



6.6 Extending certification to landscape mosaics

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Are we fiddling while Rome is burning? Are we preoccupied with the details of certification schemes while all around us forests are being degraded and destroyed and their biodiversity is being lost? Only a tiny fraction of the remaining tropical and sub-tropical forests — less than 1.5% as of April 2008 — has been certified (Bennett 2008). The certification of natural forests has been slow to be adopted in most developing countries, where the biggest impact for biodiversity conservation might be realized (Cashore et al. 2006). Undoubtedly, individual successes have been achieved and widely noted, and local environmental benefits within most existing certified forests appear to be substantial. Nevertheless, as a broader tool for securing sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation on regional or global scales, I suspect the approach has limited value, simply because huge areas of previously forested land are now human-dominated landscape mosaics in which forests are an important but patchy land cover type.

Smallholders and smallholder communities own lands that consist of a mosaic of forest patches and areas next to the forest that are used for agriculture. Yet smallholders are often excluded from participation in forest certification by its high transaction costs (Grieg-Gran, Porras and Wunder 2005). Around 37% of forests in developing countries is managed by individuals or communities (Sunderlin, Hatcher and Liddle 2008), a proportion that is expected to rise to 50% by 2020 (White and Martin 2005; data extracted from Table 1, with Australia excluded).



A LANDSCAPE LABEL POTENTIALLY PERMITS PRODUCER COMMUNITIES TO

IMPROVE MARKET RECOGNITION, SECURE PREMIUM PAYMENTS, GAIN ACCESS TO NICHE MARKETS, AND ATTAIN MARKET BENEFITS FOR NATURAL RESOURCE AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.

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Although FSC has developed new certification procedures and guidelines that specifically target smallholders; for example, small and low-intensity managed forests (SLIMF), these initiatives are largely limited to developed countries (Humphries and Kainer 2006). Other forms of certification seek to address conservation in complex and diverse agroforestry systems that retain tropical forest elements such as native trees within the landscape matrix. Examples include organic, fair trade and bird-friendly labels for crops such as coffee and cocoa. Experience shows that although these schemes increase access to niche markets and provide some degree of income stability, price premiums and large markets are often limited in the tropics, providing few incentives and low rates of seeking and gaining eco-certification.

Timber production through the logging of natural forests continues to make an important contribution to local and national economies, and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future despite the worldwide expansion of plantations. It is imperative that logging be economically and environmentally sustainable.

Forest certification is one of a number of approaches to this goal. In addition to refining, improving and promoting forest certification, we should extend the certification concept to the broader forested landscape mosaic. I advocate this on the basis that a significant proportion of tropical forests in many tropical countries have been transformed into landscape mosaics which continue to support a considerable richness of biodiversity and rural livelihoods. The landscape mosaic area will only increase since incursions into forested regions continue more or less unabated. It is important to recognize the value of diverse landscape mosaics in terms of their biodiversity, the ecosystem services they provide and the human social cultures they often encompass. Forest certification provides good ideas on how this might be done.

Due to this increased expansion of forested landscape mosaics — which support people in both agricultural and forest-related activities, and which continue to sustain a substantial level of biodiversity — certification systems are required that encompass not just forests and logging, but also other habitats and activities within the landscape. I propose that adapted concepts of forest certification need to be applied to landscape mosaics to limit further degradation of these often-diverse areas and provide greater market access to smallholders.

Definitions of what constitutes a landscape vary depending on context, but here it means a region across which land use, administrative structure and human culture are relatively homogeneous and discrete from other surrounding regions, and in which land is predominantly owned by individuals or communities. It does not necessarily exclude publicly owned lands, including protected areas.

Landscape labels

I propose combining the certification concept with that of payments for ecosystem service (PES) and applying this “landscape label” approach to landscape mosaics rather than just forest stands. Managed rural landscapes that deliver ecosystem services — according to

relevant criteria and based on local and regional evaluation by appropriate institutions — would be acknowledged by a landscape label that applied across the whole landscape (Ghazoul, Garcia and Kushalappa 2009; Ghazoul, in press).

The administrative structure through which to evaluate landscapes and grant labels would most appropriately be implemented by an international organization such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which has experience with related approaches. The label could be linked to the delivery of ecosystem services (e.g., biodiversity, carbon sequestration, provision of clean water or a combination of these) and to an associated mechanism for receiving payments for these services.

A landscape label could identify a good (e.g., timber, non-timber forest product or agricultural crop) as originating from a region that provides specific quantified ecosystem services to identified beneficiaries. A landscape label could also represent and publicize the cultural and symbolic attributes of the landscape — as defined by local communities — thereby helping to define its value for people beyond the landscape. This would promote landscape recognition that could generate new livelihood opportunities (through tourism, for example). Funds from the PES element would be invested in community-based projects. The label itself could be applied to a variety of products sourced from the labelled landscape that might directly benefit land-owners through price premiums or product differentiation.

A landscape label potentially permits producer communities to improve market recognition, secure premium payments, gain access to niche markets and attain market benefits for natural resource and agricultural products. The benefits derived would provide an incentive to manage the landscape in a way that meets the ecosystem service criteria for certification. To secure and retain a landscape label, communities would need to maintain the services against which the label was granted. This would require independent verification of performance against criteria in much the same way as in existing forest certification.

Precursors to landscape labelling

The concept of a landscape label is preceded by other approaches to increase the recognition of products, services and values generated by landscapes, and to improve the economic well-being of landscape inhabitants. Two of these approaches are Geographic Indications and biosphere reserves.

