



3.5 Forest certification in indigenous communities in Peru

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Voluntary forest certification is not new in Peru. To date, more than 670,000 hectares (ha) have achieved Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. This represents less than nine percent of the area of forest concessions granted by the government since 2000, when the new forest law was approved. The first forest certified in Peru was the 35,000 ha area belonging to the Shipibo-Konibo ethnic group in the Ucayali region; it achieved FSC certification in 2005.

Forests are a major source of environmental, social and economic benefits for indigenous communities, and activities such as illegal logging threaten local development and economic growth. The promotion of responsible forest management within indigenous communities is beneficial, mainly due to the fact that these people count on forest resources in the long term.

In the Peruvian Amazon, as elsewhere in the Amazon and some other tropical rainforests, logging involves low rates of extraction: typically less than three m³/ha. Nonetheless, logging remains the most lucrative use of Amazonian forests that could be considered as environmentally sustainable in the short and medium term and as compatible with many conservation objectives. For instance, a study carried out by a WWF Peru fauna monitoring project in Espinoza Forest Concession¹ showed that FSC-certified forest concessions could have large-animal densities that rival those of protected areas.

Of Peru's 128 million ha, just over half is covered by natural forests (68.7 million ha); 17.7 million ha are protected areas. According to the Peruvian National Forest Authority (*Dirección General Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre* or DGFFS) only around one million of the 13.6 million ha belonging to indigenous communities include legal rights for timber



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extraction. On the other hand, between 2002 and 2004 the Peruvian government granted more than 7.5 million ha of forest in concession to logging companies in the regions of Ucayali (38%), Loreto (35%), Madre de Dios (17%), San Martín (6%) and Huanuco (4%) (Perez 2010).

Box 1. Forest Regents

The Forest Regent scheme was developed by FSC to allow small land-owners to apply for forest certification as a group. This scheme, which is also practised outside Peru, recognizes one organization as the “forest regent” that is responsible for the sustainable forest management of its partners. Regency schemes prevail in Peru because certification is a complex process for indigenous peoples due to the number of requirements needed to achieve FSC certification and the work required to obtain the logging permit granted by the DGFFS. The communities first need to have legal title to their territory; they then require a board of members recognized by the national authority and the Ministry of Agriculture; registration in the tax office; and a detailed annual operation plan. This thorny paperwork always requires support from consultants, who indigenous peoples cannot afford, complicating the process to achieve certification even more.

Currently, certified forests in Peru cover an area of 673,715 ha: 406,878 ha (60.4%) belong to 12 forest concessions; 266,837 ha (39.6%) belong to 16 indigenous communities, all under the Forest Regent system (FSC Certification Data Base 2010).² On a proportional basis, five times more indigenous lands are certified than private forest concessions: at the national level, 26.7% of indigenous communities with logging permits granted by the DGFFS are certified, while 5.4% of forest concessions granted by the state are certified under the FSC scheme.

The requirements for drafting and evaluating forest management plans are included in the appendix of Peru’s 2006 forest law for community forest management.³ The law permits three levels of timber extraction, depending on the size of the communities: the first level allows extraction of up to 650 m³ annually; the second allows 650–2,500 m³; and the third allows more than 2,500 m³. Only at the third level is heavy machinery permitted, such as large trucks and tractors. Most communities apply for one of the first two levels. Both the second and third levels require a forest inventory (Sabogal, Nalvarte and Colan 2008).

The Calleria Indigenous Community

The Calleria Indigenous Community was formed at the beginning of the 19th century⁴ in the Ucayali region in the territory of the Shipibo-Konibo ethnic group. Since the main road to Pucallpa was built, immigration to the area by colonists and people from other indigenous communities has led to the destruction of a large part of the forest; this has driven the local indigenous peoples into more remote and less fertile areas. The Shipibo-Konibo people share their forest with other indigenous groups (Cocama, Cocamilla, Asháninka and Piro) and with mestizo populations.

The Calleria Indigenous Community is the official name given by the state in the early 1970s by a national Supreme Decree that recognized the legal tenancy of territories. It comprises a settlement of 50 houses sheltering one or more families closely connected by lineage.

The community stands out for its interest in managing its resources in a sustainable manner and for having organized its members in committees for better management of the community as a whole. The people fully understand that the forest is of fundamental importance, since they obtain from it the materials to build their houses, the medicinal plants for their health care, and wildlife, fruits and roots for their food.



The community owns a portable mini-sawmill and three chainsaws to carry out logging operations. They produce planks, battens and sticks: 70% of products are traded in the regional market and 10% in the local market. The remaining 20% is used for consumption, minor sales or exchange (Burneo, Piber and Sologuren 2006).

This form of forest management is considered promising because it meets the international standards of the FSC Principles and Criteria. It is small in scale and has a low impact on the forest and its fauna and flora. Based on the community's management experience, it is evident that local capacity in technical, administrative and organizational skills has been developed.

