

Certification Programme For Sustainable Forest Management

PUDJI MULJONO*

Departemen Komunikasi dan Pengembangan Masyarakat, Fakultas Ekologi Manusia – IPB
Gedung W1 Lantai 4 Kampus IPB Darmaga, Bogor, Telp/Fax (0251) 420252

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Abstract : The article describes about certification programme for sustainable forest management. Concern for forest problems has increased dramatically over last decade. Sustainable forest management is an inherent aim of certification. It is the ultimate goal to which certified forests should aspire, but such a goal is reached only through a period of transition, during which management standards are progressively established and fine-tuned. The explicit aim of certification is to improve the quality of forest management so as to reach this goal. The aim of certification systems is to make timber production more ecologically and socially responsible and economically viable by grading sources so that consumers can choose on these grounds. The argument is that environmentally aware consumers will be prepared to pay more for products if they know where these come from and how they have been produced. Higher prices will motivate timber companies to implement sustainable forest management principles. There are certain general principles of sustainability which have been agreed, these include environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability. This article describes focus on certification in context, certification in practice, views on certification, overall trends in the certification debate, the sticky issues—differing views that need resolving, and the forest certification programme in Indonesia.

Keywords: Certification, forest management, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Concern for forest problems has increased dramatically over the last decade. For numerous reasons over 200 million hectares of forest have been lost in the tropics and large areas of boreal, temperate and tropical forest have degraded in quality. As pressures have increased on remaining forest areas, conflicts have grown between 'stakeholders' - those who live in forests, forest industries, governments, and the public at large who depend in different ways on the environmental, social and economic benefits provided by forests.

The traditional approach to forest problems has been regulatory. In poor countries this approach has often been supplemented by aid-funded programmes. In general, these efforts have proved insufficient to reduce either forest loss or forest degradation. At the country level, forest legislation may be inadequate to assure improvements in forest management; cus-

tomary rules governing local forest use may not be recognized. Alternatives are required to redress the deficiencies in existing mechanisms. There is a need to recognize the wider asset value of forests throughout the world; and for new instruments to be developed which enable forest owners in rich and poor countries to get the best return within a context of sustainable forest management.

Current certification initiatives are developing against a rapidly-changing background of international and national initiatives in forestry, biodiversity, conservation, environmental management systems and trade—many of which also aim to achieve sustainable forestry on the ground. Within this context, there is a scope to focus certification so that its potential contribution can be fully realized.

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* Personal correspondence, Jl. Srikandi III No. 10, Bumi Indraprasta, Bogor 16153, Telp (0251) 340254; Hp. 081311157644, email: pudji1962@yahoo.co.id

METHODS

Certification is a tool to improve forest management. Around 90 million hectares of forests in 35 countries are now certified, including some 20 million hectares under the Forest Stewardship Council scheme. Forest certification schemes are based on the principle that 'being green pays' in financial as well as conservation terms. NGO campaigns about forest destruction have made consumers in the North more aware of their responsibility for unsustainable logging, particularly of tropical rainforests. The aim of certification systems is to make timber production more ecologically and socially responsible and economically viable by grading sources so that consumers can choose on these grounds. The argument is that environmentally aware consumers will be prepared to pay more for products if they know where these come from and how they have been produced. Higher prices will motivate timber companies to implement sustainable forest management principles. The forestry industry body, the International Timber Trade Organisation (ITTO), agreed that all tropical wood traded should come from sustainably managed forests by the year of 2000.

The debate on what constitutes sustainable forest management is evolving at the same time as initiatives on certification. Certification is designed, ultimately, to lead to sustainable forest management. As an interim goal, we propose the notion of quality forestry as that which accommodates a level of forest management which is acceptable to stakeholders. Nevertheless, with regard to sustainable forest management, it seems that there are certain general principles of sustainability which have been agreed. These include :

Environmental sustainability : this entails an ecosystem being able to support healthy organisms, whilst maintaining its productivity, adaptability and capability for renewal; it requires that forest management respects, and builds on, natural processes;

Social sustainability: this reflects the relationship between development and social norms; an activity is socially sustainable if it conforms with social norms, or does not stretch them beyond a community's tolerance for change; and

Economic sustainability: this requires that benefits to the group(s) in question exceed the costs incurred, and that some form of equivalent capital is handed down from one generation to the next.

Sustainability depends upon the specific relationship of forest management with the surrounding environment and society. Few criteria of sustainability will be universal. Precise definitions of sustainability

need to be locally negotiated, and revised as technology and society's demands, and other conditions, change. Hence the importance of management plans, participation of stakeholder groups, monitoring, continuous improvement and a cyclical approach to policy-making.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Certification in Practice. In this section, we present a generic approach that we recommend for the practice of certification. The sequence of events follows those used in the assessment of quality and environmental management systems (EMS). Prior to application the forest manager needs to complete a process of self-assessment to determine if the forestry operation in question is ready for certification. There are four main steps to consider (Upton and Bass, 1995) :

Step 1 - evaluation of need for forest certification. The forest manager should be sure that the demand for certification is real; that certification will confer a competitive advantage; and in particular, that the benefit from certification will outweigh its cost.

