



## “Remarkable social progress” when forests are FSC certified

Yaoundé, Tuesday, 8 April 2014

Forests FSC certified for their sustainable management provide more benefits to communities than uncertified forests, according to a new study of Congo basin logging concessions by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

“The evidence indicates that Forest Stewardship Council certification in the Congo basin has been able to push logging companies toward remarkable social progress,” said Paolo Cerutti, lead scientist from CIFOR.

Conducted in 2013-2014 across three Congo Basin countries—Cameroon, Gabon and Republic of Congo—the WWF-supported study matched nine certified and nine noncertified concessions, or forest management units (FMUs) to compare how well they delivered social benefits to workers and communities.

The study looked at measures such as employee living and working conditions, equitable distribution of resources, social infrastructure such as schools and community buildings, and impacts on customary rights such as agriculture and hunting.

The study is the first of its kind to look specifically at social impacts of FSC certification in the Congo basin, and highlights how communities benefit when logging companies pursue the level of responsible forest management required by and audited under FSC certification requirements.

The study found that FSC certified concessions establish more effective and better organized institutions for communication with communities and equitable financial support to development projects, in clear contrast to past and nearby uncertified forestry operations.

In light of the results of the Congo Basin research, WWF Forest Director Rod Taylor reaffirms WWF’s commitment to investments in FSC certification. “This report confirms that FSC certification can drive logging companies to adopt more progressive social practices, and thus benefits communities living in and around certified logging concessions,” said Taylor.

The study did not find significant differences between certified and noncertified concessions in terms of customary access to, and right to use forest resources within logging concessions (e.g. for agricultural use, hunting and gathering non-timber forest products). The study also highlighted a need to ensure that the benefits of certification for communities are sustained.

According to the study, the delivery of social benefits would be further improved if logging companies, certifying bodies and the FSC put more effort into establishing clear, written procedures for conflict resolution, improved monitoring of performance against social benchmarks and provided better career planning to make the logging industry a more attractive employment sector.

The Forest Stewardship Council has been operating since 1994, with the first certification in the Congo Basin achieved in 2005 and currently some 4.3 million ha of natural tropical forest under FSC certification. Still, this represents only about 10 per cent of all logging concessions in the region.

While there is an unquestionable need for formal protection of a representative portion of the region's and the world's most socially and environmentally important forests, the majority of the world's forests will remain outside of protected areas. Well-managed selective logging concessions can buffer protected areas, support healthy populations of rare or endangered species and benefit people.

Responsible forestry, including both intensive commercial management and community forestry, has a key role to play in conserving global biodiversity, preventing illegal logging and providing economic and social benefits to society.

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#### **Notes for the editor**

The report can be downloaded at [www.cifor.org](http://www.cifor.org)

#### **About WWF**

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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