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The challenges in achieving the "social" dimension of sustainable development. The case of the Forest Stewardship Council

Magnus Boström

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Summary

There is broad support worldwide for the concept of sustainable development and the integration of its three pillars: economic development, environmental protection, and social development. Nevertheless, research shows less actual willingness among policy-makers and practitioners to fully incorporate and operationalise social sustainability features in various sectors. The aim of this report is to investigate the benefits and difficulties that emerge when actors attempt to incorporate social dimensions into sustainability projects, by focusing on a case study of the transnational, multi-stakeholder organization, the Forest Stewardship Council. FSC was formally established in 1993 with the aim of promoting environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests through a system of certification and labeling. Using qualitative interviews, FSC-related documents, participant observation as well as previous research, this report examines the successes and challenges of including social sustainability features in the standards and certification process.

A number of observed achievements and difficulties are highlighted in the report, and these are analysed in relation to four general aspects: 1) improvement of substantive social sustainability goals; 2) local organization, empowerment, and employment; 3) communication; and 4) small-scale and community-based forestry. The report also discusses reasons for the perceived challenges, which relate to discursive, structural or organizational aspects. These include: 1) high expectations; 2) lack of capacity to work for effective implementation; 3) poor local social and economic sustainability; 4) contradictions in using a market-based governance system to facilitate sustainable development; 5) the balancing of environmental and social goals: historical timing and vague sustainability framing; 6) translating a universal standard to local circumstances; and 7) the relationship between the procedural and substantive dimensions of social sustainability. The last aspect is elaborated at some length in the report through a focus on representation and participation of "social" stakeholders within the FSC organization and certification process. This part of the report focuses on organizational structures and how individual "social" members take on effective roles and how they can be empowered.

In conclusion, it is stressed that social sustainability requires social sustainability. With this apparently tautological bit of reasoning, there are two implications. First, if actors want to improve substantive aspects of sustainability, a procedural dimension of social sustainability needs to be taken into account. Second, a non-state transnational standard-setter, such as FSC, that wants to improve social sustainability in various parts of the world, has to work in localities where there is at least some level of social sustainability present from the outset.

The report overall shows that the inclusion of social sustainability within the FSC has, indeed, been and continues to be a challenging task. Although most interviewees perceived a number of social benefits/opportunities involved in FSC certification, the difficulties in fulfilling social goals appear to dominate. Most of these “failures” should not be seen as a lack of real willingness within the FSC to fulfil its mission. Rather, several issues are essentially very difficult for a non-state transnational organization such as FSC to tackle. On a final positive note, FSC provides a regulatory framework and an organizational and discursive platform to draw attention to issues and generate a serious debate. FSC has provided a very promising “meeting place” for a very broad group of actors and has achieved increasing attention to a range of social issues and their linkages to environmental and economic dimensions within local and transnational forestry.

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1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development has encouraged the development of a variety of environmental reforms worldwide over the last few decades. The concept is usually divided into three pillars–economic development, environmental protection, and social development–and they are generally assumed compatible and mutually strengthening. While many policy-makers make general commitments to sustainable development and to the integration of these dimensions, research indicates that when policy-makers and practitioners attempt to achieve sustainable development, conflicts often arise among the dimensions (Dobson 1999; Lehtonen 2004; Littig and Grießler 2005) or discourses on environmental sustainability neglect aspects such as social justice, equity, and human rights (Agyeman and Evans 2004: 163). In this report, I want to emphasise specifically the incorporation of social aspects of sustainability. It is important to ask what opportunities/benefits or difficulties/detriments appear when actors try to incorporate social dimensions into sustainability projects.

Despite the increasing attention paid to social sustainability, there has been little research to date on how this dimension links to other sustainability dimensions. Some argue it is often the social dimensions, including welfare aspects such as the fair distribution of "environmental bads and goods" and political aspects such as empowerment of weak societal groups and democratic political processes, which have been most difficult to realize in practice (Agyeman and Evans 2004; Elliot 2005). Often, only the positive integration of environmental and economic aspects is considered, and ecological modernisation theory postulates that only environmental and economic facets have stimulated reform (Mol 1997). Meanwhile, aspects of social sustainability have been viewed as falling within the traditional scope and control of the welfare state with no connection to environmental protection.

In this report, I will elaborate on this topic by referring to a case study examining how the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has attempted to incorporate social sustainability goals, principles, and criteria. The FSC is a multi-stakeholder organization that sets standards and policies for sustainable forestry at the transnational, national, and regional level. The organization was formally established in 1993 with the aim of promoting environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests through a system of certification and

labeling. FSC was established as a membership organization, having both individuals and organizations as members. Members are divided into three chambers (environmental, economic, and social), each with one-third voting power. In addition, voting power is divided equally between developed (Northern) and developing (Southern) country members in each of the three chambers.

I selected FSC as both a representative and crucial case (cf. Gerring 2007). FSC is an organization that is representative of the generally endorsed ambitions to achieve and combine all three dimensions of sustainable development. In addition, the case of FSC is crucial in that if an organization with such strong ambitions has difficulties and challenges, it is likely that difficulties and challenges appear also in many other cases of transnational and local sustainability projects. FSC was one of the first organizations with these integrative aims and several scholars have portrayed FSC as pioneering and exemplary in its multi-stakeholder goals and far-reaching attempt to combine and balance environmental, social and economic objectives and features (Domask 2003; Pattberg 2007; Dingwerth 2008; Gulbrandsen 2008). A focus on this case is thus likely to shed some general light on some of the opportunities/challenges/difficulties involved in the effort to integrate social and environmental sustainability goals.

Most studies on FSC focus on one or several countries in which the FSC operates. However, in this report, I discuss FSC at the transnational level. This focus does not exclude local experiences. Rather, experiences on how FSC works at the local/national level may have important insights to convey about the working context for a transnational standard-setting organization such as FSC. In the next section, I refer to literature that provides useful perspectives on the topic of social sustainability, and I briefly introduce the framing, organizational, and power perspective that guides the subsequent analysis. Thereafter, using the perceptions of interviewees involved in FSC, I investigate the issues that are taken into account in the development and implementation of the standards and in the practice of certification. In the following section, I investigate the capabilities of actors representing “social stakeholders” to take active roles in the FSC organizational arrangement and to make an impact on the setting of standards and policies. I am also interested in finding indications of whether there is a relationship between the substantive and procedural dimension, i.e. whether the inclusion and effective *participation* of stakeholders representing social sustainability (or the lack thereof) in turn

affects the opportunities to actually consider substantive aspects of social sustainability in standards and certification.

The report comprises six sections. Following this introduction, I describe the methods used in research and analysis and thereafter I provide an overview of previous research on the integration and balancing of different sustainability dimensions. I also briefly introduce some concepts that guide the subsequent analysis. In the fourth section, I introduce FSC and report how interviewees experience FSC's achievements and challenges regarding social sustainability. This section ends by discussing possible explanations for perceived difficulties, and leads to the next section that focuses on participatory aspects surrounding social stakeholders. The conclusions then follow.

2. Methods

The report is based on a triangulation of methods. First, the research team conducted 29 interviews (most of them by telephone) between the spring of 2006 and the spring of 2009. About half of the interviews were conducted within the framework of another overlapping research project (reported in Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010). However, most quotations and references in this report are taken from interviews explicitly conducted for the Missing Pillar project.

We selected interviewees from each of the three chambers within FSC (social, environmental, and economic) from different parts of the world: from the FSC Secretariat, as well as a few non-members that had a relationship with FSC. We primarily used a "snowball sampling" technique in the selection of interviewees and considerable effort was spent in achieving a balance among the interviewees regarding the FSC chamber and geographic area that they represented. We experienced considerable difficulty in contacting and gaining access to interviewees representing social stakeholders. We do not think this was due to unwillingness on the part of interviewees, but more to the fact that there is a smaller number of stakeholders involved in social aspects of the program as well as considerable language barriers. Our challenges in conducting our research, in this respect, indeed resemble some of the challenges that we observed concerning this case.

The interviews followed a common interview guide. Our approach was flexible, however, allowing adjustment of questions in accordance with the interviewee's experience and expertise. Questions were also adjusted to accommodate the type of actor category represented by the interviewee. Of central importance for this study was to encourage interviewees to speak freely about their experiences with FSC's capacity (focusing on its organization and standards) to achieve social sustainability and to affect social sustainability relative to economic and environmental goals. The interview guide was open in this respect, as we did not want to delimit the topics that were relevant for discussion. Consequently, our research was explorative.

To the extent that interviewees addressed difficulties and challenges, we also wanted them to reflect on possible reasons for problems. Furthermore, we asked interviewees to discuss their roles, perceived impact and participation within or surrounding FSC's organization and its standard-setting work (for instance, on the board, in the secretariat, on advisory committees, in working groups, or during consultations or campaigning). We asked how they perceived their role and impact relative to other stakeholders and we wanted them to describe important obstacles and frustrations that they experienced.

Second, in November 2008, one research team member used participant observation during the FSC General Assembly (GA) in Cape Town, South Africa, and in various side meetings and field trips that were arranged in parallel to the GA. The participant observation gave us direct insight into the discussions and debates among FSC stakeholders and an understanding of the complexity of the preparation and decision-making process. Many informal conversations with various stakeholders were conducted, which provided a valuable complement to the more formal interviews. Participant observation was also an excellent opportunity to gain contact and access to social stakeholders because it was more difficult to contact them otherwise.

Third, the report relies on various documents disseminated by FSC, which are available at their website. Two examples are the FSC Social Strategy (FSC 2003) and the Global Strategy (FSC 2007). A great deal of research on experiences and economic, environmental and social impacts of the work FSC were collected in a review and assessment of outcomes and impacts of FSC certification, which was conducted by staff at the FSC international secretariat (FSC 2009a). This review was important for this study.

Fourth, the report references previous research on FSC, particularly studies that addressed social sustainability issues. In addition, where it is relevant, I also make comparisons with other similar cases of transnational sustainability projects reported in the literature.

3. How to incorporate the social dimension?

3.1. Previous research

The challenges to incorporate social sustainability, as discussed in the introduction, in large part may have to do with framing, definition, and operationalisation. Some scholars argue that the concept of social sustainability has been particularly difficult to analyse, comprehend and define compared to the other dimensions (Lehtonen 2004; Littig and Grießler 2005), and there is little agreement on what it includes (Dillard et al. 2009). Because the concept of sustainable development has its origin in environmental sustainability, social issues have been regarded to be of secondary importance (Bebbington and Dillard 2009). Another argument is that there is an unclear scientific basis for the measurement of social sustainability:

> Social sustainability appears to present different and more severe challenges in specification, understanding, and communication than environmental sustainability because there is no widely accepted scientific basis for analysis, unlike the ability to debate population ecology, acceptable levels of toxicity, or acceptable concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Nor is there a common unit of measure such as monetary units with the economic dimension of sustainability (Bebbington and Dillard 2009:158).

In its very broadest meaning, the “social” has to do with the entire relationship between society and nature, and thereby includes economic, cultural, political, and institutional structures and processes. Notions of social sustainability often refer to aspects such as social welfare, quality of life, social justice, social cohesion, cultural diversity, democratic rights, gender issues, workers’ rights, broad participation, development of social capital and individual capabilities and the like. Accordingly, it appears difficult to delimit and define what social sustainability is. Furthermore, the more one includes within the frame of social sustainability, the more difficult it becomes to understand what it is, much less to achieve it.

Several studies within the literature implicate focus on *procedures*, such as the role of democratic representation, participation and deliberation, and *substantive* matters that the standards or policies aim to improve (Agyeman and Evans 2004; Elliot 2005). A common belief is that “good” social procedures will consequently lead to “good” social outcomes. In this report, I refer to both of these dimensions, and am interested in a discussion of the possible relationship between them; for instance, whether participation/nonparticipation of social stakeholders could facilitate/prevent the incorporation of social sustainability aspects.

