



What impacts does FSC certification have on the well-being of forest workers, local communities and Indigenous Peoples?



Preamble

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international membership organization that serves as a platform for forest owners, timber industries, social groups and environmental organizations, and is aimed at identifying solutions for improving forest management practices around the globe. Launched in 1993, FSC certification is now the world's leading private and voluntary forest management certification scheme. As a result, a large amount of research has focused on assessing the impacts of FSC certification on the ground across a wide range of topics. However, given the nature of local adaptability and dynamic updating of FSC standards, there is still a great need for impact evaluations to inform current decision making.

FSC's monitoring and evaluation programme seeks to understand the effects of FSC forest management certification to share lessons learned for the continuous improvement of FSC standards. An important approach is to commission in-depth impact evaluations to recognized research organizations with the aim of assessing the contribution of FSC forest management certification on intended impacts, and to understand the chain of causality associated with these impacts. In this context, CIFOR-ICRAF has been commissioned to conduct a research project

that seeks to evaluate the social impacts of FSC forest management certification by answering the following questions:

1. Is FSC certification producing the intended social outcomes and impacts?
2. What unintended social effects (positive and/or negative) have resulted from FSC certification?
3. What factors could have influenced the results of the study (factors within and outside the control of FSC)?
4. What are the limitations of the study?



Research objective

The main objective of the project is to understand and assess the social impacts of FSC certification in Brazil. In addition, the project has the following specific objectives:

1. to provide an up-to-date understanding of the institutional and legal contexts for forestry in Brazil.
2. to provide an assessment of the social impacts of FSC forest management certification (for plantation and natural forests) on workers and local communities, including Indigenous Peoples in the to-be- selected Brazilian States;
3. to support FSC's ongoing efforts to make Forest Stewardship Standards more outcome oriented.



Geographical scope

The project focuses on Brazil for three reasons. First, the country is of great importance for FSC's certification system. Globally, Brazil ranks fourth worldwide in terms of total certified forest area, and first for tropical countries. It also has the largest percentage of FSC-certified forest area in South America, with certified forests covering seven of the nine states of the legal Amazon. Specifically, as of February 2024, Brazil has 9,404,761 hectares (ha) of FSC-certified forests managed by 156 certified organizations. Second, the country has extremely high levels of ecological and social diversity. FSC-certified forests are present in four of Brazil's six biomes. While 75 percent of this certified area consists of plantation forests, previous assessments estimated that around 80 percent of the 3.5 million ha certified in the region were natural forests, some of which were used by local and/or Indigenous communities. Third, despite Brazil's undeniable importance, there remains a significant gap in comparative empirical studies assessing the social impacts of FSC certification in the country.



Methods and phases

To achieve its aims, the study will use a mixed-method approach, and interviews with federal and state authorities, representatives of management units (MUs), all certification bodies (CBs) that have audited current FSC-certified operations in the country, workers of the certified MUs, as well as local communities – including Indigenous Peoples – living in or near MUs who may be affected by their management activities.

The study will be divided into three phases:

- **Phase 1 (2025):** A desk study that will characterize historical and contextual, regulatory and other factors pertaining to natural and plantation forestry implementation; labour considerations; and local community participation (e.g., Free Prior Informed Consent and benefit-sharing arrangements) in FSC certification. It will also compile all historical and current information regarding FSC-certified

MUs. This information will guide the development of precise research hypotheses and research activities in Phase 2.

- **Phase 2 (2025-2026):** Research design, refining and further specification of hypotheses, research implementation and synthesis, including field studies of selected MUs according to the sampling design developed in Phase 1.
- **Phase 3 (2026):** Restitution of the key findings to relevant Brazilian federal and state authorities, and applicable CIFOR-ICRAF and FSC staff (including FSC Brazil, FSC International).



Key deliverables

As a result of the project, the following deliverables will be produced:

1. A report on the institutional and legal context of natural forest and plantation certification in Brazil
2. A report on the social impacts of natural and plantation forest certification in Brazil and associated trade-offs (a CIFOR-FSC Occasional Paper of around 30–40 pages together with annexes);
3. At least one peer-reviewed scientific article published;
4. Research-based insights on ways to consider the use of outcome-oriented indicators, particularly focused on key intended social outcomes, along with potential associated progress indicators and monitoring requirements that could be helpful to FSC processes along the road.

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CIFOR-ICRAF

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