2013, the Congo Basin had the largest area of certified natural tropical forest in the world, at about 5.3 million ha.

two reasons. First, the amount of certified land in the region is expected to continue increasing. Second, some tropical producer countries recently proposed recognizing FSC-certified timber as compliant with the requirements of the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan (FLEGT). Once the action plan is operational in the Congo basin countries, the FSC-certified timber produced there could potentially be exported as legal timber.

WWF and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) commissioned a study in 2013 to assess if FSC certification has positive impacts on three social elements:

1. the working and living conditions of logging companies' employees and their families,
2. the effectiveness and legitimacy of the institutions set up to regulate relationships between logging companies and neighboring communities, and
3. the local populations' rights to and customary uses of forests.

## THE PROBLEM

The FSC standard has a strong social component that seeks to contribute significantly to local development and improve relationships between logging companies and local populations. However, there is limited research on the social impacts of forest certification and the research that does exist is conflicting.

The need to address this issue is particularly important and timely in the Congo basin for



## RESULTS

Researchers assessed the mechanisms adopted by nine certified and nine non-certified logging companies to investigate working conditions in sawmills and forestry operations, as well as to understand the relationships with villages neighboring their forestry management units (FMUs). The research included a review of literature and other documents, interviews, focus groups and surveys.

The research results suggest that significant differences exist between certified and non-certified FMUs, particularly with respect to safety, medical coverage, contracting arrangements, and living conditions. Key findings include the following:

- In certified FMUs, employees have better working and living conditions (e.g., better access to water and medical facilities, as well as products available at local minimarkets)
- Certified FMUs implement more diligent safety procedures; safety procedures existed in 90 per cent of certified versus 25 per cent of uncertified FMUs
- 100 per cent of certified FMUs offer health and life insurance to all staff, versus just 25 per cent of non-certified
- There is a significant difference in the existence of functional local medical facilities in case of injury; 100 per cent of certified FMUs versus 38 per cent of non-certified
- About 87 per cent of workers in certified companies hold a permanent contract, versus 72 per cent in non-certified
- Results showed that the longer a company operated in one place, the deeper the social relations with neighbouring populations became. This is important because certified FMUs tend to have better relationships with their surrounding communities, which results in less conflict between local populations and logging companies

- Reasons why relationships are better between certified versus non certified FMUs and local populations include: local populations and companies discuss issues on a more regular basis, certified FMUs offer greater benefit sharing mechanisms and more equitable redistribution, certified FMUs offer better governed institutions for negotiations between local populations and logging companies, and innovative ways of dealing with problems related to infringement of customary uses.

Overall, the results indicate that social improvements are associated with certified FMUs because companies are required by certification to

1. Set and respect a calendar of implementation vis a vis certain criteria and
2. Set up structures that establish permanent channels of communication between local populations and companies.

## CONCLUSION

The social variables measured by this study indicate that differences between certified and non-certified FMUs are very prominent. The study proves that FSC certification leads to various improvements within the FMU, particularly with respect to worker well-being and external relations. While FSC and FSC-certified FMUs should not be complacent about the measured differences and continue striving to improve the social outcomes, the operational improvements have major implications for the sustainability of logging concessions, as well as for the local populations who live in and around the concessions. Through the evidence gathered, it is clear that forestry certification in the Congo basin has pushed companies towards remarkable social progress.



Western lowland gorilla, Congo. © Michel Gunther / WWF-Canon