



Event Covered: 2015 PEFC Forest Certification Week held in Montreux, Switzerland, December 7–10, 2015



The Standards Reporter

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This report covers the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification’s (PEFC) third Forest Certification Week held in Montreux, Switzerland, from December 7-10, 2015, where 130 participants from 50 countries came together to discuss sustainable forest management (SFM) and developments associated with the PEFC system. National governing bodies (NGBs), certification and accreditation

bodies, academics and representatives from the timber, pulp and paper industries were represented. The planned revision of PEFC’s international standards in 2016 is timely, as certification will be an important vehicle for realizing—and tracking—progress towards global development priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the international climate agreement reached at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21) UN Climate Change Conference. PEFC endorses national forest certification systems that have demonstrated compliance with their globally recognized Sustainability Benchmark. National forest management standards must be tailored to country-specific priorities, as defined through a multistakeholder, consensus-driven process.

Day 1: Progress Update

Over 267 million hectares of forest are certified to PEFC’s internationally recognized Sustainability Benchmark. The most significant growth in certified hectares came from China, Sweden and Canada in 2015 with the inclusion of large forest areas in Russia planned for 2016. The PEFC “family,” comprised of 41 national systems in 40 member countries, officially welcomed its newest country members, New Zealand and India, at its 20th General Assembly. Hungary is expected to join in early 2016, while Thailand, Guatemala, South Africa, Ghana, South Korea, Nepal and others are in the process of pursuing membership. PEFC’s Chain of Custody (CoC) certification, which tracks sustainably sourced forest-based materials to final products, grew by 3.2 per cent in 2015 and now covers 17,243 companies.

Technical Workshops

The week began with a technical workshop on group certification. Representatives from Spain, the United States and Southeast Asia first shared their experiences with this approach. Participants then broke out into small interactive groups. Group certification was lauded by many country representatives for its importance to their smallholders, notably by countries currently developing their national forest management standards, including: Guatemala, Vietnam, Ghana, South Africa, South Korea, Nepal and others. PEFC pilot group certification projects are ongoing in Vietnam, Thailand, Nepal and Malaysia.

Group Certification: Adding Value for Smallholders

While large companies owning or managing forests can absorb certification costs, smallholders—who manage 30 percent of the world’s forests—often find it unfeasible. With this in mind, PEFC developed and popularized the group certification approach over a decade ago, to enable small forest landowners to work together and share costs, responsibility, and knowledge. Nearly 1 million small forest owners have PEFC certification. Michael Berger, Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Technical Unit at PEFC International, commented on the consistent interest from countries for group certification, and the need to get the accreditors’ acceptance for this approach. In terms of terminology, “groups” can be organized in different ways—by political boundaries, watersheds or other geographic features, or through common interest in certification—and the mechanisms of how they work remains identical. A “group” must be legally bound together, however, via a written agreement. Group certification at PEFC is elaborated in the PEFC ST 1002:2010 international standard.

Richard Laity, Projects and Development, PEFC International, offered perspectives from Southeast Asia, where 71.6 million people are forest smallholders. In spite of the significant value of the forest industry in this region—USD 9 billion/year with an annual production of 184 million m³—smallholders face significant barriers to trade and market access when they are not certified. In this context, group certification provides a very real mechanism for market access and improved livelihoods.



PEFC Chief Executive Officer Ben Gunneberg

PEFC and Responding to Local Context

The flexibility provided by PEFC's forest certification system means that the standards can be adapted to local contexts to respond to diverse conditions (geographical, economic, social) faced by forest owners around the world. The [State of Sustainability Initiatives Review 2014](#) supports this approach, stating that "the equal application on of identical standards may not always be effective for maximizing sustainable development outcomes or consistently linking sustainable consumption with sustainable production." Accounting for contextual differences, which is fundamental to the implementation of sustainable development, is aligned with PEFC's historical origins.¹

William (Bill) Street, Outgoing PEFC Council Chairman, shared that "the original family founders of PEFC designed a system to fit the needs of small European landowners. What they did not know at the time was that their system would fit like a glove in the Global South, where it is important for the national governing bodies to administer their own land and system. The highly decentralized structure of PEFC provides nations with a structure they find acceptable."