3.2. Analytical dimensions: framing, power, and organizing

In attempting to understand how actors try to integrate different sustainability goals and aspects into sustainability projects, any analysis has to take into account how the actors themselves frame social sustainability, as well as how they try to create organizational arrangements and stakeholder categories that are assumed to represent social sustainability concerns. The framing perspective draws attention to the way issues are defined, categorised, included/excluded, and interpreted. Framing assists in making a complex reality plausible and understood (Fischer 2003; Boström and Klintman 2008). Framing also occurs at different levels. Actors may refer to frames that are common in the general environmental discourse, such as “sustainability.” Such frames may be called meta-frames or master frames (Snow and Benford 1992; Eder 1996), which are collectively accepted and used as a reference in the communication of environmental issues. Thus, framing occurs in a discursive context (Steinberg 1998), but are not determined by general discourses. Vague frames such as “sustainability” need to be systematised and concretised by organizations so that they agree with organization-specific identities and activities (Boström 2004).

In order to analyze the strength of those who are supposed to represent social sustainability, it is useful to add a power perspective. Power is a relational concept. It is not a thing someone has independently of social relations (Clegg et al. 2005). Thus, a number of conditioning factors: organizational/institutional, structural, and discursive (Barnett and Duvall 2005; Betsill and Corell 2008; Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010), enable or constrain social stakeholders in their efforts to address social sustainability goals. Although a broad range of actors are given access to a

multi-stakeholder arrangements such as FSC, different types of actors may face different opportunities and constraints in raising concerns, advancing their arguments, or participating in decision-making.

The formal and informal institutional context of governance, including rules and procedures, may favour some actions and categories of actors while hindering others (Barnett and Duvall 2005; Betsill and Corell 2008). Some types of actors may not be granted access to decision-making structures, and the concrete arrangements may asymmetrically affect stakeholders' formal or informal opportunities to raise concerns, promote their arguments, or participate in stakeholder consultation or decision-making. Indeed, social sustainability framing may assist in making organizers and stakeholders more sensitive to how a given institutional context asymmetrically affects different stakeholders. For instance, FSC's organizational structure, which will be described below, was clearly affected by the rising sustainability discourse. This discourse helped to legitimize the very idea of a multi-stakeholder process, as well as the inclusion of both environmental and social values and concerns in rule-setting and policy-making. Organizing is therefore an activity related to discursive contexts, framing efforts and power struggles (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010). Organizing is dynamic and evolves over time. It is an ongoing process; the concrete organizational arrangements develops in relation to various legitimizing aspirations as well as to power struggles among the organization's members and stakeholders (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010). Over time, however, the established form becomes more robust and harder to change.

The institutional arrangement can affect the conditions for actors in multiple ways, but a particularly intriguing aspect within a multi-stakeholder arrangement is the issue of *categorization*. A multi-stakeholder arrangement, by definition, entails several types of actors and these, in one way or another, must be sorted into different stakeholder categories (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010), such as being categorized as a "social" stakeholder.

Categorization plays a critical role in the exercise of power. Early on in the standard-setting process, when the organizational structures are discussed, negotiated and implemented, the issue of stakeholder categorization may be intensively debated. Various interest groups want to make sure they acquire sufficient voting power in the organization. However, as the organization evolves over time, the given categorizations

may become more implicit and taken for granted (Bowker and Star 1999), and the consequences of categorizations become less visible.

Accordingly, actors may be empowered or hindered by institutional/organizational, structural and discursive factors (Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010). In addition to such conditional factors, a complementary agency-oriented notion of power directs attention to the actors themselves and their resources and strategies. All organizations mobilize, accumulate, control, and make use of collective resources, which they can use to exercise power (Ahrne 1994). In this sense, power refers to socioeconomic resources or the ability to shape an agenda, debate, and discourse through framing. Power is essential in making an impact on standard setting and other policy processes and must be taken into consideration. In this report, I will draw on earlier research on stakeholders' power resources (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010; Boström and Hallström 2010) by referring to the ways in which social stakeholders mobilize and make use of material, symbolic, cognitive, and social power resources within and surrounding FSC.

4. Defining and practising social sustainability in FSC

4.1. The FSC standards

Parallel to the establishment of FSC in 1993, its basic standards, known as the FSC Principles and Criteria, were drafted, broadly discussed in numerous stakeholder consultations and workshops, negotiated, and finally implemented (for this process, see Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010, chapter 4). The framework has 10 principles, and each principle is coupled with a number of criteria (56 in total). The principles and criteria are general and must be adjusted and concretised in regional or national processes of standard setting and certification. Certification is completed by an accredited third party certifier, which can use either a national/regional adjusted FSC standard or FSC's Principles and Criteria directly in countries that lack such locally adjusted standards. Through chain-of-custody certification, the products that come from certified forests are given the FSC label.

The principles are listed in the text box below:

Text box 1: Overview of the FSC's ten principles[1]

***Principle* 1.**
Compliance with all applicable laws and international treaties

***Principle* 2.**
Demonstrated and uncontested, clearly defined, long–term land tenure and use rights

***Principle* 3.**
Recognition and respect of indigenous peoples' rights

***Principle* 4.**
Maintenance or enhancement of long-term social and economic well-being of forest workers and local communities and respect of worker's rights in compliance with International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions

***Principle* 5.**
Equitable use and sharing of benefits derived from the forest

***Principle* 6.**
Reduction of environmental impact of logging activities and maintenance of the ecological functions and integrity of the forest

***Principle* 7.**
Appropriate and continuously updated management plan

***Principle* 8.**
Appropriate monitoring and assessment activities to assess the condition of the forest, management activities and their social and environmental impacts

***Principle* 9.**
Maintenance of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs) defined as environmental and social values that are considered to be of outstanding significance or critical importance

***Principle* 10.**
In addition to compliance with all of the above, plantations must contribute to reduce the pressures on and promote the restoration and conservation of natural forests.

These principles have largely remained unchanged since FSC's establishment (Principle 9 and 10 have been revised). However, there is

[1] http://www.fsc.org/pc.html downloaded 2010 09 02

currently a review being done of all principles and criteria.[2] The review began recently, so this study does not attempt to incorporate an analysis of this process and its possible outcomes.

FSC made a firm initial commitment to creating balance in the standards, equally reflecting environmental, economic, and social aspects, and to the idea that the standards should apply equally to boreal, temperate and tropical forests, and similarly to large and small-scale operators (Synnott 2005). Since establishment, the FSC has "remained consistent with those conclusions" (Synnott 2005: 21).

The principles do not exactly follow the common distinction between economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Our interviewees discussed social aspects in relation to most, if not all, of these principles and associated criteria. Yet, principles 2, 3 and 4, in particular, were frequently referenced in comments about social sustainability. FSC has defined principles and criteria for a broad array of aspects, such as indigenous peoples' rights (Principle 3 and four associated criteria; see text box below). This principle and the associated criteria focus on the legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources. For example, forest management should not threaten or diminish (directly or indirectly) the resources or tenure rights of indigenous peoples.

Principle 4 and five associated criteria concern local communities and workers' rights. The principle and criteria prescribe that the forest management area should provide opportunities for employment, training, and other services to the communities within, and that rights of workers to organize and voluntarily negotiate with their employers should be guaranteed according to ILO standards. The principle and criteria also stipulate that management planning and operations should incorporate the results of evaluations of social impact and that consultations should be maintained with people and groups (both men and women) directly affected by management operations. In addition, the health and security of employees and their families are mentioned, and there is one criteria directed to resolving grievances and compensating losses or damages affecting the legal or customary rights, property, resources, or livelihoods of local peoples. The criteria concerning workers are meant to apply

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[2] See http://www.fsc.org/pcreview.html Attached 2010 10 04. See also FSC 2009c and FSC 2010.

equally to all workers carrying out activities in the forest management unit whether they are hired directly or through a sub-contractor.

Some features are less frequently mentioned, such as gender issues, but, overall, few potential sustainability aspects are defined as irrelevant from the outset. In addition, principle 2 (about long-term tenure and user rights) was frequently mentioned among interviewees from a social sustainability standpoint (see text box 4, particularly criteria 2.2.). Principle 5, which covers the social benefits of the forest operations, including a diversified local economy, and the social costs of production, was also noted by interviewees. Indirectly, all other principles could relate to social sustainability. For instance, principle 1 stipulates that forest management should respect all applicable laws of the country as well as international treaties and agreements (such as the ILO) to which the country is a signatory. As explained in the next section, this principle can be an important tool to further social sustainability in some national contexts. Social values are also implicated in the concept of "high conservation value forests," which is the basis of principle 9.

Text box 2. Principle #3: Indigenous peoples' rights[3]

The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources shall be recognized and respected.

3.1 Indigenous peoples shall control forest management on their lands and territories unless they delegate control with free and informed consent to other agencies.

3.2 Forest management shall not threaten or diminish, either directly or indirectly, the resources or tenure rights of indigenous peoples.

3.3 Sites of special cultural, ecological, economic or religious significance to indigenous peoples shall be clearly identified in cooperation with such peoples, and recognized and protected by forest managers.

3.4 Indigenous peoples shall be compensated for the application of their traditional knowledge regarding the use of forest species or management systems in forest operations. This compensation shall be formally agreed upon with their free and informed consent before forest operations commence.

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[3] See http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/international_FSC_policies/standards/FSC_STD_01_001_V4_0_EN_FSC_Principles_and_Criteria.pdf Accessed 12 April 2010.

Text box 3. Principle #4: Community relations and worker's rights[4]

Forest management operations shall maintain or enhance the long-term social and economic well-being of forest workers and local communities.

4.1 The communities within, or adjacent to, the forest management area should be given opportunities for employment, training, and other services.

4.2 Forest management should meet or exceed all applicable laws and/or regulations covering health and safety of employees and their families.

4.3 The rights of workers to organize and voluntarily negotiate with their employers shall be guaranteed as outlined in Conventions 87 and 98 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

4.4 Management planning and operations shall incorporate the results of evaluations of social impact. Consultations shall be maintained with people and groups (both men and women) directly affected by management operations1.

4.5 Appropriate mechanisms shall be employed for resolving grievances and for providing fair compensation in the case of loss or damage affecting the legal or customary rights, property, resources, or livelihoods of local peoples. Measures shall be taken to avoid such loss or damage.

Text box 4: Principle #2: Tenure and use rights and responsibilities

Long-term tenure and use rights to the land and forest resources shall be clearly defined, documented and legally established.

2.1 Clear evidence of long-term forest use rights to the land (e.g. land title, customary rights, or lease agreements) shall be demonstrated.

2.2 Local communities with legal or customary tenure or use rights shall maintain control, to the extent necessary to protect their rights or resources, over forest operations unless they delegate control with free and informed consent to other agencies.

2.3 Appropriate mechanisms shall be employed to resolve disputes over tenure claims and use rights. The circumstances and status of any outstanding disputes will be explicitly considered in the certification evaluation. Disputes of substantial magnitude involving a significant number of interests will normally disqualify an operation from being certified.

[4] See http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/international_FSC_policies/standards/FSC_STD_01_001_V4_0_EN_FSC_Principles_and_Criteria.pdf Accessed 12 April 2010.

4.2. Achievements and difficulties in relation to social sustainability goals and aspects

By October 2010, more than 124 million ha of forest, distributed in over 80 countries worldwide, were certified to FSC standards.[5] This is an area roughly corresponding to 10% of the world's managed forests (FSC 2008). Although competing certification schemes exist and some are even larger, it is fair to say that the FSC has been successful in terms of certified hectares. Staff at the FSC secretariat have conducted an extensive literature review covering research on the impact of FSC certification, and they have concluded that forest certification has indeed been a catalyst for substantial changes in diverse aspects of forest management, “rather than a means of rewarding operations that were already conducting excellent forestry before certification” (FSC 2009a: 218; Newsom and Hewitt 2005).

It is clear that FSC has managed to include an extensive list of features that are relevant from a social sustainability position within the standards framework. The above-mentioned review reported a number of environmental and social benefits of actual certification (FSC 2009a). However, it is important to dig deeper and attempt to systematise the aspects that have been easier or more difficult to take into account in practice. In this report, I will look at this topic more closely, primarily using the views of interviewees. In addition, I will simultaneously refer to findings in previous research on FSC, including FSC's own literature review. In general, I emphasise the aspects that several independent interviewees have mentioned and concentrate the observations into four general topics, which are summarized in Table 1.

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[5] http://www.fsc.org/about-fsc.html, Accessed 12 November 2010.