Step 2 - undertake a preliminary analysis. If a decision is made to go ahead with certification the owner should first prepare by undertaking a preliminary analysis. This involves the selection of standards and their local interpretation; followed by a baseline assessment of current activities to measure their adequacy against the selected standards. If possible, the preliminary analysis will also identify and prioritize the environmental and social effects of the forestry operation. This will help to confirm the adequacy of objectives and targets to the assessor during assessment.

Step 3 - establish, implement and evaluate an EMS to achieve quality forestry. Where inadequacies have been identified as part of Step 2, modifications will be required. These may be minor or major - perhaps even requiring a total rethink as to how the forestry activities are undertaken. In all cases it is recommended that modifications are made within the context of an EMS. This allows for clear and feasible objectives and targets to be set; procedures to be defined in order to meet set targets; and a programme of internal monitoring to measure progress.

Step 4 - invite certification of quality forestry practices. The bulk of the certification process takes place once the operation is well prepared and success likely to be achieved. However, certification is not an end of pipe, 'black' and 'white', 'no' or 'yes' process. In reality, the forest manager will have started a process of dialogue and understanding with the

certification body from the beginning. In this way, award of the certificate is the culmination of a process which has resulted in improved environmental and social management of the forest in question; and - it is expecting for an improved operating performance of the local forest management units.

Views on Certification. Certification, both from conceptual and operational viewpoints, has been and continues to be a learning process for many stakeholder groups. Many groups have been obliged to work out a position from first principles, which not all are equipped to do. So in particular, nearly all stakeholder groups have difficulty with the structuring of certification programmes as set out by ISO. Definitions also present particular problems. There is a frequent confusion, for example between certification, eco-labelling, chain of custody inspection, life cycle analysis, and management information systems.

Nonetheless, there has been a huge change in the debate from the position in 1991 when 'certification' was new; the knowledge base was low; and governments in particular were reluctant to even consider certification as a potential tool. It is our belief that continued discussion and consultation will further the process and, should certification prove to be a useful tool, programmes will be produced which have significant practical application. An important product of this process will be the building of trust between the different stakeholder groups. This is likely to have other, wider benefits to the local community beyond improved forest management.

We have grouped stakeholders into five main groups: governments; environmental NGOs and independent observers; indigenous peoples' NGOs and sociogroups; forest industry and the timber trade; and consumers and retailers. All groups seem to agree that certification should cover at least the following: environmental issues, include international consensus and clarity, and require certifying bodies to be accountable rather than self-appointed.

Overall Trends in the Certification Debate. The potential of certification is now generally accepted, although some groups still raise fundamental dilemmas which are summarized below. To many governments, trade groups and NGOs, certification now appears to be inevitable, and a better alternative to bans and boycotts. The hope is that certification could be a useful mechanism to reconcile the needs of free trade and economic, social and environmental sustainability. Few, however, see it as a solution. There is a general understanding that certification has to be part of a strategic approach to sustainable forest management: it is not a single-issue 'miracle cure'.

With better information and more debate, both the initial fears about certification and many of the initial naive hopes for it are being moderated. The ramifications, especially sovereignty issues, had been holding up government and intergovernmental consideration. There are now being eased through mutual learning and debate.

Interest in certification tends to be demand-led. Of governments, importing governments tend to be taking the lead, being more supportive of the idea than exporting governments, some of which still see certification as a possible trade barrier. However, this is changing. Similarly, timber importers are encouraging timber exporters to address the possibilities.

Some basic principles seem now to be agreed:

Temperate, boreal and tropical forests all need to be included,

Harmonization is needed for: acceptable standards of sustainability; and mutual recognition between different certification programmes,

Standards and procedures should be set through wide stakeholder participation,

Local interpretation of standards needs to be allowed for,

Certification procedures and the accreditation of certification bodies should be clear and rigorous,

Certification should be based on cooperation and transparency, not discrimination,

Cost-minimization needs serious attention,

The public needs to be educated about certification, thereby allowing bogus schemes to be exposed.

The Sticky Issues-differing views that need resolving. Most views seem to conclude, either reluctantly or enthusiastically, that the issue now is not whether certification should go ahead, but what should be the responsibilities and mechanics of certification - how to do it, how high to set the standards how much regulation should complement the voluntary approach, what other complements are necessary, the cost and benefits for different groups, efficient procedures throughout the chain of custody; who should run it and who to involve. These 'sticky issues' should be the focus of research and for further debate.

The effectiveness of certification in solving forest problems. The dilemmas are: whether certification offers an incentive to improve the management of the majority of production forests, as opposed to just rewarding the few forests that are already sustainably managed; whether certification will lead to systemic market changes, or establish only small 'niche' markets; whether certification will improve market access, or act as a trade barrier; whether certification alone is adequate, or whether

complements such as life cycle analyses of forest products, or key regulations, are also required; and whether or not certification can be 'enforced', and the scope for illicit timber entering the market.

