

Sustainable solutions — teaming up on forest stewardship

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Healthy and resilient forests help life on Earth to thrive. Forests cover over 30 per cent of the Earth's surface, harbouring the vital genetic diversity of land-based plants, animals, and other living organisms. However, deforestation and forest degradation have resulted in over 13 million ha being lost annually, creating a significant global loss in biodiversity and ecosystems.

There is a crucial need to halt deforestation and forest degradation; forest stewardship does and goes even further. We must pursue a holistic approach including protection, conservation, restoration, and active forest management to ensure a future filled with healthy and resilient forests. We otherwise risk losing the fight against enormous global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

The Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) has made it its mission to promote environmentally sound, socially beneficial and economically viable forest management worldwide. FSC certification sets the standard for responsible forest management and is used by forest managers, businesses, and public authorities as part of their sustainable development agendas. FSC has implemented an evolving, holistic approach to foster a community for co-creation. Forest stewardship brings together stakeholders from diverse economic, environmental, and social perspectives in a balanced organizational structure to address global challenges facing forests and the planet as a whole. It enables multi-stakeholder processes to define responsible forest management standards that the certificate holders implement worldwide to drive change on the ground and set a global benchmark for forest stewardship.



Image: Julián Manrique

Ejido Nuevo Becal, Mexico. Forest conservation and sustainable forestry in Mexico contributes to maintaining the king vulture species' population



Image: Iván Castro

The Mayan Biosphere Reserve, Petén, Guatemala, is an FSC-certified community model on reducing deforestation and generating economic and social benefits for its inhabitants

The true value of forests is reflected in our understanding of forest stewardship. This is based on the knowledge, experience, and differing interests of our members, network, and staff around the world. A solution-based collaboration helps ensure holistic engagement, where the world's forests are used, cared for and protected.

The protection and development of the world's forests encompasses a multi-level approach, with FSC setting legal, environmental, social, and economic standards for forest stewardship. FSC is working to contribute to the development of widely used norms for forest landscape restoration and the creation of connectivity in the landscape to generate significant ecosystem benefits. Its standards extend beyond forest management and include monitoring requirements for manufacturers in the supply chain for labelling and recycling. FSC certification continues to grow and plays a pivotal role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As such, forest stewardship not only benefits local managers but also influences regional, national, and international stakeholders.

Key to protecting and managing ecosystems is the High Conservation Values approach, a pragmatic methodology that identifies and protects areas of high conservation importance. The six main categories are: species diversity; landscape-level ecosystems, ecosystem mosaic and intact forest landscapes; ecosystems and habitats; ecosystem services; community needs; and cultural values. FSC incorporates this approach into its forest stewardship standards, requiring local managers to protect FSC-certified forests, preserve endangered species, and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem functions. Adherence by all certificate holders to these extensively developed

and reviewed standards makes FSC a significant contributor to the Global Biodiversity Framework and SDG 15, which focuses on conserving and restoring 'Life on Land.'

FSC certification is highly relevant to SDG 15 and recognized as an indicator within target 15.2, which refers to the implementation of sustainable and responsible management of all types of forests, their protection, and reforestation. FSC forest management standards require forest managers to prevent deforestation, avoid forest degradation, and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem functions in the certified area. Only those forest managers that meet and maintain these standards are granted FSC certificates. Forest certification serves as a tool to track global progress towards sustainable forest management, included in indicator 15.2.1. However, its impact is not limited to one aspect within SDG 15. Instead, it plays a role in meeting most of SDG 15's targets. For example, FSC certifications and stipulations can be used for afforestation (15.3), mountain ecosystems (15.4), natural habitat (15.5), and protection against poaching (15.7), to name just a few. Applying the principles of FSC in these projects can encourage the creation of multi-functional forests with benefits beyond the borders of the project. In fact, FSC certifications have significantly impacted the conservation and restoration of forest ecosystems worldwide, playing into target 15.1 — ensuring the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains, and drylands.

The Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) in Guatemala is one such notable example of FSC-certified forest management. Within this reserve, FSC-certified local communities manage approximately 398,300 ha (out of the more than two million

ha of 15–20-meter towering trees), with 55 per cent designated for conservation and safe habitats for local biodiversity and harvesting non-timber products, like xaté. The remaining 45 per cent is approved for wood extraction, limited to a cutting cycle of 30 to 40 years. The success of responsible forest management in the MBR is evident through the economic benefits generated, improved community well-being, and thriving biodiversity, including an increased population of jaguars. With reported values ranging from 1.5 to 11.28 jaguars per 100 km², these areas boast the highest numbers of this iconic species in the country. Furthermore, the incidence of vegetation fires within certified community forest areas in the MBR is significantly lower. Less than 1 per cent of the 7,794 regional vegetation fires recorded in 2017 occurred within the certified community forest areas. This stands in stark contrast to surrounding legally protected areas like the Laguna del Tigre National Park. The MBR case exemplifies FSC's contribution to SDG 15, particularly targets 15.2, 15.5, 15.7, 15.9 and 15.A and B.

Achieving sustainable development requires not only protecting forests but also ensuring responsible and sustainable production and usage of forest materials throughout global supply chains. Consumers worldwide are increasingly demanding sustainable goods and expect brands and businesses to bear responsibility for positive change. The global report “An Eco-wakening” from The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021, has shown an increased online interest

in sustainable goods by 71 per cent worldwide. Additionally, according to a joint study from McKinsey and NielsenIQ published in the US in February 2023, an overwhelming majority of consumers care about buying environmentally and ethically sustainable products. This seems to be directly correlated to the business growth of companies, as the study states: “Products making ESG (environmental, social, and corporate governance)-related claims averaged 28 per cent cumulative growth over the past five-year period, versus 20 per cent for products that made no such claims.” Through these kinds of studies, it is apparent that consumer awareness for sustainable products is on the rise and manufacturers are increasingly required to show their commitment to responsible and sustainable production.