Table 1. Achievements and difficulties

Aspects	Achievements	Difficulties
Improvement of substantive social sustainability goals	Working conditions (particularly in the South) • Worker health and safety • Training • On time wages	Non-labour social issues (local communities, indigenous peoples) Social criteria for the entire production chain
Local organization, empowerment, and employment	Awareness of rights and plans, education, and new experiences with organization and collective action	Lack of local infrastructure and (democratic) institutions Unclear rights, including land rights.
Communication	Forest owner required to engage in communication with the local communities, indigenous people and workers Improved dialogue among different interest groups within communities	Who is represented in communication networks? What is a local community? How to deal with existing tensions within the local community or among workers and the local community?
Small-scale and community based forestry	Standards and procedures that simplify certification of small-scale operations	Biased certification (more in the North) Economies of scale; asymmetric advantages for larger forest companies with good access to international markets.

A: Improvement of substantive social sustainability goals: workers, local communities, and indigenous peoples

A primary question that we raised during interviews concerned the social aspects of the FSC framework that interviewees considered satisfactorily addressed, and those that they felt had not been adequately addressed.

Several interviewees mentioned that the FSC Principles and Criteria have been a remarkably effective instrument for improving labour conditions in some countries. Benefits have included the provision of protective clothes and safety equipment (e.g. helmets, safe chainsaws), as well as training and instruction for workers in occupational health and safety issues (see also FSC 2009: 84-93; Cashore et al. 2006: 580). In addition, companies have been required to establish specialist positions for environmental health and safety. One interviewee from a developing country said that the FSC standards have helped reduce the high accidents rates in the forest industry.

An extensive study by Newsom and Hewitt (2005) for the Rainforest Alliance, which certify forestry in 21 countries according to FSC standards, confirms our observations. They found that worker training and safety were two of the three most frequently mentioned topics in terms of improved social impacts required within FSC certification. The most frequently mentioned improvements in their study were communication and conflict resolution with stakeholders, neighbors and communities, which are aspects discussed further below.

Our Russian interviewees mentioned benefits such as on-time payment of wages (see also FSC 2009: 94-95). Interviewees from developing countries spoke of the issue of hiring workers only with formal work contracts, which provided job stability. In tropical forests, forest operations are often seasonal, with the consequence that work must be interrupted during the rainy season. The result is “employees are overworked during summer and lose their jobs during the winter” (de Azevedo et al., quoted in FSC 2009a: 89). However, case studies of forest certification in Brazil have shown a win-win situation: when job stability and income are guaranteed throughout the year, social and economic benefits result because of lower manpower costs and incentives to invest in improving the technical capacity of the employees (FSC 2009a).

Other measures in the standards and criteria relate to the entire living conditions of forest workers such as constructing logging camps. Again, a case study from Brazil is illustrative:

> Usually forest workers sleep in precarious tents … without adequate toilette facilities and a proper place to eat their meals. In certified operations, logging camps are equipped with sleeping quarters, bathrooms, eating places, office, first-aid room, and leisure space, such as TV and a sports court (de Azevedo et al., quoted in FSC 2009a: 89)

There is a striking difference between the developed and developing world in these respects (Newsom and Hewitt 2005: 21-22). In the developed world, most of above mentioned topics are already well covered by existing legislation and regulations, whereas the FSC standards can enable significant improvements in the developing world (FSC 2009a: 92-93).

Several interviewees mentioned that the FSC framework is effective in developing countries in the sense that it requires companies to comply with existing rules, such as ILO standards and national legislation. Interestingly, national legislation is often seen as fairly good, but there is little compliance, and there is scarcity of state administrative resources for monitoring and sanctioning of companies and dealing with problems with corruption. FSC plays an important role in that it requires compliance with national legislation. In addition, a few interviewees said that it is easier to address complaints through the FSC system, via auditors, than through national legislation.

Whereas interviewees were relatively content with substantive criteria regarding labour standards, interviewees expressed more concerns regarding other social aspects related to indigenous peoples and local communities. These concerns have to do with both how the standards are written and interpreted in the certification process (FSC 2009a: 84-85).

There are, to be sure, positive examples. One concrete example of a positive outcome of FSC certification is the formal recognition of land tenure rights for indigenous people or inhabitants in local communities. Land rights help these groups maintain practices that are often their main source for living (such as reindeer herding in the North or nut picking in Amazonas; see FSC 2009a: 105). According to an interviewee representing an indigenous group in the North, the granting of land tenure rights within the FSC framework was the key reason why this group became a member

of FSC. A market-based instrument thus became an alternative solution when legislation was not sufficiently addressing their interests.

Land use rights can be extremely complex in many countries. The FSC certification process sometimes provides a strong model for conflict resolution (similarly, unclear land rights often create huge obstacles for certification in the first place, which is discussed further below). A quote from an interviewee from the FSC secretariat illustrates the potential benefits in land use rights in the following way:

> Pygmies…you could not find in the whole world a group least empowered, more marginalized, and yet, through FSC certification in this concession, they have had their observance of customary rights formalized to the extent that their leaders or, say, prominent people amongst the pygmies have been given hand held GIS-systems so that they can, for example, locate precisely their sacred sites so that nothing is touched in those areas. So, there's a degree of sophistication that has arrived through FSC certification that was unbelievable before. Nobody could ever think that the pygmies could handle modern technology to demarcate where they had customary areas they wanted to protect. And these areas are now protected!

However, our interviewees generally agreed that the FSC framework is stronger and more concrete on labour issues than on other social aspects. For example, one interviewee commented on a criteria regarding "cultural sites" (see criteria 3.3. in text box 2 above), which, in her opinion, was not applied because forest management had no knowledge or methods for taking into account these values. In general, the conditions for local communities and indigenous peoples are more socially complex. According to one interviewee, "You have to establish much more knowledge about the conditions for indigenous people within the FSC framework; and that you actually understand these values and adjust one's FSC forestry to such values" (representative from an indigenous peoples group in the North). Newsom and Hewitt (2005, see p. 20) also cited the less attention paid to cultural sites compared with other social goals.

If standards regarding workers are stronger and easier to apply, this is generally in relation to primary production (the forestry) and not for later production steps. Whereas FSC has several social criteria that address forestry, there has been, at least until recently, a lack of social criteria for the remaining production chain. There were standards for chain-of-custody tracking, but only for ensuring that products carrying the FSC logo actually

originate from a certified forestry operation. This problem was particularly emphasised by interviewees representing labour unions.

> The workers involved in the forest logging operations are very few compared to the number of workers employed in the woodworking, furniture or plywood industries that are being certified with chain of custody. So it doesn't make sense to us if they only improve the working conditions in the logging operations but not improve the working conditions in the wood working factories. It has to go along the chain. This is our opinion. (Interviewee from a labour union)

Labour unions have, however, addressed, campaigned and conducted a feasibility study around this issue. They prepared a motion for the GA 2008, which was approved. There is now the requirement that all companies that have a chain of custody or any other certificate must comply with core ILO conventions. Although an *ex ante* full evaluation of labour conditions at each stage of the supply chain would be economically infeasible, the implication would be that an *ex post* reporting of violations of any of the core ILO conventions among associated companies along the product chain could imply the termination of the certificate.[6] We conducted an interview with a representative from a labour union in the spring of 2009, after the latest GA, who considered this change as a milestone in FSC history. It is too early, however, to assess the potential impact of this change.

B. Local organization, empowerment, and employment

Another general issue that is seen as related to social sustainability concerns how the FSC framework has contributed to participation and empowerment at the local level, which subsequently may affect the capability of social stakeholders to make an impact on standards and policies at the transnational level (a point that is discussed later in the report).

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[6] Around this issue; see FSC 2002, FSC 2009d and motion nr 39 in the list of motions for GA 2008, available at http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/general_assembly_documents/FSC_General_Assembly_2008_final_motions.pdf Accessed 17 November 2010.

Previous studies and interviewees contacted for this study reported both benefits and challenges in relation to this aspect. First, it is clear that FSC certification can contribute to local employment (FSC 2009a: 95-96), although this was not emphasised by our interviewees. Second, a positive outcome of FSC certification has been the consolidation or granting of land tenure or user rights, as was discussed in the previous section. This has happened in Guatemala and Brazil (FSC 2009a: 219).

Third, certification has resulted in the empowerment of local organizations as a direct effect of the implementation of the FSC framework. According to several interviewees, this was an extremely important benefit of certification. Interviewees described how workers and local communities had essentially no experience with organization and collective action prior to becoming involved in the FSC certification process. One interviewee from a Southern country, discussing the general lack of organization among many local forest communities, said, "Once the communities is searching for FSC they have to be better organized, they have to organize an association or a cooperative, have to develop rules..."

Other interviewees indicated that the FSC framework has helped to educate social stakeholders on ILO standards and other global and national rules and rights, and helped forest workers obtain training in how to request better working conditions. In addition, FSC certification can also assist in raising awareness regarding the local forest management plan:

> Now, when the FSC local communities are really involved, they know exactly what the management plan is … what are their rights and what are their duties. So, this is the things that are really a marvellous improvement in the forest management in the tropics (Interviewee from a regional office in the FSC administration).

These positive effects are also apparent at the national level in countries where a national standard-setting process has occurred (including establishment of a National Initiative). "Among the non-market benefits, the encouragement of a more participatory forest policy process is often highlighted as an important benefit in countries which have undergone a national FSC certification standard setting process" (FSC 2009a: 219).

FSC certification can empower local societies on several dimensions: legal (consolidating land and user rights), social (local organization), and cognitive (learning of rights and rules). However, it can be difficult to

improve local empowerment in places where a local civil society is more or less absent. Moreover, FSC certification requires at least some level of functioning local infrastructure and institutions (if not to say democracy), in which various stakeholders are allowed and empowered to voice their concerns. Yet, many interviewees said that it is enormously difficult for some communities to reach this level of functioning.

> I think FSC is a good tool for local communities to be empowered, to be engaged in also local policies and development. The problem is that FSC is too difficult for community-based forests in the tropics. I mean, it's a system that was developed not for them. (Interviewee from a certification body in South Africa)

I elaborate on this problem more under section 4.3, *Explaining the challenges*.

C. Communication

A recent FSC synthesis report (FSC 2009a) showed that many stakeholders strongly appreciate the ability of FSC to bring diverse groups of people together in discussions and conflict resolution (FSC 2009a: 97ff). This occurs at the global level, for example in the General Assemblies, where standards and policies are developed and revised; at the national and regional level where nationally/regionally adjusted standards are developed and applied; as well as at the local level in relation to the actual planning process for forest certification. Broad stakeholder input that involves local communities and workers is required in each of these planning processes.

The FSC standards require certified forest companies to engage in a dialogue with, and take into account the concerns of indigenous peoples, local communities, and workers. "We have the chance to actually demand our rights," an interviewee from a developing country stated. Local communication may be indispensable when local inhabitants need to visualize and claim their land tenure rights, and require mitigation or economic compensation of losses caused by the presence of the forest company in the area.

> Certification has had many effects that cannot be measured in hectares or premiums. It has given a greater voice to indigenous groups who have been

> historically left out of the forest debate. Certification has made a tremendous contribution to creating space for broad participation… Regional standard-setting groups have brought together industry, the environmental community and local communities in an unprecedented way. (Ros-Tonen quoted in FSC 2009:30).

Newsom and Hewitt (2005) reported that communication and conflict resolution with stakeholders, neighbours and communities were, among six pre-defined criteria, the most common social benefits of FSC certification. Our interviews confirmed this picture. There is a general appreciation of the broad communication and potential for conflict resolution among our interviewees from both Northern and Southern countries. "[W]e have... initiated a consultation process that is bigger than what the legislation requires" (Interviewee from an indigenous group, North).

Several interviewees also mentioned that the FSC framework and procedures have contributed to an improved dialogue *within* local communities. There can be a number of conflicts among inhabitants in the communities. For example, those who work in the forest may not have the same interest as non-workers who use natural resources from the forest.

