

Getting certified in Papua New Guinea

An indigenous community attains FSC certification with ITTO assistance

by
Yati Bun

Executive Director

FPCD

yabun@datec.net.pg

IN A RURAL COMMUNITY in Papua New Guinea (PNG), indigenous forest resource owners are managing their forest resources according to FSC standards for sustainable forest management. The members of the Madang Forest Resource Owners Association (MFROA) have committed themselves to managing their forests under the auspices of the FSC PNG National Standards with technical assistance from the Foundation for People and Community Development (FPCD). This partnership has been in place since 1997 when the MFROA approached FPCD for assistance in managing their forests sustainably.

The MFROA is made up of indigenous resource owners who have experienced the unequal distribution of benefits under (and sometimes destructive practices of) foreign logging companies and have decided to develop and manage their own forest under sustainable forest management practices. FPCD, a local non-government organization, promotes ecoforestry as its main program. It assists resource owners to develop their forests by providing them with small portable sawmills. The timbers milled are exported to buyers in New Zealand under the Eco-timber label.

FPCD has been working with MFROA under this arrangement and has transferred skills and technology to members of MFROA. Since they have begun managing and developing their forests with assistance from FPCD, their lives and living standards have improved. The income generated from the sale of Eco-timber is higher than concession fees received from foreign logging companies.

Most of the forests on or around the land of members of MFROA consist of secondary regrowth, having been previously logged by foreign companies. These operations typically left little or no long term benefits for the indigenous resource owners, who received only a fraction of the income generated by these export logging operations.

In 2005, FPCD developed a group certification scheme, the Indigenous Community Forestry certification scheme (ICF), to demonstrate sustainable forest management and to make certification accessible to forest resource owners in PNG. In June of the same year, FPCD engaged US based FSC third party accredited certifier, Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), to conduct a preliminary assessment of the ICF scheme.

The assessment was intended to identify potential areas of non-conformance with FSC standards that could constitute a barrier to the issue of a group certificate by FSC. The SCS auditor identified certain areas or gaps that FPCD/MFROA needed to address in preparation for the full evaluation. These gaps included technical training for staff and resource owners, updating documents and the development of FPCD policies and guidelines for sustainable forest management according to the FSC Principles and Criteria.

In January 2006, ITTO, under ITTC Decision 5(XXXIII), provided financial assistance to FPCD to address these gaps and allow for the full evaluation of its ICF group certification



Certified: ICF group members with timber stacked for grading and export. *Photo: Y. Bun*

scheme. This assistance enabled FPCD to conduct a gender sensitization workshop, two first aid training workshops for FPCD staff and MFROA members, and also to purchase safety equipment for the chainsaw and sawmill operators. A database was established and the development and updating of forest management policies was also carried out. MFROA members were prepared for the full evaluation under the FSC certification process through awareness raising and information distribution.

The full evaluation was conducted in June 2006 by SCS with the assistance of a local consultant. It included document review, stakeholder consultation and field visits. The SCS auditors visited ICF group members in Uya, Aronis, Jobtor and Malas villages in Madang, interviewing local resource owners and checking FPCD's operations within the sustainable forest management area. FPCD and MFROA staff were also interviewed and FPCD's forest management and development documents were reviewed. Stakeholders from various government and civil society organisations including the PNG Forest Authority, The Nature Conservancy, WWF, FORCERT, and the EU Eco-forestry Program were also interviewed.

The full evaluation resulted in the issue of 12 corrective action requests (CARs). Three of these were major CARs that were to be addressed before the issuance of a group certificate. The remaining nine were to be addressed over a period of 12 months. The three major CARs were addressed in the six months after the evaluation was carried out and work to address the remaining nine is nearly complete.

In May 2007, FPCD was issued a FSC group certificate by SCS. FPCD and MFROA can now clearly demonstrate sustainable forest management in this area. The FSC certification has also made a strong contribution to FPCD's goal of improving the livelihood of the indigenous people of PNG through sustainable forest development. The group certificate will enable the members of MFROA to obtain higher prices for their export timber while still obtaining their basic subsistence needs from the forest.

Details of ITTO-supported work are available from emi@itto.or.jp.