FSC provides certifications and labels such as the “FSC 100%” and “Chain of Custody Certification” to manufacturers, enabling them to demonstrate their commitment to responsible and sustainable production. By sourcing materials from FSC-certified forests, manufacturers are required to maintain a sustainable resource base while harvesting forest materials and providing benefits for ecosystems. Certified manufacturers are also enabled via the FSC network to source from sustainably managed forests carrying a Forest Management Certification. FSC actively supports licence holders to connect with certified sources and suppliers, fostering trust and certainty for all stakeholders. In the same vein, FSC has helped develop SDG 12, which focuses on “Responsible Consumption and Production,” and is a main contributor under this goal. Its implementation helps to achieve overall development plans, reduce future economic, environmental, and social costs, to strengthen economic competitiveness and reduce poverty. FSC particularly supports targets 12.2 on sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources and 12.6 on company reporting in sustainable practices.

Sustainable forest management can also often be driven by public procurement. FSC's efforts have garnered support from public authorities, who are increasingly integrating sustainable sourcing requirements into their purchasing policies and recognizing the value of FSC's claims and labels. In consideration of target 12.7 on promoting public procurement practices that are sustainable, FSC has started a project to promote the use of FSC certification in sustainable public procurement in Latin America. With responsibly sourced materials and manufacturers observing best practices, the penultimate step lies with the people. Only if consumers have the opportunity to choose sustainably produced materials and products can a true impact be achieved. With forest managers, manufacturers, and consumers acting in concert, moving toward a better world becomes possible.

Consumer awareness and demand for sustainable products are on the rise, emphasizing the importance of providing choices for sustainably produced materials. Closing the circle from sourcing to reclamation, FSC has established the “FSC Mix” and “FSC Recycled” Labels. These labels promote the reclamation and recycling of wood materials to ensure circularity in the sustainable production of forest materials. FSC's labels and practices contribute significantly to achieving SDG 12, specifically targets 12.5 on reducing waste generation substantially through prevention, reduction, recycling and

Case study: Maya Biosphere Reserve, Guatemala

The Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) forest concessions in Petén are a clear example of conservation, cohesion, and development. These concessions bring benefits not only to the local communities but also to the forest itself and the country as a whole. By fostering biodiversity and enabling sustainable livelihoods for local communities, the MBR demonstrates the successful coexistence of human well-being and environmental preservation.

Under the management of local communities, the forest concessions within the MBR have thrived, showcasing sustainable practices and remarkable biodiversity. In fact, the level of success achieved within the FSC-certified areas surpasses that of adjacent legally protected regions. One notable accomplishment is the preservation of the forest, with deforestation rates as low as 0.4 per cent, contributing significantly to maintaining 70 per cent of the reserve's conservation status.

The positive impact extends beyond environmental conservation. Within the local communities, the forest concessions have led to tangible improvements in social indicators. For example, child malnutrition rates have decreased, school attendance has increased, and migration rates have lowered. These outcomes reflect the holistic approach of the forest concessions, promoting the well-being of both people and nature.

The MBR forest concessions demonstrate the extraordinary potential for sustainable development when communities, conservation, and responsible forest management align.



Image: paper bottles: Paboco. Pots: H&M Home



Image: Ivan Castro

Above: Paboco paper bottles made with FSC-certified paper, offering a fully recyclable alternative to established non-degradable plastic bottles. Left: The Mayan Biosphere Reserve, Petén, Guatemala

reuse, and 12.8 on ensuring that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

An example of sustainable production is the Paboco bottle. Since 2022, Paboco has used FSC-certified paper to offer consumers a fully recyclable alternative to established non-degradable plastic bottles. The development of the bottles began in 2010 and quickly became a collaborative effort between Paboco and FSC with the vision to create a 100 per cent bio-based and recyclable paper bottle using materials that are responsibly sourced and fully sustainable. It's this kind of small innovation and step toward responsible consumption and circularity that moves us forward on the path to a better

world. Collaborative projects such as this are vital for achieving SDG 12, and FSC remains a valuable tool and enabler for all forest-based products.

By combining responsible forest management and sustainable consumption practices, FSC contributes holistically to sustainable development worldwide. FSC certification ensures that forests are protected, biodiversity is conserved, and ecosystems can thrive, thus contributing to SDG 15. Simultaneously, with FSC's labels and certifications empowering manufacturers to demonstrate their commitment to responsible production, FSC is actively advancing the objectives of SDG 12. Together, these efforts contribute to the broader goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

While the work to protect forests and promote sustainable practises is ongoing, FSC remains dedicated to providing the necessary tools for sustainability commitments on communal, business, and governmental levels. We strongly believe that forest certification has been, and remains, a powerful solution, but it cannot stand alone. Collaborative efforts between forest managers, manufacturers, consumers, NGOs, and public authorities are essential to keep forests healthy and resilient and to realize the SDGs. Forest stewardship has a role within these efforts, and we aim to increasingly work in partnership with other actors to achieve the long-term preservation of biodiversity, the restoration of forest ecosystems, and a more sustainable future for all.