> [M]ost of the time it's only a part of the village that are actually involved in the forest management activities. But the rest of the village, they also have some traditional rights to use the forest for many different purposes. So, during the certification process that is something you discuss with the people involved in forest management and you also invite other people from the communities to participate in those discussions. And what you accomplish doing is that people have a much more, in the communities where they been through this certification process, the community is much more united in terms of their view on the forest management activities and also their view on how the forest management benefit the development of the community. Because many other communities where there's no collaboration between the part of the community involved in the forest management and the other part of the community there's a lot of misunderstandings .... In a lot of the communities there's actually a lot of conflicts between different interests ..., whereas if you try to involve the rest of the community in decisions related to forest management, and you have to do so during the process of certification, you can actually see it's got a very positive effect on a number of conflicts (Interview from an NGO in the North working on FSC-related developmental projects in the South)

Yet, establishing local communication in which all stakeholders can participate effectively is difficult. Earlier critical studies have documented

cases with a lack of real consultation and free, prior and informed consent (Counsell and Loraas 2002; FSC 2009: 109-112). A related problem is defining what a local community actually is and who is supposed to represent that community. As mentioned above, some interviewees argue that a "community" cannot be seen as one entity in which all inhabitants share the same interest. While FSC certification is a platform for this type conflict resolution, it was also mentioned by interviewees that existing tensions can stand in the way of a dialogue being established in the first place.

D. Small-scale and community-based forestry

On a general level, social sustainability and its linkage to the other sustainability dimensions concerns the equitable access to certification and distribution of benefits along a North–South (developed/developing world) dimension. FSC holds a great deal of hope and ambition that the organization can benefit small-scale economic activities as well as local communities in the developing world through the certification process (the same could be said for several other similar schemes, e.g. Fair Trade).

However, an interesting dilemma arises when focusing on small-scale operations. On the one hand, "small" is often uncritically claimed to be "beautiful," but in fact, ILO has observed that working conditions, basic salaries and worker health and safety can often be worse in a small forest enterprise than in larger companies (FSC 2009a: 117-118). Accordingly, small-scale is not necessarily always complementary with social sustainability. On the other hand, many forest operations in developing countries *are* small-scale and community-based and if one wants to reduce poverty and ensure benefits to Southern countries, it is important to address this topic.

How has FSC benefited small-scale and community-based forestry in developing countries? Indeed, one of the most serious criticisms commonly directed at FSC is its inability to encourage certification with these types of forestry operations. "One of the broadest critiques of FSC was that its greatest success occurs not in the tropical regions, but rather in the Global North with its temperate and boreal forests" (FSC 2009a:12). Hence, the majority of certified forests have appeared in the developed world and within big forest companies, rather than in small family or community-based forestry (Meidinger et al. 2004; Leigh Taylor 2005; Cashore et al.

2006; Pattberg 2007; Dingwerth 2008; Klooster 2010). Several of our interviewees were eager to discuss this problem.

It should be noted, however, that recent trends show that FSC has made clear progress in tropical regions. In mid-2008, the certified areas in the FSC North and FSC South were actually balanced (FSC 2009a: 13). This positive development is, however, a result of a rapid growth in certification in a few countries such as Brazil, Bolivia, and Russia[7] (FSC 2009a), so key obstacles that confront developing countries have not ceased to exist. While community forestry enterprises cover an estimated 25% of global forests, as of 2007, they accounted for less than 5% of FSC certified forests (FSC 2009a: 14).

The certification process takes time, is costly, and requires access to information plus familiarity with formalized, documented auditing procedures. Early on, FSC sought to simplify the process and make it less costly for small landowners to certify their forests through group certification. An outcome of the FSC social strategy (FSC 2003) was FSC's Small and Low Intensity Management Forest (SLIMF) standards, which were designed to simplify and reduce the cost for small-scale and low-intensity landowners to certify their forests. The SLIMF-initiative led to a series of modifications in the ways in which certification bodies could carry out certification assessments, monitoring and re-assessment for operations that qualified as SLIMF. It also led to a guidance document, which aims to:

> Provide guidance to FSC National Initiatives, national or sub-national standard writing groups and certification bodies when developing FSC forest stewardship standards. It is intended to help these groups to develop standards that are more appropriate to the needs of small and low intensity forest management units, and which use simpler language and include realistic requirements, whilst retaining the rigor of FSC certification (FSC 2009b: 4).

Compliance with basic principles and criteria is required, but the certification procedure is streamlined and the new policy suggests that FSC is open to more interpretative flexibility of the standards at the local level.

Examples of positive outcomes in relation to the SLIMF initiative are already apparent (FSC 2009a: 127) and statistics show progress regarding certification of community forest. Yet, FSC certification is still biased

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[7] Russia is defined as South

towards larger, industrial forest operations in the North. Although several of our interviewees appreciated SLIMF and other measures, most maintained that problems remain, as the following interviewee described:

> FSC certification, in our experience, is set up for big landowners and big organizations because of the complexity of the whole system and the expense involved. So, it hasn't allowed our real small growers to access, or to be certified and access potential benefits from being certified. Even amongst our group schemes, including the SLIMF, it's the bigger, wealthier landowners who are certified. You know the smaller people aren't certified purely because they perhaps don't have the technical know-how to do the administration around certification. (Interviewee representing economic chamber, south).

In addition, FSC documents acknowledge that the impact of certification for SLIMFs did not happen as quickly as expected or desired (FSC 2009a:127). The FSC global strategy states: "FSC has not made as much impact on small forest owners, community forests, or low-intensity managed forests as was initially hoped" (FSC 2007: 8). Simplifying the certification process and providing for interpretative flexibility does not appear to remove all obstacles.

A related challenge for small-scale and community-based forestry in the developing world is gaining access to international markets. A number of interviewees spoke of the obstacles involved in making a community competitive in an international market (see also FSC 2009a: 15):

> Well, this is being quite a challenging area because partly the inherent obstacle that communities face in competing in the international timber trade are extremely difficult to overcome because they have to compete on volume, quality, timely delivery; a whole load of technical factors which weight against them. It makes it difficult for them to be competitive. So, therefore you either have to look for niche markets or you have to differentiate that these products come from communities. And Fair Trade could help in this. Or you have to put in capacity building and FSC never had a mandate for capacity building although this may well change in the future. And look for new sources of income (interviewee from the FSC secretariat)

If access to international markets is established, many benefits for the community can arise. Consequently, a few interviewees spoke of social sustainability in relation to the ability of certification for linking forestry

operations with transnational retailers and other companies committed to corporate social responsibility (CSR). This line of argument indicates the integration of economic and social sustainability.

FSC can report progress, but so far hopes and expectations have exceeded results, and the need for more measures aimed at improvement is constantly debated. A discussion on connecting FSC to Fair Trade labeling emerged among both FSC members and external observers. In 2007, FSC and the Fairtrade Labelling Organization International started to explore and discuss the potential for collaboration. Soon after, a feasibility study was initiated. The feasibility study found a strong case for the development of FSC and Fairtrade dual certification. In 2009, the two organizations launched a pilot project with the aim of establishing a dual certification system that could bring benefits to small-scale and community based forestry.[8] This project aims to develop an affordable dual certification system for communities, which will then be incorporated into the existing FSC and Fairtrade certification systems. Time will tell whether this rapprochement with Fairtrade labelling will help to address some of the problems. Some thoughts on this and other challenges will be presented in the next section.

4.3. Explaining the challenges

According to most interviewees, FSC has achieved a number of tangible benefits that could be described using the framing of social sustainability. However, difficulties and challenges seem to predominate, and this was acknowledged in the FSC document *FSC Social Strategy: Building and implementing a social agenda* (2003) and in later strategy documents (FSC 2007). One of the interviewees from a Southern country who spoke of several positive examples, still made a rather disappointing final judgement: “it’s too few examples.” Therefore, it is important to reflect upon factors that may help to explain observed challenges and difficulties. I do not attempt to provide a complete list of explanatory factors here, but I want to address seven general factors that appear critical. These relate to discursive, structural, and organizational factors.

[8] http://www.fsc.org/dualcert.html Accessed 2 October 2010.

A. High expectations

First, difficulties should always be seen in relation to aspirations and expectations that are found in general discourses and framings on sustainable development related to forest certification. One could say that achieving social sustainability is indeed a tremendously ambitious objective given the exceptionally problematic circumstances worldwide that FSC is attempting to alter. As a previous FSC Board member representing economic/North indicated in an interview: “It is not possible to believe that FSC should be able to solve within ten years what the UN has not solved within 40 years.” The high expectations are in part reflected in the organization’s mission and goals, but it is also something that is constantly expressed from participating members. High expectations are specifically addressed in relation to social issues, as indicated in the FSC general literature review on outcomes and benefits (2009: 84). This report argues that stakeholders do not always recognize that FSC standards and certification necessarily result from a compromise between social, environmental, and economic goals (FSC 2009: 216-220). Moreover, it is stressed that:

> FSC impact on the complex social realities is indeed often very critically measured against these high expectations. At the same time, internal FSC Working Groups and external observers are demanding that FSC ‘raise the social bar’. These expectations are usually not addressed to other forest certification schemes with less prominent criteria for social impact (FSC 2009a: 84).

B. Lack of capacity to work for effective implementation

One key challenge in ensuring that high social standards are met is to have resources in place to ensure that social principles and criteria are actually implemented on the ground and in a consistent manner. Several interviewees mentioned that the most vital aspects are not in the formulation of standard principles and criteria. The problem is rather how certification bodies and auditors interpret the standards and how forest companies operationalise them. They criticize certification bodies for not auditing companies sufficiently or effectively.

A few interviewees primarily addressed environmental aspects in their criticism, whereas others addressed social issues. Interviewees also spoke

of differences among forest companies in terms of their CSR commitment. While some companies perform well and satisfactorily comply with FSC criteria, there is a common criticism towards FSC that it should be able to better police the worst examples. This problem was addressed in a letter signed by a long list of environmental NGOs, which was sent to the FSC Board and Secretary in October 2006 (Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010: 48). In sum, "what is drafted in the standard and what is implemented on the field there is a great gap. That is the problem." (Interviewee from a regional FSC office). "A lot comes down to the auditor, how the auditor interprets the standards." (Interviewee representing economic chamber, South)

There seems to be a general joint understanding among our interviewees that FSC has strong standards but too few resources to monitor the certified practice as well as the certification bodies. Neither FSC itself nor certification bodies can persistently confirm what is occurring in a forest operation. Certification bodies can only visit an operation at most a few times a year, and some interviewees expressed doubts that some certification bodies are entirely neutral in their auditing of forest companies, as there is an economic link between certification bodies and companies applying for FSC certification. FSC lacks resources to monitor the certification process or thoroughly scrutinize certification bodies. Funding has proved to be an persistently challenging issue for FSC (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010: 56), so monitoring of the certified practice is necessarily delegated to all sorts of other actors.

One way forward in improving capacities for effective implementation is through training of local unions and workers so they are familiar with and better understand the certification contracts, and can raise issues of non-compliance. This relates to cognitive power, which I will get back to later.

C. Poor local social and economic sustainability

Many of the observed difficulties described in section 4.2 relate to the fact that it is difficult to work for social sustainability if the conditions for developing sustainability are exceptionally poor. Several issues appear to be especially difficult for an organization such as FSC to tackle using a market-based governance system. Indeed, many of the accomplishments that FSC sets out to achieve require that strong infrastructure and institutions are already in place, locally and transnationally.

Existing conditions are based in cognitive (education, culture), organizational (existence and recognition of local civil society groups), political (democratic rights, land rights), and economic (access to international markets) features of the local community. Indeed, it is difficult to work for social sustainability (standardize and certify) without some degree of existing social (and economic) sustainability. "FSC can better expand its impact in countries with a supportive policy and regulatory frameworks with democratic space for civil society participation" (FSC 2009a: 217). One interviewee from a Northern NGO who works on preparation and the development of capacities for forest certification in developing countries confirmed this view. He spoke of the serious difficulties that are experienced when there is a lack of economic capital, poor infrastructure, low level of education and no experience of organized interaction among groups: "you work in a developing country with a weak democracy, with very weak institutions; you always wander into all sorts of weird problems all the time."