The flexibility of the PEFC certification scheme in terms of adapting to specific national circumstances and varying sizes of land ownership is a strength that has and will continue to allow them to overcome important challenges associated with forest certification. "Our zero to 60 speed is slow, but the 60 to 120 speed is really fast," continues Mr. Street, because "bottom-up consensus building takes time. But once that is in place, everything happens really quickly."

Sarah Price, Head of Projects and Development, PEFC International, reflected on the supportive role of the Spanish government in integrating the PEFC scheme to the national context and establishing an enabling environment for group forest certification via tax incentives, absorbing certification costs, advisory services and capacity building. To date, 8 out of 17 regions in Spain have obtained regional certification. Tom Martin of the American Forest Foundation (AFF) shared that some American states, such as Wisconsin, have tax abatement programs whereby lower tax rates are charged on forested lands. Dr. Ha from the Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry stated that the Vietnamese government is setting an ambitious target of 2 million hectares of certified forests by 2020 (137,000 ha are currently certified). Such government incentives can help drive the formation of smallholder groups for certification; the challenge remains getting the management unit size right.

Tom Martin from the AFF led a thought-provoking session on how to engage small, private forest owners in sustainable forestry—a group that represents the largest management class in the United States, with 22 million landowners. Because land is largely inherited through families, and holds ancestral, cultural and recreational value to owners, the "making money" angle of certification is largely unsuccessful in the

American context. Identifying the goals and expectations of different groups is therefore important, whether it be for habitat protection, hunting or privacy and seclusion. Groups in the United States can be organized by state boundaries, through industry associations or companies with certified fibre and other forest product demands, or by consultants specialized in bringing together owners for group certification.

Day 2: Rooting Down

Participants were updated on advances being made at PEFC, including new and ongoing projects, European Union (EU) affairs, marketing and communications, and upcoming technical issues. Discussions were structured as a "marketplace" of ideas, with participants covering trademark protection, training and synergies followed by a "tour-du-monde" panel featuring six different countries. The day closed with a culinary presentation from PEFC Spain and PEFC Italy on wild food forest products.

Updates from the PEFC Secretariat

PEFC is providing active support to 17 countries, including South Africa, Guatemala, Tunisia, Algeria, and Gabon, in the process of developing or updating their national forest certification standards.

¹ This approach aligns with the principle of subsidiarity, which advocates for management at a level where tasks can be performed effectively to account for contextual differences. "Implementing the principle of subsidiarity through the development of localized standards can help ensure that a standards system more accurately internalizes the costs of sustainable production and thereby more efficiently promotes the development of a green economy (Potts et al. [2014], *The State of Sustainability Initiatives Review 2014: Standards and the Green Economy*. Winnipeg, MB: International Institute for Sustainable Development, p.48)."



Tour du Monde Discussion

PEFC's Collaboration Fund resulted in four projects in 2015 to advance forest certification and the 2016 Call for Proposals is open until March. A Trademark Protection Strategy to guide members in avoiding trademark misuse is being developed and implemented. Concern was expressed about approaches that focus on forest byproducts instead of the holistic goals of SFM in relation to the EU's move to subsume SFM under the biomass sustainability criteria. The EU Timber Regulation revision provides PEFC with an opportunity to increase the contribution that certification can make. In 2015, the PEFC certification standard received a 96 per cent rating from an independent body, and a 70 per cent rating from the WWF Certification Assessment Tool. An in-house study revealed PEFC's strength in reporting in local languages, reflecting its bottom-up country-level approach.

Trees Outside of Forests

Sarah Price, Head of Projects and Development, PEFC International, reported on the status of PEFC's initiative to consider certifying trees outside of forests, such as trees in agricultural and urban areas. An expert group was recently convened in Geneva and provided much insight to PEFC for developing a solution for including these trees. Certification will likely focus on land management instead of the trees themselves, though PEFC is still in the initial scoping phase. In his address, the newest PEFC member, Sachin Raj from the Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests, and the representative for the newly endorsed PEFC India, stressed the importance of this topic for India, where 80 per cent of industrial wood comes from trees outside forests.