Geographic Indications

Geographic Indications (GIs) differentiate products originating from specific localities. Examples include Champagne, Florida oranges and Melton Mowbray pork pies. The provisions for GIs are stipulated by the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, and legal protection is afforded by national and international law. A GI is a marketing tool; it adds value to agricultural products by creating an identity based on place of origin and on specific knowledge and/or natural resources used in the growth and production processes. The GI concept has been

extended to include environmental, cultural and biological diversity. The link to environmental quality remains weak, however, as the GI value derives solely from the reputation of the product.

Biosphere Reserves

Biosphere Reserves combine core protected areas with zones where sustainable development is fostered by local individuals and enterprises. A certification scheme backed by UNESCO confers international visibility (UNESCO 1996). Designation of a locality as a biosphere reserve raises awareness among local people, other citizens and government authorities. The biosphere label can also be used to market a variety of goods produced within Biosphere Reserves, but this is not linked to any verifiable environmental criteria.



Both of these schemes provide benefits through increased recognition of products and product locality, but they are not directly or verifiably linked to assessments of the environmental quality of the landscape.

The benefits of landscape labelling

Landscape labelling borrows ideas from these initiatives and integrates them into a single approach that rewards the delivery of ecosystem services at the landscape scale and across communities rather than at the farm-unit scale and to individuals. This approach retains many of the benefits of GIs and biosphere reserves and has several additional advantages:¹

- The landscape perspective allows local communities, conservationists, ecosystem service beneficiaries and governments to incorporate a wide variety of landscape values into management and verification systems. Retention of a landscape label would be conditional on the development of a verifiable management plan that seeks to maintain the ecosystem services and conservation benefits provided by the landscape. Several environmental goods and services might be included within management objectives, and the management system itself would need to be inclusive; its effective delivery would rely on the participation of a wide variety of local stakeholders. Forest certification, in contrast, often recognizes only a limited number of goods and services, usually from only one habitat type (forests), and often (although not always) fails to consider the surrounding habitat matrix and associated stakeholders.
- Landscape labelling is not restricted to a particular product, as is the case with forest certification or GIs. Any product derived from a landscape could use the label to signify that it was produced under a management system that conserved biodiversity and/or provided ecosystem services. For example, if Kodagu District in southern India — a heavily wooded landscape mosaic that includes rich agroforestry systems and sacred grove forests — was granted a landscape label, it could be used for Kodagu coffee. Due to coffee's large export market, this label would also increase market recognition of a host of other Kodagu products, such as pepper, palm oil and ginger. The Kodagu name would achieve higher national and international

recognition, helping facilitate the development of a tourism industry. The concept could be extended to labels for other forms of economic activity, including tourism, artisanal commodities and other small industries. Under a landscape label scheme any Kodagu product would benefit directly or by association with the Kodagu name.

- A landscape label could even represent non-market values — including the cultural and spiritual importance of landscape features — as well as natural heritage, notably biodiversity. Many tropical landscapes are rich in biodiversity that has little present economic value; they may harbour species that have local religious or spiritual symbolism but little significance for global buyers of ecosystem services. In Kodagu, sacred forest groves and trees have immense importance. A landscape label could identify and catalogue such features, encouraging local communities to conserve these features in the face of development pressures.

The success of a product certificate relies on consumers' trust in what it represents. If forest cover is accepted as an appropriate proxy for ecosystem service delivery, then consumers of labelled products from landscape mosaics could use widely available software such as Google Earth to make their own verification.

Barriers to adoption and implementation

The landscape label approach also inevitably has some disadvantages, which will challenge its implementation. Implementing and ensuring adherence to landscape label requirements is likely to be complex, necessitating interaction and agreement by many individuals, villages and community-based institutions. Transaction costs might therefore be high. The success of landscape-wide community schemes depends on effective institutional structures. Conflict and corruption within community-based organizations are perhaps the most significant threats to the successful implementation of landscape labelling.

There are, however, many examples of effective community-based organizations. One is the Kodagu Model Forest Trust (KMFT), representing diverse groups including coffee planters, community organizations, and representatives of local government. All of them have interests in the environment and management of the Kodagu landscape. It includes groups that represent local landholders, non-governmental organizations, the Karnataka Forest Department, community groups and research institutions. For the last five years KMFT has been implementing programmes related to integrated landscape management, including promotion of organic farming, revival of community-based sacred forest management and management of human-animal conflicts. KMFT could provide an inclusive platform that allows innovative new certification schemes to be developed and managed.

Other concerns are also common to forest certification and PES schemes. They include dealing with free-riders, managing conditionality, avoiding leakage (displacement of degrading activities to a different location), ensuring the effective functioning of cooperative institutions, and dealing with disturbances beyond the control of the communities (e.g., atmospheric pollution or climate change). Peer pressure may minimize freeloading, but may also create or exacerbate conflict. Opt-out agreements for individual landowners

allow for flexibility in decision-making, but may erode the landscape label concept if they allow too much leeway. Leakage is less likely in a landscape labelling approach than in other approaches, since the assessment of the delivery of services is made at the landscape scale, but displacement beyond the boundaries of the landscape could still occur.

Conclusion

The landscape label concept differs from forest certification approaches: it specifies a landscape-wide certification scheme and incorporates a PES element. Landscape labelling offers several advantages over existing incentive systems, particularly in that it covers a breadth of products and habitats across a defined landscape. There are, however, major obstacles to be overcome. Even so, the extensive area of forest-agriculture landscape mosaics throughout the world compels us to develop alternative certification strategies that will ensure the continued maintenance of these human-dominated yet biologically and culturally rich landscapes. Our equivalent of Rome constitutes more than just the forests we seek to certify, but the wider landscapes within which those forests are found. It also encompasses the diverse land-use systems with which people are engaged, and which often provide environmental benefits far beyond the landscape's boundaries.

Endnote

1. For a full consideration of advantages and disadvantages, see Ghazoul, Garcia and Kushalappa (2009) and Ghazoul (in press).

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