In their extensive study (regression analysis including 117 countries), Van Kooten et al (2005) argued that mature institutions (formal rules and informal constraints) explain why firms are more likely to seek certification voluntarily. "Institutions reflect a collective commitment to public goods, while protecting the rights of the private provider" (Van Kooten et al 2005: 861). They also argue that social capital is important to sustainable forestry as well as a true desire on the part of firms and forest landowners to certify forest practices. "In countries with higher levels of social capital, firms will be pressured to behave more responsibly towards the environment, and they are likely to be better corporate citizens" (p. 862). The lack thereof can thus be seen as a key obstacle to certification. The authors relate social capital to citizen empowerment, including citizens' abilities to influence political decisions concerning the provision of collective goods. This empowerment is operationalised in terms of overall literacy rate, both among men and women. Whether this operationalization really reflects the theoretical concept of social capital is open for debate. However, the important point here is to bring attention to varying institutional and social contexts that evidently affect certification potential.

The topic of unclear land rights is an important problem in relation to FSC certification. In the FSC system, only the landowner can be certified, but in many parts of the developing world, tenure and ownership are often unclear (or there is conflict and disagreement regarding who the landowner really is). Sometimes land users have no formal ownership or rights to the

land, but have a tradition of using of the natural resources of the forest or land (e.g. cultivation, grazing). According to FSC standards, such customary rights are supposed to be respected. Yet, customary rights can conflict with legislation, and tensions may arise, for example, if big forest companies buy land, claim ownership, and set up a plantation. Several interviewees mentioned this issue. One who was active in the recent plantation review process[9] (revision of principle ten; see Klooster 2010) argued that the issue of land rights is a typical social sector issue that FSC has difficulty untangling and tackling effectively. An interviewee from the FSC secretariat also addressed this topic and said that there is little FSC can do in cases in which national legislation and government block local communities from rights to their land.

> We can only certify where there are legal rights to land use, legal tenure. So, if something is not legal, we can't certify. That is again, in the case of Africa, it's a big problem, a major problem, and we really can't do much about that. I think that is one area where we bump up against a brick wall. It's a legality issue. (interviewee from the FSC secretariat)

> FSC's progress and impact is by far lower in countries with poorly defined land tenure rights and a high degree of centralization in forest authority and decision-making (FSC 2009a:217)

This shows that there is an important role for state actors to support the non-state driven process in various ways, both in the North, such as in Sweden (Boström 2003) and in the South, such as in Guatemala and Bolivia (FSC 2009a: 34-39). Governments can assist the certification process by (see, for instance, Rametsteiner 2002; Boström 2003; Cashore et al. 2006):

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[9] The certification of plantations has always been controversial in the history of FSC. For example, members of the World Rainforest Movement and other groups have argued against plantations in the FSC system. At the General Assembly in 2002, a motion was passed, calling for a working group to review the FSC plantation policy, in essence deciding whether to continue certifying plantations. Since 2004, FSC has run a process for reviewing the policies for certification of plantations. See http://www.old.fsc.org/plantations/ Accessed 2010 10 02

a) Ensuring the compatibility of ongoing activities with laws and international obligations;

b) Providing a facilitating legal framework (or removing legal barriers), such as ensuring legal rights to communities to live and work in the forest;

c) Setting and enforcing minimum standards so that ruthless suppliers cannot outcompete firms that take an economic risk by trying to obtain forest certification;

d) Recognizing and expressing support (legitimacy) for the non-state certification process;

e) Providing financial support to the certification process, and other resources such as technical and administrative expertise;

f) Taking part in capacity building;

g) Prioritising FSC certified products in procurement policies; and

h) Requesting FSC certification for state forested land.

D. Contradictions in using a market-based governance system to facilitate sustainable development

Another structural explanation for the observed difficulties relates to the contradictions of using a market and consumption-oriented governance strategy to facilitate sustainable forestry (Dingwerth 2008). As Dan Klooster (2010) argues:

> Certification cannot make the current model of insatiable demands for goods from all over the world either environmentally sustainable or socially equitable. This reflects the contradiction of using a market-based, consumption-dependent strategy to leverage sustainable development in a world where markets and consumption patterns are fundamentally inequitable. (p. 127)

In general, the labelling and certification strategy cannot avoid a general compromise between market pragmatist/expansionist goals on the one hand and environmental and social stringency goals on the other (Leigh Taylor, 2004; Boström and Klintman, 2008). The following quote, representing an

indigenous group from the North is representative for a larger group of social and environmental interests:

> Above all, we want the standard to be adjusted so that it improves continuously. And there we can feel a resistance from other interests, above all forest industries ... that we have different views on how the FSC should be developed

In order to achieve its objectives, a certification system such as the FSC has to achieve significant market impact, and hence enter into the mainstream market and invite powerful economic actors along the product chain. Too rigorous social and environmental criteria would entail huge costs, thus prevent a mainstream, fast-growth strategy. A market-based approach can, moreover, do very little by way of standardization to prescribe work for poverty reduction, basic capacity building (such as reducing illiteracy) or equitable wealth distribution, which are all topics that may be necessary prerequisites for sustainability, as was argued in the previous section.

Furthermore, as an unintended indirect effect, certification systems may in practice benefit economies of scale, thus mainstreaming industrial forestry. This can include intensively managed plantations, while placing small and community-based forestry at a symbolic and competitive disadvantage. In section 4.2, I discussed the economies of scale and barriers to certification that are involved in certification, and which negatively affect smallholders and community-based forestry and make certification more accessible to large-scale industrial forest organizations in the developed world. The various measures that have been taken by FSC (the SLIMF initiative) appear unable to fundamentally alter this result.

A large number of precise and strict criteria can add to the difficulties for small operations. Various market issues may encumber certification for small forest enterprises (Butterfield et al. 2005). They may be unable to deliver the large, consistent supplies of certified timber demanded by retailers or processing companies. The initiation and achievement of a certification process in small-scale forestry in the developing world is therefore often dependent on external support from donors (FSC 2009a: 117ff). Butterfield et al. (2005: 28) argue: “FSC will continue to struggle to capture SFE clients given the high entry barriers.”

The rapprochement with Fairtrade labelling could be helpful for FSC in its effort to handle some of the challenges of incorporating the non-

industrial elements of forestry. Fairtrade is explicitly aimed at altering trade relations along the mainstream commodity chain. Producer operations must be small-scale and family-based, and studies show that Fair Trade does contribute to direct and indirect benefits for small-scale farmers, their families, organizations and communities (Leigh Taylor 2005: 134, 137). Yet, it should be mentioned that the Fairtrade system is not immune to the dilemmas that arise from the pressures from conventional market logic, the mainstreaming tendencies and the increasing incorporation of large corporate actors in the Fair Trade network (Leigh Taylor 2005).

While providing a pessimistic analysis, Klooster (2010) offers some optimistic thoughts. Although the "neoliberal framework implicit in certification limits the scope of action" (p. 127-9), he argues that FSC certification is, while not sufficient, still potentially an important part of what needs to be a broader movement questioning and demonstrating alternatives to current practices of environmentally and socially damaging forestry (see also Leigh Taylor 2004).

E. The balancing of environmental and social goals: historical timing and vague sustainability framing

In our study, we found broad consensus among the chambers around the view that environmental aspects generally take precedence over social aspects, in both standard setting work and in certification. To be sure, there are studies of FSC certification that reveal that "the impacts of certification are not skewed in any one direction – for example, there is not a heavier emphasis on environmental changes and impacts than on social" (Newsom and Hewitt 2005: 31). In their quantitative assessment, Newsom and Hewitt found that there is roughly equal attention paid to a set of social criteria (six criteria) by the certification body, compared with a set of criteria that correspond with the other sustainability dimensions. That is, to be sure, an important observation, but it is important to take into account that it is dependent on the pre-defined parameters that were included in their analysis.

It is also interesting to investigate how interviewees representing different stakeholder groups perceive the balance when they can speak freely about any kind of environmental or social sustainability goal. Indeed, most interviewees, including those representing environmental NGOs, argued that social sustainability issues in general lag behind environmental

aspects. Although FSC gave considerable space for social sustainability concerns from the establishment of the organization, a more serious focus on social sustainability did not develop until after the start of the new century. By that time, social sustainability was more accentuated in the general sustainability discourse, and FSC faced escalating criticism from FSC members that it had failed in its objective of successfully incorporating social aspects (which was also admitted in the FSC Social Strategy).

One interviewee, who played key roles in both early and later stages of FSC development, argued that the standards that were set during the early 1990s mainly reflected environmental sustainability. This interviewee acknowledged the greater attention being paid to social issues in the last few years as a response to escalating criticism, but he argued that FSC specifically, and the forest sector in general, has not yet managed to incorporate them sufficiently. He continued:

> The environmental issues are more or less internalised in the forest sector globally, at least in the progressive part of it where you actually consider certification. They have internalised the environmental issue as a kind of necessary production cost, which is not questioned. The forest sector globally has not, so far, understood that the social costs and the social work is an equally necessary part of responsible production. It is still seen as a kind of hanger-on. (Interviewee representing environment, north)

Another interviewee also intensively engaged from the start of FSC, said that neither environmental organizations nor the commercial sector were particularly interested in social issues at the time of the establishment of FSC. In addition, another interviewee representing the economic South confirmed this picture: "The environmental issues were much more strong in terms of discussion, standard development etcetera. Also, the companies they don’t have experiences, they don’t have the staff to deal with social aspects."

A couple of interviewees mentioned the plantation review process (revision of Principle 10; 2004–2007) as somewhat biased towards benefiting economic and environmental goals. Social sustainability views on how plantations negatively affect smallholder and community certification were more difficult to take into account, according to their

view. Meanwhile another interviewee argued that the "social" bar needed to be raised for plantations (see Klooster 2010 on this issue).

Also the vague framing of social sustainability is important to consider. Bebbington and Dillard (2009) argue that the social dimension of sustainable development is more difficult to take into account in corporate public reporting and accounting than both the environmental and economic dimension because "the elements that make up the social dimension tend to be perceived as more subjective" (p. 166). Such views and experiences were reflected among our interviewees. Several interviewees from all chambers argued that social values in the forest are usually seen as fuzzier than environmental issues, which are seen as "more scientific" and therefore less subjective and more legitimate to consider. Here are two examples:

> Environmental and economic issues are more easily addressed by the FSC mechanism, than social issues /.../ well, you know environmental issues... they can follow like a guide on how to minimize environmental impact, it's more mechanical. The hierarchy of forest engineering is more easy to deal with environmental issues, but when it comes to social issues, such social issues that are very, ah, embedded in the region in the system as a role, it's much more difficult to address by the companies, much more difficult to be addressed by the certification bodies, it's more difficult to get addressed by the standard development, by FSC policies and so on. (Interviewee, economic chamber, South)

> The environment is placed against social issues in some situations in that some issues get very strong attention, which they certainly to some extent should have. But the social issues get somewhat jammed, and I recognize the same way of thinking in many other parts of society. The environmental thinking has come a rather long way /.../ while the social values in the forests are still usually seen as rather fuzzy (Interviewee, social chamber, North)

F. Translating a universal standard to local circumstances

In a multi-level governance system such as FSC exemplifies, it is necessary to draw attention to the likely tension between the need for universal standards and local adaptation. Several interviewees touched on this topic in various ways: "the problem with standards is that they have to be general. They have to touch upon areas and then they do it in a general way" (Interviewee from an environmental NGO, North). Social

sustainability means very different things for people in various parts of the world.

> In Denmark, it's mainly for recreational purposes you use the forest. I mean, you go for a walk or maybe you go collect some mushrooms or a few other things. But nobody is depending on forest resources for their survival in Denmark. (Interviewee from an environmental NGO, North).

The situation could be quite the opposite in many other parts of the world, where social sustainability is more about survival and basic needs. Here is another comment on the topic:

> The FSC group in general is very, let's say… it's very difficult for them to accept any policy specifically for a region. The argument is always: we, as FSC, we cannot develop a standard specifically for a region because FSC is international for all forests. So it's very difficult for them to accept to take a look specifically for Southern countries or for tropical forests and develop specific policies and standards for those regions. (Interviewee representing economic south)

It can be challenging to come to mutual understanding within a transnational standardization project as well as to reach agreement on precise and prescriptive standards and policies. However, a system with national initiatives that include nationally/regionally adjusted FSC standards is an effective way to cope with this tension between universal standards and local adaptation (FSC 2009a). For several years there were just a few national initiatives for developing countries and only in Latin America (Dingwerth 2008), but recently many such national initiatives have appeared in Africa (in part due to funding of the Africa office, and with donor requirements, according to an informant from the FSC secretariat) and Asia as well.[10]

The translation of a universal standard to local circumstances can be facilitated to the extent that local actors are able to refer to the global framework. The use of international norms and principles as an argumentative tool in local campaigning is referred as a "boomerang strategy" (Smith 2008). One interviewee representing an indigenous group

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[10] See http://www.fsc.org/worldwide_locations.html Accessed 13 April 2010

in the North argued that their group could potentially benefit a great deal in their struggle against local forest enterprises, but had to deal with the problem of a lack of resources: “If we had more resources, economic resources, we would be more on the international level within the FSC because there exists a completely different perspective on indigenous peoples.”