Who should run certification schemes. The dilemmas are: whether national schemes should be run by the government, by industry, by NGOs or by partnership; and whether international harmonization and accreditation should be run by an NGO or by multilateral body such as the European Commission, and whether this should be in the UN system such as UNCTAD and GATT or outside the UN, such as ITTO.

The scope-all forests?. The dilemmas are: natural forests only; or including plantation, separately or integrated; the minimum size of forest to be certified; and whether or not conversion forest-ie those being converted from forest to non forest cover can be certified.

The standards and their assessment. The dilemmas are: the processes required for defining standards-principally the levels of stakeholder participation; the scope and detail of standards, especially regarding social issues; whether to go for minimum, achievable standards or to set maximum requirements; how to make assessment practicable in the forest; and the degree of local interpretation of standards that is desirable.

Phasing. The dilemmas are: whether to go for a slow approach led by pilots or by less stringent schemes, or to start with a major organizational and policy commitment covering rigorous standards; whether to begin programmes with all forests, or whether tropical forest only would be best to start with-some importers favour the latter, because of domestic pressure to boycott tropical wood; whether or not a period of grace should be included for compliance.

Concessions for 'special cases'. The dilemmas are: whether or not special provisions need to be made for small procedures such as community groups, to enable their forests to be certified; and whether or not support to poorer countries should be included as part of certification schemes; such as to cover the incremental costs required for them to establish and run certification programmes.

The Forest Certification Programme in Indonesia. In September 1993, a preliminary set of standards was completed by the working group of experts set up by concession-holder and forest industry organisations, i.e. Masyarakat Perhutanan Indonesia (MPI) and Asosiasi Pengusahaan Hutan Indonesia (APHI). This was followed by the establishment, in December 1993, of a Foundation for Eco-

labelling (Lembaga Ekolabel Indonesia, LEI) under the chairmanship of Professor Emil Salim.

LEI is responsible for the development and operation of the certification and labelling scheme for Indonesian forest products, based on internationally accepted standards and processes. In order to retain credibility, LEI will adhere to principles of independence and transparency. The standards applied will be based on a range of sources, including the Forest Stewardship Council's Principles and Criteria. Three sub-groups have been formed to cover ecological, economic and social forestry issues. To achieve international acceptance the selection and accreditation procedures for certification bodies will followed EN 45011.

LEI will accredit and commission certification bodies to undertake assessments and monitor their work. LEI will also review the audit reports and make the final decision regarding certification of the audited forest operation. Under the LEI programme chain of custody verifications will be undertaken by the Ministry of Forestry. Following field testing of the forestry standards in June 1994, a manual is being written explaining them as well as their application. It is aimed to have the LEI programme, including chain of custody verification, operational by the year 2000, in line with the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) target. Training and initial installation should already be underway by 1996.

In 1998, LEI was officially established as a foundation and since then has conducted several certification assessments. LEI and FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) have also developed a Joint Certification Protocol (JCP) that obliges FSC to use both LEI and FSC criteria and indicators when conducting an assessment of a forest management operation (Muhtaman and Prasetyo, 2004).

Certification has been underway in Indonesia for about 10 years. Since 1998, 14 forest management units (FMU) have undergone a certification assessment out of a possible 300. Of the 14, one passed the LEI and FSC scheme with total area of 90,957 ha; four passed the expert panel II of LEI scheme (total area of 665,046 ha); two had a lower performance (total area of 557,173 ha); three passed only the screening process (total area of 493,900 ha); and four failed altogether (total area of 720,651 ha) (Muhtaman and Prasetyo, 2004).

CONCLUSION

In concluding the many ideas that have been presented in this article regarding certification, there are three levels of need which currently stand out: At

the forest level, to ensure that both forest managers and certification bodies can accurately interpret external standards for specific sites. Moreover, to ensure that managers can implement (and certification bodies can assess) the management systems required to assure, over the long term, a level of environmental and social performance consistent with the certification standards. Addressing this need must be possible for all LFMUs-regardless of size- and not prohibitively costly.

At the international level, to agree one general international standard (probably expressed as principles and criteria). This should be directly applicable at the site level and avoid certification being a barrier to trade (should therefore allow for all forest types). Creation of such an international standard requires improved information-sharing on certification; and greater understanding of the relationship between standards, accreditation and assessment-which are all inter-related within the certification process and should be considered together, not separately.

At the national level, or regional if appropriate, to bring together stakeholder groups to explore the potential and implication of certification within the national context.

An important need is to allow for government involvement in setting national guidelines for site interpretation of the international standard; and government involvement in accreditation of certification bodies. The potential for using existing (ISO and other) standard-setting procedures and national government accreditation bodies should be examined.

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