

Some insight into the current thinking of the Forest Stewardship Council about forest carbon and indigenous peoples

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The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) first began looking at its potential role in climate change, and certification of forest carbon management during a workshop at the 1999 General Assembly. The FSC dialogue came to a head after the adoption of the Bali Road Map by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2007. Some of the Indigenous Peoples concerns were then addressed in the Cancun Agreements, committing to

Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws, and noting that the United Nations General Assembly has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2010:26).

The Bali Road Map to a secure climate future consists of a number of important actions. One of the significant parts of the road map is a collaborative, voluntary United Nations program. It invites countries “to further strengthen and support ongoing efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation on a voluntary basis.” It is now commonly known as REDD. It will become a part of a Kyoto successor protocol after 2012.

In response to the COP-13 adoption of REDD, a major global development, in 2008 the FSC’s General Assembly adopted a motion through an overwhelming majority of the membership that requested the exploration of the council’s engagement in frameworks to mitigate climate change. This work would be done by a Forest Carbon Working Group, whose mandate

would be to research and advise on relevant issues and facilitate decision-making processes.

In December 2010, the Forest Carbon Working Group published an issue paper that provides useful information both supporting and challenging some contemporary British Columbia First Nations’ views about the immense array of resources and services from natural ecosystems. Three issues within the FSC context were identified as concerns: (1) stewardship, (2) accountability, and (3) commoditization.

The FSC has not yet adopted the issue paper as a new policy. Here, I discuss only one of the three issues—the commoditization of an ecosystem service and its impact on the rights of indigenous peoples—which the working group regards as more complex than the matter of measuring forest carbon.

Although some see financial opportunities in the sale of carbon offsets, others fundamentally question the environmental integrity of forest carbon credits. According to the issue paper, some governments as well as social, indigenous, and environmental organizations oppose and object to the commoditization of forest carbon because of the potential negative impacts of new concepts such as “carbon rights” on “the existing, fundamental rights of local and indigenous peoples.”

Some Indigenous peoples have expressed their opposition and concerns during UN conferences on the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Indigenous peoples also launched their own processes to assess REDD in relation to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

and their own sustainable forest management efforts that utilize indigenous knowledge systems. Their process concluded with the Anchorage Declaration at the Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change, at Anchorage, Alaska, on April 24, 2009. Conference participants agreed by consensus to deal with forest carbon and indigenous rights as follows:

All initiatives under Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation . . . must secure the recognition and implementation of the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, including security of land tenure, ownership, recognition of land title according to traditional ways, uses and customary laws and the multiple benefits of forests for climate, ecosystems, and Peoples before taking any action. (Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change 2007)

As a result of the uncertainty and controversy surrounding the commoditization of forest carbon, the Forest Carbon Working Group has concluded that the FSC should not be directly involved in carbon offset quantification (measurement) and verification. Instead, the FSC should provide (or refer to) best practice guidance on principles or methodologies for carbon accounting.

References

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