With this quote, we are getting closer to procedural and participatory aspects of social sustainability, which is the key topic of the rest of the report.

G. Relation between the procedural and substantial dimensions of social sustainability

Finally, a general explanation is arguably related to a procedural dimension of social sustainability–to the mobilization, involvement, and organizing of social stakeholders. Difficulties involved in achieving social goals may relate to participatory aspects of social sustainability. If actors that could be seen as representing the values and concerns of social sustainability cannot take an effective part within the arrangement on the transnational and/or local level, it is reasonable to think that substantive concerns are difficult to take into account. In the next section of the report, I will analyse participatory features, particularly difficulties in mobilizing, organizing, and categorizing actors representing these social concerns.

5. The representation and participation of “social” stakeholders

5.1 FSC’s organizational structure and members

FSC was set up as a membership organization, having both individuals and organizations as members. It is governed by a General Assembly of members, which assembles every third year. The members are divided into three chambers (environmental, economic, and social). Each chamber has one-third of the voting power. In addition, the voting power is divided equally between Northern (developed) and Southern (developing) country members in each of the three chambers. The day-to-day operations are delegated to an international board (with equal representation from the three stakeholder groups as well as from North and South) and to an

international secretariat with about thirty employees. This tripartite structure closely resembles the emerging sustainability discourse at the time of the FSC establishment (Pattberg 2007: 109).

A primary aim of the chosen organizational design was to ensure that no group could dominate policy-making or that the North could dominate at the expense of the South. This division of power between South and North has to be understood in relation to the tensions between developed and developing countries during the 1980s (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2008: 45-47). The tensions arose after intensive campaigning against rainforest destruction and tropical timber boycotting, which gave the questionable impression that forestry in the North was good, but bad in the South.

This inclusive structure is also mirrored in national or regional standard setting processes that are set up for introducing locally adjusted FSC standards. In general, the FSC is remarkably transparent (e.g. the informative website), hosts stakeholders meetings (the General Assembly, public consultations, etc) and disseminates information in both Spanish and English. Likewise, the inclusiveness model is mirrored in various policy and standard revision processes, in which systematic efforts are made to assure that stakeholders from each chamber take an effective role. Klooster (2010) investigated the recent plantation review processes (revision of Principle 10) and noticed that FSC made substantial effort to create a participatory process, including economic, social, and environmental stakeholders from all continents, both within the drafting group and in public consultations. "A variety of voices from all over the world were heard in a process that was explicitly designed to be transparent and inclusive" (Klooster 2010: 123).

Many efforts are made during the meeting of the General Assembly to make the deliberations accessible to all. One interviewee from a developing country spoke about his impression of the latest GA in 2008: "It was an experience for me to renew my confidence in the system."

Although FSC makes considerable efforts to provide opportunities for broad inclusion on both the transnational and local level, it is also important to consider if the conditions for effective participation differ among the different stakeholder categories in the arrangement.

It is useful to look at statistics regarding FSC membership. FSC has been steadily growing from its inception.[11] It has struggled to achieve a balanced representation of members from the different chambers, and there is still less representation of social stakeholders. By December 2009, FSC had 829 members, 371 from developed (Northern) countries and 458 from developing (Southern) countries. A total of 336 of the members belonged to the economic chamber, 342 to the environment chamber, and 151 to the social chamber.[12]

Table 2: FSC Members, December 2009[13]

	North	South	Total
Economic Chamber	182	154	336
Environmental Chamber	132	210	342
Social Chamber	57	94	151
Total	371	458	829

While the social members are fewer, the FSC appears, on the surface, to have done a good job in recruiting participants from developing countries (South). Yet, representation from the South cannot merely be counted in numbers. It is also important to consider that a member could be either an individual or an organization. Within FSC, organizations have 90% of the voting power and individuals 10% in each chamber. As Table 3 shows, there is a greater share of members *as individuals* from the social chamber

[11] See trend, p. 21 of the FSC annual report of 2007: http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/publications/annual_reports/Annual_Report_2007_ENG.pdf, Accessed 15 May 2009.

[12] Figures taken from newsletter issued by the FSC, volume 7 issue 11, at http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/publications/newsletter/newsletter_2009/FSC-PUB-20-07-11-2009-12-23.pdf Accessed 9 April 2010.

[13] Figures taken from newsletter issued by the FSC, volume 7 issue 11, at http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/publications/newsletter/newsletter_2009/FSC-PUB-20-07-11-2009-12-23.pdf Accessed 9 April 2010.

compared to the other chambers (see also Dingwerth 2008). However, what is particularly striking is that the North has many more *organizations* as members, whereas the South has many more *individuals* as members.

Table 3: Organizational and individual members in the chambers[14]

	Economic Chamber	Environmental Chamber	Social Chamber	Total
Organizational members	**54%** (180)	**43%** (148)	**37%** (54)	**46%** (382)
Individual members	**46%** (155)	**57%** (200)	**63%** (93)	**54%** (448)
	100 %	100 %	100 %	100% (830)

Table 4: Organizational and individual members in North and South[15]

	North	South	Total
Organizational members	**69%** (261)	**27%** (121)	**46%** (382)
Individual members	**31%** (117)	**73%** (331)	**54%** (448)
	100%	100%	100% (830)

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[14] The calculation is based a list with information on all FSC members, accessed from the FSC web-site; http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/Documentos_de_membresia/Lista_de_Miembros_del_FSC_-_SPA.pdf Accessed 9 April 2010. All members with names and titles such as Dr, Prof, Ms, Mrs, and Ing were coded as individual members. The figures are from 2009 08 07.

[15] The calculation is based a list with information on all FSC members, accessed from the FSC web-site; http://www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/Documentos_de_membresia/Lista_de_Miembros_del_FSC_-_SPA.pdf Accessed 9 April 2010. All members with names and titles such as Dr, Prof, Ms, Mrs, and Ing were coded as individual members. The figures are from 2009 08 07.

Being a member as an unaffiliated individual, compared to being a representative of an organization, means you have less formal power. In addition, interviewees maintained that those without affiliation to an organization tended to be weaker. Unless you are well known, an individual who wants to have a strong position in FSC needs to be backed by an organization with access to its collective resources (Ahrne 1994). This is even truer at the transnational level. It is easier to claim that you speak on behalf of a broader group of interests if you participate as a representative of an organization. According to an interviewee from the FSC secretariat, Southern members are often academics or people with particular interests, often middle-class. These people cannot easily be said to represent the "people" of the South. Dingwerth maintains that this asymmetric pattern reflects that "civil society is strongly organized in industrialized countries in the North but weakly organized in all but a few countries in the South" (2008: 63-64).

Our respondents had slightly different views regarding whether social stakeholders were under-represented or not. A few interviewees, mainly from the economic chamber, noted that social chamber members have far greater power per organization than others do because as a group, they still have a third of the voting power. One interviewee argued social stakeholders were actually over-represented rather than under-represented. Most interviewees would maintain, however, that social stakeholders were indeed under-represented because of their low numbers, which negatively affects this group as a whole in many other ways than just voting. An interviewee from an environmental NGO (North) made the following comment:

> *Interviewer: What do you think about the organizational structure with the division of these three chambers with equal formal power?*
>
> Interviewee: I think it's absolutely necessary! It's absolutely necessary because otherwise for instance the social chamber, which is by far the weakest chamber within the FSC both in terms of numbers of members but also especially in terms of funding. If everybody was member of FSC without this distinction, then this social interest would hardly be represented at all.

In what follows, I will further analyse the capability among social stakeholders to participate and make an effective impact on the standards

and policies of the FSC by using the notion of power resources (see also Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010).

5.2 The power resources of FSC members

First, *material power resources* include financial resources, equipment and (paid or voluntary) labour. Having the ability to pay the registration fees and send paid or voluntary delegates to the places where the transnational standard-setting process is taking place is critically important. In terms of working capacity, it is also important to make sufficient preparations before participating in decision-making. Several interviewees remarked that there is a huge asymmetry in the access to such resources, particularly if we compare members from the economic chamber (forest companies and big retailers such as IKEA) and members from the social chamber. One interviewee from a Southern country (economic chamber) said that "representatives from indigenous people in Brazil they don't take a flight to go to Germany or South Africa to discuss issues." An interviewee from the FSC Secretariat said that they "would like to see more participation, real participation of social groups, social organizations, civil society organizations, trade unions in FSC." However, the problem is that they have no money. He continues:

> In many cases, even the internet is not a good solution because if you want to get down really to the people most affected by forest activities, they don't have access to the internet. It's not only physical access, it's a technological exclusion. Some places in the world they don't have electricity.

Another comment was provided from a representative of an indigenous group regarding the much stronger capacities among environmental NGS:

> If you take the environmental chamber, for example, they are extremely strong in resources, well articulated, devoted, and they have personnel employed for things like this. Regardless if you talk about the WWF, Greenpeace or whatever, they have officials on both national and international level that deal with these types of issues every day. Of course that give them an advantage, they are ways ahead and can monitor the issues in a completely different way than what representatives for social organizations can do. Because social organizations are often quite weak

> financially, and they may have strong persons engaged but there are not enough resources to be able to sit and work with such types of issues.

Second, *symbolic power resources* include assets such as a generally recognized and appreciated name and logo that is associated with a particular organization (e.g. Greenpeace, the Red Cross, Amnesty International). It is difficult to ignore the claims and messages disseminating from an organization with strong symbolic power. Indeed, many social stakeholders are NGOs, and NGOs are in general the most trusted forms of organizations (Jordan and Van Tuijl 2005:13; Van Rooy 2004: 88ff; Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010). However, within FSC, environmental NGOs such as WWF appear to rank higher than social NGOs. For example, interviewees from the economic chamber mentioned environmental NGOs, not social NGOs, when they were talking about the most influential and appreciated actors within FSC. The same was expressed by interviewees from the social chamber, as stated by the following representative from a labour union:

> In mass media you only read about labour unions when it is about problems. You read about how labour unions organize strikes. Otherwise you seldom read about them. We are many times seen as something negative … workers are causing troubles and so on … That is the common picture of a labour union

This view, that environmental NGOs are seen as more recognized than social NGOs, is remarkably frequent within this empirical material. It should be mentioned, however, that the symbolic power of a particular type of organization is partially dependent on the organizational and framing context. For instance, within the ISO 26000 standard-setting process (for Social Responsibility), environmental NGOs experienced more difficulties in gaining recognition, whereas certain social NGOs had a much stronger profile (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010). Sustainable development was an important theme also in that standard-setting process, and thus the environmental dimension should have played a significant role. Still, the difference compared with the FSC case seems related to the fact that the social dimension (social responsibility) was framed as the key focus from the start (see earlier discussion in this report). Similar results could be expected if we examine, for instance, the Fairtrade system or SA8000. However, we would expect to find fewer social stakeholders and less

recognition of their interests in cases such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) or within standardization of organic food. The symbolic power of a particular type of member thus partly depends on the profile and framing of the particular standardization activity.

Third, we may speak of *cognitive power resources*, which include everything from language skills (in the case of the FSC, English or Spanish), on the ground experiences, sensitivity to different cultural traditions, ability to provide technical expertise in the matters that are relevant for standard setting and certification, as well as capability to provide alternative framings, arguments and viewpoints. Because of actors' different histories and locations in the social landscape, they have different access, experiences and abilities to provide knowledge, experiences, and information (Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010).