Tastes from Sustainable Forests

Ana Belén Noriega from PEFC Spain and Antonio Brunori from PEFC Italy demonstrated that non-wood forest products can also be CoC certified, via the commercial development of certified wild food products. Their projects promote the multifunctional management of forests by broadening the range of products to be considered—truffles, pine nuts, mushrooms, ham, honey and pine-infused beer. The projects resulted in an award-winning cookbook in Spain and award-winning beer in Italy.

Day 3: Branding, Identity and Revising Standards

The morning covered branding and identity, followed by a review of the upcoming technical revisions of PEFC's Sustainability Benchmark. The afternoon was reserved for PEFC members to discuss the General Assembly topics and funding.

Branding and Logo

Chairman William Street led an interactive morning session on PEFC's ongoing identity and branding efforts. Developing standardized branding poses particular challenges for an organization that prides itself on diversity and the local ownership of its members. It was agreed, however, that a globally recognized brand is important, and the secretariat will form a committee to finalize this process.

Brian Kernohan, Hanock Natural Resources Group, made practical recommendations on how to communicate impact. For forestry, topics that resonate best are the impact of sustainable forest management on freshwater availability, impacts for climate change, and impacts for biodiversity and habitat protection. An important question is how to distinguish the impacts of certified forests from those of other non-certified forests.

Revising the Sustainability Benchmarks

Technical officer Christian Kämmer gave a presentation on the upcoming revision of PEFC's Sustainability Benchmark, a set of over 300 criteria that form the basis against which national certification systems are assessed during PEFC endorsement. This process will begin in 2016 and will be complete by 2017. A wide range of technical documents will be reviewed and revised if necessary, covering their SFM standards, group certification standards, CoC standards, the usage of the PEFC logo, the requirements of certification bodies and others.

Within the small group discussion on the revision of the SFM standard, the general sentiment was that meta-standards should be globally applicable benchmark standards that lay the foundation for SFM across member countries and do not attempt to cover all aspects and products of sustainable forests (e.g., ecosystem services, timber, pulp, non-wood forest products) that are better defined at the national level. Participants suggested, however, additional guidance in the meta-standards on issues such as disaster response, climate change impacts on forest enterprises and the role of evolving technologies such as remote sensing for SFM.

PEFC's last revision processes resulted in one meta-standard for all types of forests but with interpretations and additional criteria for plantations and tropical forests. Special provisions for tropical forests were established since they experience particular challenges such as balancing SFM with subsistence agriculture, protecting rich biodiversity hotspots and managing tropical soils. As discussions evolved, tropical forest representatives felt that additional requirements should not be



PEFC's 20th Annual General Assembly.

imposed on tropical forests. They proposed designating them as “high-risk forests” as a more just and comprehensive approach. This brought up the importance of risk-based assessments, which will form an important part of the 2016 revision process, and which will move PEFC away from tropical forest-specific requirements.

Day 4: General Assembly

The final day of PEFC Forest Certification week brought members together for the 20th Annual General Assembly. India and New Zealand were officially welcomed as newly endorsed members and, from industry, the Indonesian pulp and paper company April Group became the newest international stakeholder. Representatives from Ghana, Guatemala, Nepal, Philippines, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam all provide updates on their countries’ progress to join PEFC. Nominations for PEFC Council members were presented, and three new board members were appointed for a three-year period. The day ended with heartfelt farewells to outgoing Chairman William Street.

The General Assembly opened with a keynote address by Albert Emilio Yuson, Director General of the Building and Wood Workers’ International, which represents over 15 million workers globally from the forest and wood-working sector. His main message was clear: environmental degradation is the result of social degradation, and any forestry that supports or reinforces rural poverty is not sustainable. Yuson urged the PEFC community to continue integrating social sustainability into its standards and auditing. He shared the challenge with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) to enforce the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Core Labour Standards in their certification

scheme. PEFC has made compliance with ILO core standards compulsory. The upcoming revisions of the technical standards provide an opportunity to further drive socially responsible forestry.

Sustainable Forest Management and the Sustainable Development Goals

PEFC CEO Ben Gunneberg took several occasions throughout the week to highlight that SFM is featured in 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endorsed by the United Nation’s General Assembly. Goal 15, Life on Land, contains direct targets to restore and conserve the sustainable use of forest ecosystems, halt deforestation, increase afforestation and reforestation, and mobilize capital for developing countries to finance SFM. Goal 1, