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ABSTRACTS BOOK
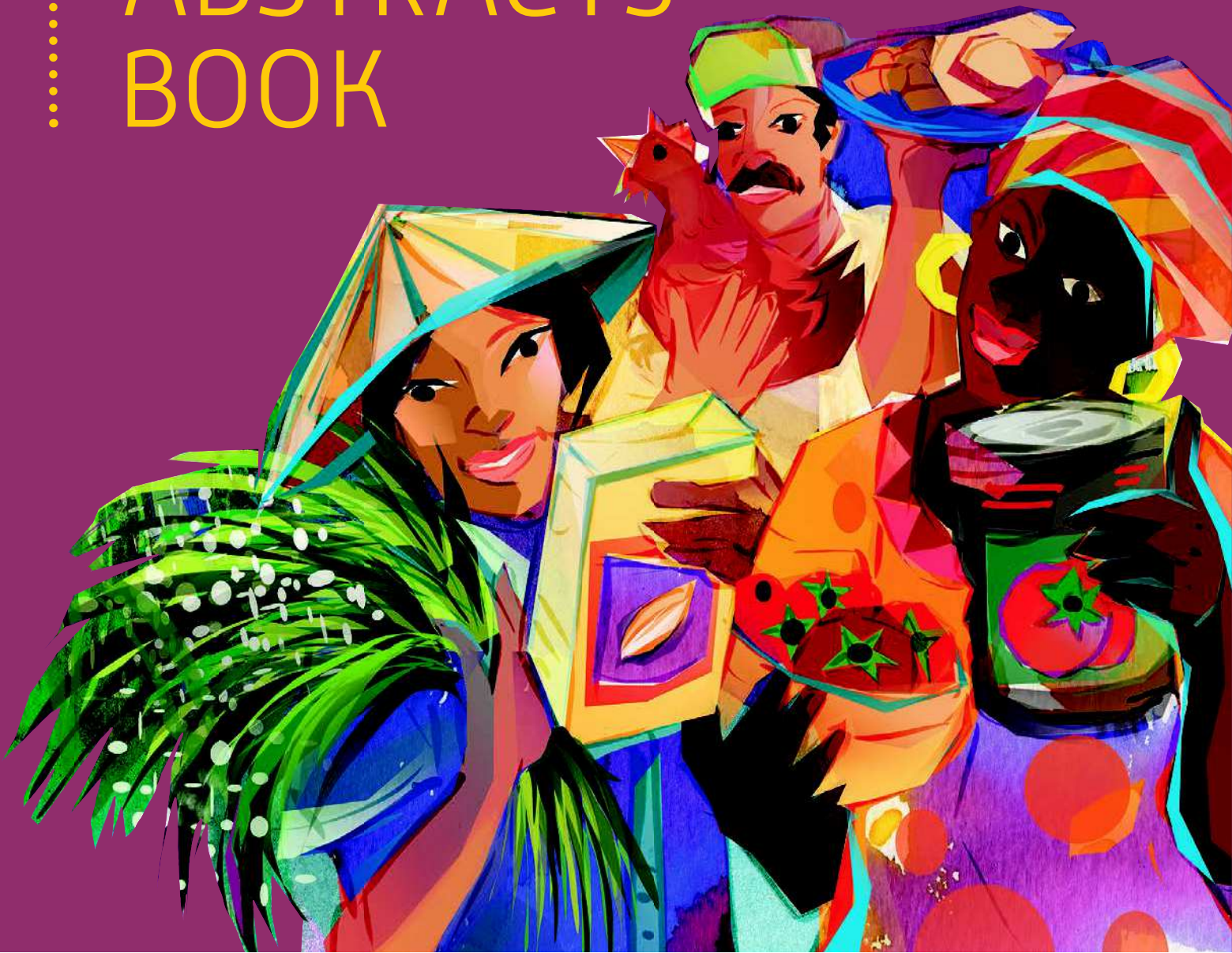
Evaluation of the FSC forest certification scheme in Brazil: a three level approach

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Introduction

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an international non-governmental organization, was created in 1993 in response to concerns over global deforestation. It is considered to be a pioneer of Voluntary Sustainability Standards and its forest certification scheme is one of the most important schemes implemented in the tropics. FSC emerged to counter the lack of legally binding international instruments on forests and the shortcomings of public forest policies (Humphreys, 2006) and as such has been recognized as a private forest regime (Espach, 2009; Pattberg, 2005). It can also be viewed as a component of an international environmental regime (Tikina and Innes, 2008).

The lack of evidence on the overall impact of FSC certification has led to intense debates among scientists and between different stakeholders involved in public action on tropical forests. Some government agencies and NGOs believe that FSC has a positive impact on conservation (Burger *et al.*, 2005; WWF, 2010). But others, including some NGOs involved in the creation of FSC, are much more circumspect or critical about the social and environmental performance of this scheme (Counsell and Loraas, 2002; Sahlin, 2013). Therefore, some civil society organizations, foundations, private companies and government agencies have begun to wonder if their investments in supporting FSC activities are worthwhile (Cashore and Vanderbergh, 2010). In view of these debates, it seems important and relevant to assess FSC's true impact.

After a critical analysis of the methods undertaken so far to evaluate the FSC impacts, the paper lays the foundation of the three levels framework we propose for evaluating FSC's effectiveness framework, and shows some results of its application in the Brazilian context.

Methodology

The methodology we used rely on our participant observations as members of the FSC entities and consultancies. We have also conducted a field research in a natural forest area in the Pará State in Brasil (Santarem region). The fieldwork was supplemented by a series of semistructured interviews with key players involved, at the Federal and local level, in the development and implementation of forest policies and certification in Brazil. Finally, the methodology was complemented by an extensive literature review of the evaluation of the forest certification schemes.