An environmental NGO such as the WWF is well known for its large research budgets and activities. In addition to basic research capacity, environmental NGOs also have two other advantages compared with social NGOs within FSC. First, they played key agenda-setting roles early on during the establishment of FSC and are therefore familiar with the frames that permeate the FSC principles and criteria. Second, specifically concerning the transnational level, an important cognitive power strategy involves claims of representing the global view or a claim of universality (Van Rooy 2004: 79). Interviewees maintained that it is easier for environmental NGOs to frame a global, not local, view on various problems (Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010). Local actors from the social chamber express very local perspectives, and local perspectives from hugely different countries may be difficult to reconcile.

> It's been very difficult to engage Brazilian organizations on the FSC international discussions. /.../ local NGOs working with social issues, they're much more focused on local discussions. They're not really trying to influence on the international level (Interviewee from economic chamber, south)

This skill in framing "a global view" relates to an ability to handle tensions that easily arise between the double need for universal standards and local adaptation, which I discussed in section 4.3. It appears particularly more difficult for indigenous and local community groups to, first, have someone representing and aggregating their view in the global organization, and second, translate global values and rules to local circumstances. Likewise,

in her study of transnational social movement organizations, Smith (2005) found it was more difficult for Southern affiliates within such organizations to relate their local concerns to global campaigns than it was for Northern affiliates.

From a union perspective, particularly to membership at the local level, standardization and certification may appear abstract and not as an effective strategy for improving social conditions. One labor union interviewee made the following remarks:

> Practically, in everyday working-life, certification falls somewhat outside the ordinary frame for the labor union. That is not the core activity. The core activity is to organize members and to negotiate with employers, to sign collective agreements and so on. And it is not highest on the priority list, as they have so few resources to work with.

Others made similar observations:

> Unions across the world have found it difficult to train the grassroots shop-stewards to be aware of certification and then to actively participate in certification discussions with companies as they become certified (Bowling, quoted in FSC 2009:86)

Similar kinds of remarks were also made by representatives of indigenous groups. It was mentioned by indigenous representatives from the North that FSC had not been effective, possibly because the representatives have been unable to fully comprehend the FSC system (understanding standards, policies, certification procedures, complaint procedures, etc.) or initiate local training at the grassroots level.

Within developing countries, the problems are accentuated because of illiteracy (Van Kooten et al. 2005) and low levels of public education (FSC 2009a). The problem of language barriers and level of education is frequently mentioned among our interviewees. The following quote is representative of a common view:

> *Interviewer: You said that the social chamber is by far the weakest, and that they're helped by the division with the formal equal power. But do you still think that the social chamber has a somewhat smaller chance to get their voice heard?*

> Interviewee: Yes, unfortunately. It's mainly for two reasons. One reason is the language barrier. A lot of the social members they are either from Latin America, or Africa. Or a few from Asia as well but mainly from Africa and Latin America. Latin America is probably the biggest in terms of social members after Europe. /.../ And that means it's… many times the social members they can be indigenous peoples, organizations, it can be unions, it can be cooperatives, associations of small producers and stuff like that, that has got a non-profit objective. They can also enter into the social chamber, and a lot of those organizations they also have a problem that they don't have any professional education, the representatives very often they are producers themselves. I mean, they come from small communities and a lot of them they only have like a few years of school training and stuff like that. So, it can be very difficult for them to understand and keep track of the different processes within the FSC and thus it's very difficult for them to influence.

After these pessimistic observations, it is only fair to mention that the other side of the coin is cognitive empowerment or learning (i.e. that engaging in the standard-setting and/or certification process provides invaluable experiences) (FSC 2009a: 113-116), something which was also touched upon in section 4.2.

Finally, we may speak of *social power resources* that include what scholars generally associate with social capital, or access to networks. Social power resources include the ability among actors to link to or to establish formal or informal cooperation or alliances. Certain NGOs may be well trained and organizationally structured to establish links, networks or alliances among groups on a global scale (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Smith 2005; Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010).

Interviewees representing economic and social categories speak of the organizational and networking skills of global environmental NGOs, which can assume chamber leadership. We note from our interviews the importance of establishing common viewpoints both within a chamber and with stakeholders from the other chambers (see also Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010). Otherwise, it is difficult to make an impact. The trick is to find collaborating partners both *within* and *across* chambers. Capabilities in using this power strategy to develop such alliances derive from networking skills, frame bridging skills, leadership experience, and resources to arrange meetings, seminars and workshops. These abilities differ remarkably among environmental and social NGOs. An interviewee from the FSC secretariat maintained it was more difficult consulting with social constituencies because they are often completely unorganized and have

difficulty expressing their wishes. Another interviewee with experiences from both the environmental and social chambers was discussing how to mobilize support for particular motions in the General Assembly. He maintained that people from the social chamber are far less trained, skilled, integrated, and organized than people from the environmental chamber in activities such as networking and mobilizing allies both within and across chambers.

However, organization of the GA in South Africa 2008 was mentioned as a positive experience for the opportunities of developing social capital and engaging in networking activities. FSC organized field trips and side events before the actual GA so that members could meet and talk. Such side events were used for the mobilization and preparation of common viewpoints before the voting within the GA.

> Through the side-event, which was attended by various actors, we were able to articulate what we think our view is /.../ So through that kind of lobby, various players within the FSC structure were able to listen to us (representative of a labour union).

Among the social stakeholders, labour unions appear as the strongest, which was a general view held among our interviewees. This relates to the fact that standards for labour conditions and rights in forestry were seen as fairly well covered in the FSC framework compared with standards for indigenous peoples and local communities. An interviewee from an indigenous group says that:

> We have completely different prerequisites. I experience that they can work with much more emphasis and that they have another type of organization and economic basis from which they can work, and therefore are able to participate actively in the chamber or in the board and so on.

An interviewee representing an indigenous group from the North who participated in a GA for the first time in South Africa 2008 experienced some confusion initially:

> *Interviewer: Have you been to an FSC General Assembly before?*

> Interviewee: No, it was the first time.
>
> *Interviewer: What were your impressions?*
>
> Interviewee: Well, first I was slightly confused. I thought it was hell of a running here and there, and discussions here and there, and I didn't really always understand the weight ... Then I started to realize, so to say, what it was all about, this coalition building and hush-hush in every corner and all corridors where you tried to find support for your motions and reformulations /.../ there are a number of persons who apparently are very engaged in the system and probably also have very much time to deal with it and which makes it to a clique of an elite who knows about all standards and guidelines and all policy documents and then uses a rather elitist discussion about formulations here and there... and that is somewhat excluding for people who are not so very well-educated or don't have the language or don't are experienced in these processes

In sum, we have seen that material, symbolic, cognitive, and social power resources appear to be unequally distributed within FSC. Although the social chamber as a group formally has one-third of the voting power, there are clear indications that they have less power resources in all of these four dimensions, and that places them at a disadvantageous position to terms of participating effectively and speaking for social sustainability concerns. In addition, there are other contextual factors, specific to the organization that further complicates the situation for social stakeholders.

5.3. Challenges related to scale, time, and categorization

In this sub-section, I want to emphasise a few factors that further complicate the issue of mobilizing and organizing social stakeholders.

First, it is necessary to take into account difficulties that arise from the *transnational scale* of standard setting (Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010). The decentralised structure of FSC with national/regional standard setting processes (National Initiatives) could be a fruitful means to make it easier for local actors to participate. If local actors can take part also at the transnational level, they gain insights and experiences regarding the key debates and policies that are the basis of the standards. Consequently, they become empowered to make a stronger impact regarding the FSC implementation at the local level. However, I have already reported how challenging it is for certain actors to participate *transnationally*. For taking part in transnational standard-setting activities, such as in the General Assemblies or in revision processes, there is a need for, for example,

significant financial resources (travel budget) and cognitive capabilities (framing a global view), as was discussed earlier.

Second, it is essential to acknowledge a temporal dimension, and thus see standard setting and certification as a dynamic *process* (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010). On the one hand, achieving social sustainability requires time: "FSC recognizes that in some regions of the world, the positive impact of FSC certification **requires time"** (FSC 2009:111; emphasis added by author).FSC authors refer to the monitoring and complaints procedures addressed to forest companies and certification bodies, when environmental and social NGOs observe inappropriate social and/or ecological management practices. In addition, the requirement of time concerns also the inclusive standard-setting process, as well as the planning process prior to certification, which includes broad and careful stakeholder consultation. Thus, the procedural dimension of social sustainability necessarily requires time. The speeding up of a certification process for particular forest operations may be beneficial for economic reasons, but not for the careful consideration of non-economic goals.

On the other hand, the fact that this kind of sustainability project is a *permanent, regular* activity creates both material and ideological obstacles for participation, particularly for social stakeholder categories. It requires considerable resources to commit and take part in a local or transnational standard-setting process that is extended over time. Long-term commitment may conflict with core activities, critical distance, and the ideologies or "movement-identity" of particular stakeholders, such as campaign-oriented NGOs (Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010).

A related obstacle that connects with this time/process dimension concerns the fact that the standard-setting process tends to be increasingly bureaucratic and complex (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010; Boström and Tamm Hallström 2010). The governance structures and processes become much more complex with forums for decision-making, stakeholder consultation (for both members and non-members), expert advice, working groups, and special workshops. Regional and national organizational structures add to the complexity. This is an inevitable effect of a democratic multi-stakeholder governance arrangement that needs to legitimize itself and respond to a multitude of various stakeholder concerns (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010). However, several of our interviewees, from all three chambers, commented on the increasing complexity and time-consuming negotiation processes. It is difficult for any

stakeholder, even the strong ones, to gain insight to know where to focus attention, resources and strategies. *Inter alias*, it is even more difficult for actors with little material, cognitive, and social power resources to do so.

Finally, the way stakeholders are categorized in the organizational structure may affect their opportunities to voice concerns, find collaborating partners, and form alliances (Tamm Hallström and Boström, 2010). The formal and informal institutional context of the governance arrangement, including rules and procedures, always favours some actions and categories of actors while hindering others (Barnett and Duvall 2005; and Betsill and Corell 2008). Earlier, I discussed that FSC's organizational structure was affected by the rising sustainability discourse. This discourse helped to legitimize the very idea of a multi-stakeholder process, as well as the inclusion of both environmental and social actors, values, and concerns. However, it is relevant to ask if it actually is in the interest of social actors to be categorized as “social actors,” as is the case in FSC.

One problem experienced by interviewees is the fragmented social chamber, which gives it a disadvantageous position in the preparation and coordination of views before decision-making (See Tamm Hallström and Boström, 2010: 130). All of our interviewees spoke in different ways of the fragmented nature of the social segment, in contrast to the other more integrated chambers. The social chamber includes a diverse cluster of groups and individuals representing indigenous groups, local communities, labour interests, small landowners, and individual academics. These groups may have an antagonist relationship towards each other, or at least distinctly different interests. For example, an interviewee representing an indigenous group said that it was difficult to see common threads within the social chamber and therefore difficult to identify oneself with it. She says: “it sometimes feels like we are our own chamber because our issues are not like the others.” A representative from a labour union addresses the problem in the following way:

> Sometimes the workers and communities they have different attitudes or different opinions regarding one particular company for example. There is one aspect that is called corporate social responsibility and some of the companies are using this as a very fancy pr-ploy. Once they already give freshwater to the community, or a mosque in the case of Indonesia, or a church and school... they think they are already fulfilling the corporate social responsibility but they are paying the workers less than the minimum wages! When we are going to complain about this we will be confronted by the community! They say that: ‘Ah, this company has

> already been giving good things for us! Why do you complain? If the workers are going on a strike then the company will close down and we are all going to suffer.'

Various groups are sorted into one chamber that is called "social," thus resembling the ideal of social sustainability. However, precisely as it seems difficult to sort out and categorize (frame) such a vague dimension as "social" (previous section) it seems difficult to lump together such a heterogeneous group of actors.

5.4. Empowerment of social stakeholders

FSC itself and its stakeholders have certainly observed such challenges around the mobilization and organization analysed above, and FSC is pressured to respond to these challenges. For the very legitimacy of FSC, the organization sees a need to make serious efforts to continue facilitating the inclusion of social stakeholders and improving social sustainability. "We are accelerating and widening our activities in the social field" an interviewee from the FSC secretariat said (see also the FSC Social Strategy, FSC 2003). FSC does this in various ways. For example, FSC has seen a need to make it easier for "weak" stakeholders to certify themselves. The so-called SLIMF process has been part of this endeavour (see section 4.2), which aims to make it less costly for small operators to achieve certification. In addition, the current rapprochement to Fair Trade can be seen as an effort to work towards such empowerment.