Problems outside the community represent serious threats to the continuity of current low-impact practices:

- pressure from urban expansion;
- uncontrolled tree harvesting by illegal loggers and untrained operators;
- new forest concessions (4,089,926 ha in the region);
- overlapping land uses (e.g., oil concessions and community territories);
- indiscriminate hunting by outsiders;
- invasion of local water bodies by immigrant fishermen; and
- inadequate legal protection of forest and nature resources.

Overall, however, when comparing with conventional forest exploitation practices by other forest operators, this experience turns out to have been very positive for the local population, and for the conservation of the forest and its resources. The approach has enormous and sustainable potential for conserving biodiversity. If this type of management is maintained, it will protect the richness of the area and conserve the flora and fauna.

The certification process

Indigenous communities already manage the forest in their own way, but not as sustainably as possible. Their habits relate more to collection than to production, and their forest use is based on subsistence, not on the generation of wealth. These activities have very

little impact on the forest. This is why local people have difficulty comprehending the idea of a lack of natural resources. They only realize the impact of activities when the effects are evident and severe — and, as a consequence, difficult to remediate. So if they coexist with nature without “management” and “production” concepts, how can they understand sustainable management at a level that is profitable but still not harmful to the forest? The technical capacity of indigenous communities is extremely limited; given the issues local people face, how can they understand the concept of certification and criteria? This is why organizations such as WWF have to invest in capacity building for indigenous people.

Calleria Indigenous Community achieved FSC certification in 2005, but it was not an easy process. The community started its work in certification in 2000. It was supported by a local NGO, *Asociación para la Investigación y el Desarrollo Integral* (AIDER), which took the lead, and since 2002 by technical assistance from WWF’s Peru Programme Office (WWF PPO), with funding support from the United States Agency of International Development (USAID).

AIDER guided the indigenous community through the process, coordinating all field work, collecting data, filling out reports and dealing with legal issues. WWF PPO carried out capacity-building activities, providing assistance and training in forestry issues. It also conducted workshops to teach and apply a step-by-step approach to forest certification, and to design an action plan that reduces environmental impacts.

This experience is intended to be replicated by other indigenous communities, but it requires financial support, time and hard work. Between 2000 and 2007, the CEDEFOR project, led by WWF PPO, provided almost US\$250,000 (about US\$7 per hectare for 35,000 ha) to the indigenous communities to achieve forest certification.

Conclusions

Sustainability remains uncertain even in well managed forests. This is especially clear for commercial tree species, vulnerable animal and plant species, and sensitive ecosystem functions. By and large, however, well-managed timber operations are expected to maintain the values and functions associated with forests at a much higher level than that achieved by most alternative land uses, such as intensive agriculture, pasture or mines. Certified forestry operations — because of improved planning of forest roads, increased controls and attention to direct and indirect impacts — also help reduce various aspects of forest degradation (Valqui 2010).

Although the annual operation plan includes activities related to environmental issues, implementing these in practice is a problem for indigenous people, mainly due to the lack of resources and capacity. Indigenous communities do not have clear measures to identify and manage high conservation value forests⁵ (HCVFs). They also have difficulty in defining fauna monitoring and hunting periods. Neither indigenous communities nor forest concession managers have checklists or environmental monitoring plans to measure impacts. They do not have procedures for waste disposal either.

Most communities still rely on NGO support to elaborate or update the plan, and much of the time the document is developed without sufficient community input.

Experiences in a range of projects have revealed both benefits and disadvantages for indigenous communities regarding forest management and FSC certification. We strongly believe that positive results are possible, but certain changes are required:

- Forest certification demands monitoring (e.g., of hunting and intrusions by outsiders), but indigenous communities do not fully comprehend the importance of this work. Training is required.
- Hunting is not as productive as some years ago, not only because hunters must meet requirements related to the HCVF and fauna monitoring plans, but because most of the time logging activities keep animals away. Fauna monitoring activities and observing hunting seasons are required.
- The FSC certification process involves social aspects, but does not incorporate traditional knowledge about biodiversity. By using the knowledge and ideas of the indigenous people as a starting point, the certification process will better link to indigenous concepts of forest management. This is an important step toward meeting environmental standards.

Endnotes

1. See article 4.4 in this issue.
2. See <http://info.fsc.org>.
3. See DGFFS RJ-232-2006.
4. See <http://ibcperu.org/sicnabd>.
5. The HCVF concept was initially developed by the FSC for use in forest management certification. Within FSC certification, forest managers are required to identify any HCVF attribute that occurs within their individual FMUs and manage them in order to maintain or enhance the attributes identified. The FSC definition encompasses exceptional or critical ecological attributes, ecosystem and social functions (WWF Malaysia 2009). See article 5.1 in this issue.

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