Assessing the effectiveness of forest certification schemes: a critical review

Recent studies have taken stock of what we know and what we don't know about the assessment of forest certifications (Cashore and Auld, 2012; Romero and Castrén 2013; van Kuijk *et al.*, 2009). These surveys reveal the difficulties in assessing the overall environmental impact of FSC or, in other words, the extent to which FSC contributes to alleviating the problems it addresses (Gulbrandsen, 2010; Visseren-Hamakers and Pattberg, 2013).

At the micro-scale, many of the existing evaluation studies have chosen to assess the effectiveness of certification schemes using a counterfactual. This remains a huge challenge because the evaluation must be based on a credible counterfactual, a configuration that is rarely observed in reality (Blackman and Rivera, 2010). For this reason, a lot of research are not based on indicators of impacts, a dimension that weakens the findings of evaluations. Despite these difficulties, the studies that have applied this meth-

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odology generally show that environmental management is more effective in certified forests than in non-certified ones. For instance, in Brazil, a study was conducted in a community forests in Acre State through a survey of local perceptions regarding a series of parameters such as the signs of forest degradation (deforestation, forest fires, game hunting, etc.) and the local people's environmental awareness (waste storage, knowledge of regulatory measures, etc.). The study reveals that 87% of the certified communities' members said they implement wildlife protection measures – such as not hunting with dogs, catching game only for their local consumption, respecting a hunting calendar, and preserving trees that provide food for wild animals –, whereas only 44% of the non-certified control group members said they took such measures. (de Lima *et al.*, 2008).

Approaches comparing situations before and after obtaining certification clearly reveal the improvements resulting from certification. This methodology is generally based on the analysis of the corrective action requests (CARs) issued by third-party certifying bodies. (Blackman *et al.*, 2014; Cubbage *et al.*, 2010). However, these assessments do not prove that the FSC standards actually refer to a "solving problems" goal. They only indicate that the operator complies with a certain standard of certification, which itself only reflects a compromise between different and sometimes incompatible interests (van Kuijk *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, several authors stress the fact that standards are vague and subject to interpretation, which results in the implementation of insufficiently stringent heterogeneous management measures (Elbakidze *et al.*, 2011; Schulze *et al.*, 2008).

The first level: defining a focal point

For the evaluation to be truly relevant, it must measure the gap between the present state of affairs and the situation that should be achieved in order to solve the environmental problem that justified the creation of the scheme. We have applied a strategic environmental management analysis approach (Mermet *et al.*, 2010) in order to "transcode" various information (scientific papers, societal demands, international commitments, etc.) into a benchmark that includes four major management objectives (Guéneau, 2011): avoiding large-scale conversion of natural forests, conserving key natural forest habitats, restoring the forest ecosystem and maintaining the ecosystem functions of production forests.

We have analyzed whether the FSC-Brazil standards are consistent or inconsistent with this benchmark. Our results show that the Brazilian standards for Amazonian forests include additional criteria that are intended to fill gaps in the Brazilian legal framework as it applies to the Amazon, especially with regard to illegal logging and the status of forest communities. However, the full implementation of these standards remains contested, as many socio-environmental conflict have been observed. The Brazilian standard for plantation forests reflect a more business-oriented vision as it has evolved in a direction that allows companies to convert some natural areas into plantations, although it is limited.

The second level: assessing indirect impacts at the landscape level

To demonstrate the effectiveness of certification schemes, it will be necessary to assess to what extent the strengthening of environmental management measures in the certified forest unit may lead to the shifting of harmful activities to adjacent areas. At the landscape level, it is also relevant to assess whether the certified company deals with the impacts caused by log transportation from the concession to the industry. In the Pará State, several conflicts between traditional communities and logging companies have been notified regarding the wood trucks impacts in the villages or in the areas of traditional activities. Finally, the evaluation at the landscape level has to deal with the social transformations induced by the logging activities. For instance, the new forest roads can bring in new farmers to forest areas that were hitherto relatively undisturbed.

Some FSC-certified companies in Amazonia have to face several challenges regarding the legalization of land tenure and land procurement by new migrants. In the case of Brazilian certified forest plantation, the risk of social and environmental impacts caused by a large quantity of workers from various Brazilian states can't be neglected.

The third stage: policy implications

Forest certification can have policy and institutional implications for other processes that may help solve the problem or, on the contrary, worsen it, irrespective of the effects observed in the field, on the forest certified unit and on its immediate environment (Auld *et al.*, 2008). One of the key points that any assessment must be able to determine is to what extent FSC certification acts as a vector of social transformation, or on the contrary, whether it is a "green marketing" instrument in line with the neoliberal governmentality principle.

Although some FSC supporters have used their positions in the Federal government to implement forest policy reforms in Brazil, the FSC has not succeeded in transforming the forest sector and promoting the emergence of forest management alternatives. The number of forest communities that have obtained a forest management certification is dramatically low, and these communities have many difficulties to comply with FSC standards.

Conclusion

A lot of studies conducted at the micro-level showed the positive effects of certification, including in Brazil (Basso *et al.*, 2011; de Lima *et al.*, 2009). The application of the three level framework evaluation of the FSC in Brazil reveals that the technocratic and optimistic vision of the FSC improvements on the ground, that rely on the stringency and the rigorous implementation of standards at the management unit scale, can be counterbalanced by negative environmental, social and policy effects on a wider scale. These findings suggest rethinking the research on the impacts of forest certification that focus primarily on the end of the policy cycle, by integrating the analysis of the construction of the standards in any evaluation methodologies.

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