Moreover, FSC attempts to improve conditions for effective participation of social stakeholders, as well as developing country members, in the standard and policy development as well as certification processes. One can note two types of empowerment. Either FSC itself tries to empower weak social stakeholders or "strong" stakeholders try to empower "weak" ones. Interviewees from the FSC secretariat spoke very warmly about the role of some international NGOs, for instance WWF, and governmental development organizations for capacity building services. FSC itself or the "strong" stakeholders may contribute to the empowerment in different ways, which relate to different kinds of power resources.

The standard-setting organization could empower under-resourced stakeholders financially. It is, for example, possible to get funding for Southern members to travel to FSC General Assemblies. However, FSC

itself has meagre financial resources and is understaffed, so the organization can allocate few resources for such purposes. Meta-organizations (organizations with organizations as members) tend to be weak in terms of financial resources (Ahrne and Brunsson 2008). Several interviewees commented that FSC is extremely under-financed (see also Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010: 560). However the situation has improved recently, according to an informant.

> They (the FSC) try as hard as they can, but it's very, very difficult. It's very costly. I mean, to invite ten people from all over the world to come to a meeting somewhere in Europe is just a shit load of money! You know, you have to pay for hotels, you have to pay for the living costs and stuff like that and it's just really, really expensive. (Interviewee representing an environmental NGO, North)

It may be easier to get "strong" members such as WWF to empower "weak" ones. For example, in the FSC-plantation review process, a Swedish environmental NGO (SSNC) together with the Swedish development agency SIDA economically assisted the participation of one member from a Southern country.

> Big donors like the Swedish, and the Danish, and the Dutch you know, they sponsor money to the FSC so they can pay the costs for people coming from poor countries. So, the General Assembly is usually fairly well represented from both North to South and between different regions and between the chambers. (Interviewee representing an environmental NGO, North)

Another way to empower weak stakeholders is to strengthen their cognitive resources by providing training, education or information, or assisting with translation (see also Tamm Hallström and Boström, 2010). For example, FSC staff has attended regional union meetings within a transnational meta-organization for a labour union in the forest sector to explain the potential usefulness of FSC certification to union leaders.

Economic and cognitive assistance also relate to the empowerment of stakeholders' social capital. If stakeholders are able to meet, they have a better chance of strengthening their networking abilities. One interviewee representing a labour union appreciated the side-events and other interactive methods used in the GA 2008, which helped actors to network and develop their understandings. FSC also tries to arrange meetings in

various policy and standards revision processes in various places around the world, thus giving a chance for participants in different regions.

Likewise, to strengthen organizational capacity locally could make an immense difference. Several interviewees strongly emphasised the importance of capacity building, particularly in terms of establishing organizations such as cooperatives. This is also something the Fairtrade system has focused on a great deal, with positive results (Leigh Taylor, 2005). Interviewees said that the FSC framework has contributed, and has more potential to contribute positively in this regard. Yet, FSC alone can achieve little. Northern-based environmental NGOs have to play an important role.

One interviewee from the FSC administration in Africa said it is sometimes “too difficult for people to really appreciate what FSC is” and argued that FSC has to improve its communication to various types of stakeholders. One interviewee from a Northern-based environmental NGO who is actively engaged in capacity building in Latin America stated how important it is to engage in awareness raising around a number of issues including the need for organization, as well as to provide local communities with a new more economic view of their own activities. These latter aspects are emphasised toward the end of this relatively long quote:

> It's really difficult to get people, communities, to view upon their activities as an enterprise which I think it is. I mean it's quite logical that if you have activities and you work together and then you sell it to a third party then you actually have an enterprise or cooperative. But the communities they work very much… maybe not as individuals but they don’t see their activities as an enterprise that actually have to make money, reinvest in chainsaws, safety equipment, ... So they’re actually looking upon their activities on a very short term basis, and that’s their big problems because in the long run they will need to reinvest, and every time they need to reinvest they are all looking at each other and saying: ok, what do we do now? And that’s where the activities stop or they have to get out and get a loan and they become really uncomfortable with the situation. So, I think that’s where we’ve been working actually maybe the hardest and using a lot of effort and also resources on developing or training groups in order to see themselves more as enterprises. … changing the attitudes to the way they log or the way they manage their forest is much easier than changing their attitude to the way they actually organize and handle their organization because that’s never been really the focus of their activities.

This interviewee also says it is not a problem finding good foresters in these countries, “but you don’t find really good people within this area to develop business and train communities within this area.”

In principle, rule-setting organizations such as the FSC might also empower weak stakeholders with symbolic resources by visualising and recognizing the name and activities of particular NGOs, which have difficulty in presenting themselves to global audiences. FSC can also help in recognizing the social rights of local organizations, for example the right of a group of forest workers to organize. An interviewee from the FSC secretariat says that some social constituencies from developing countries have no experience with collective action at all. Their meetings with FSC may be the first time they get an opportunity to organize. In addition, interviewees representing labour unions mentioned that FSC provides an opportunity for the local recognition of social rights. Likewise, interviewees from a Northern-based environmental NGO observed a direct benefit from their experiences in Latin America, that state forest service agencies give special attention to communities with certification.

Empowering “weak” stakeholders is not without challenges. One interviewee from the FSC secretariat stated:

> What we wouldn’t want to is to create elites, I don’t think FSC would like to be associated with creating elites within the, let's say indigenous peoples, people who can get funding to attend big international meetings but lose their representativity, so I think that’s a real problem.

Northern-based environmental NGOs also tend to speak on behalf of Southern-based social constituencies. Is it self-evident that the former know what the latter needs and want? Is there a risk that the former focuses (too) much on environmental sustainability and misses important aspects of social sustainability? Are there important trade-offs between these dimensions of sustainability that are neglected? Indeed, our interviewees do not see many trade-offs between the dimensions, but tend to stress synergies. Could that be a blindness created by the sustainability frame? One could argue that possible trade-offs need to be discussed in an open political debate among actors with symmetric power resources. By contrast, one could also argue that no one would speak on behalf of these communities unless these Northern-based environmental NGOs did so.

Most interviewees say that the imbalances observed within FSC are a reflection of the power asymmetries in the world at large. We should not blame FSC for the "under" representation of social categories because that is how the world looks, the story goes. Rather, we should appreciate FSC for the ambition to at least attempt to counteract the enormously unfair global situation.

A few interviewees actually went one step further in their argument and stated that FSC actually must *discriminate formally* to the advantage of weak stakeholders. However, this would require reforming the entire governance structure of FSC. The following comment is clearly not representative of most interviewees views. Yet, it is interesting because it highlights that the most democratic structure in the formal sense is not necessarily seen as substantially democratic:

> I have always questioned whether it was appropriate to have the timber industry and the paper industry it selves actually involved in the membership, in the board and in the decision making process of the FSC.

6. Conclusion: Social sustainability requires social sustainability

With this tautological heading, I want to stress two aspects. First, a procedural dimension of social sustainability needs to be taken into account if actors want to improve substantive aspects of sustainability. This conclusion closely resembles an idea commonly found in the environmental justice literature (Agyeman and Evans 2004). Second, a non-state transnational standard-setter such as FSC that wants to improve social sustainability in various parts of the world has to work in localities where at least some level of social sustainability exists from the outset. Indeed, many of the tasks that FSC sets out to do require that strong infrastructure and institutions are already in place, locally and transnationally. In other words, it requires that some level of social sustainability and economic sustainability are already in place. FSC is often described as an exemplary and leading example of novel and ambitious rule setting for sustainable business, and there are a couple of the things to appreciate: first, the combination of social, environmental and economic goals, concerns, and actors; and, second, the combination of procedural and

substantive dimensions. It is without question that FSC indeed has achieved many things beyond business as usual.

However, this report has also shown that the inclusion of social sustainability within FSC has been and continues to be a challenging task. Although most selected interviewees perceived a number of social benefits/opportunities with FSC certification, the difficulties in fulfilling social goals appear to dominate. Most of these “failures” should not be seen as a lack of real willingness within the FSC to fulfil its mission. Rather, several issues are essentially incredibly difficult for any non-state transnational organization such as FSC to tackle.

This report has also addressed, for example, the historical timing and vague framing of social sustainability. In organizations such as Fairtrade Labelling Organization International, some of these problems may be less pronounced because concerns about social issues were at the very core of the mission.

The difficulties also concern organizational and participatory aspects of FSC standard setting, policy making, and certification. Again, this report argues for relevance in addressing the link between social sustainability in terms of process (effective and democratic participation) and substance (standards that can improve social aspects such as labour conditions). For example, labour unions are perceived as the strongest social stakeholders within FSC (not in terms of numbers of members, but in terms of impact). Likewise, the standards covering labour issues were also seen as strongest on the social side.

In general, it has been more difficult to recruit members to the social chamber as well as to assure effective participation. Material, symbolic, cognitive, and social power resources are unequally distributed among members within FSC, which give social representatives a disadvantageous position to mobilize and voice their social sustainability concerns. The transnational scale and the lengthy process, which among other things gives rise to an increasingly complex administration, as well as the role played by categorization within the FSC, add to the problematic situation for many social stakeholders. Indeed, precisely as it seems difficult to sort out and categorize (frame) social criteria it is difficult to lump together such a heterogeneous group of “social” actors. It is thus not self-evident that the best strategy for aspirations of social sustainability is to include and label a certain collection of interest groups as the “social category.” A more sophisticated arrangement for such a general group might be called for.

Providing equal formal opportunities, as through the tripartite chamber structure, thus does not seem to be a sufficient means for long-term incorporation of social sustainability. Arguably, there is a need for reflection on and possible refinement of the categorization. There is also need for further empowerment of weaker stakeholders through various means. Sometimes in collaboration with some of its most resourceful members or other public or private organizations, FSC certainly does what it can to empower weak stakeholders (education, assisting in translation, assisting in funding for travelling to FSC General Assemblies for members from developing countries, etc). Such empowerment issues and challenges are topics that need to be investigated and further analyzed in further research.

Currently, for the first time since the establishment of the FSC, there is a review process of all principles and criteria, a process that as usual includes broad stakeholder consultation.[16] FSC perceives a need for such revisions because of the availability of new knowledge, changes in international conventions, observed problems by stakeholders, and ambiguities in formulations (2009c: 7-8). Some of these problems do likely reflect the increasing attention being paid to social sustainability issues during the last decade. This study has not attempted to incorporate an analysis of this current review process and its possible outcome, however. Future studies will have to see whether a revision of the framework will foster an improved balance and integration of the various sustainability aspects. At least, such optimistic notes about an improved balance were expressed from a few social stakeholders that provided their comments on an early draft (FSC 2010, p. 5). However, a lesson from this study is that social sustainability within forest certification is a far larger issue than the inclusion and exact formulation of a set of principles and criteria. Issues such as empowerment, including local capacity building, and the mobilization and organizing of social stakeholders might indeed be even more important to consider in future reform.

FSC is appreciated for its high ambitions in integrating social, environmental and economic sustainability, but the organization still faces serious challenges. The FSC project indeed is a remarkably serious effort, with more than fifteen years of determined work on this topic. I argue it is

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[16] See http://www.fsc.org/pcreview.html Attached 2010 10 04. See also FSC 2009c and FSC 2010.

possible to infer that the observed challenges will be of key concern in all sustainability projects of similar kinds, in any sector. Any transnational rule-setting organization with high and serious goals of integrating all of these sustainability dimensions will most likely face similar kinds of challenges that have been observed in this study. The FSC at least provides a regulatory framework and an organizational and discursive platform to channel the issue and make room for a serious debate on the topic. FSC has provided a very promising "meeting place" for a very broad group of actors and has brought increasing attention to a range of social issues and their linkages to environmental and economic dimensions within forestry, locally and transnationally. FSC works constantly to improve the social dimension of sustainability. Moreover, a number of forest workers and local inhabitants around the world indeed enjoy some new significant benefits thanks to FSC.

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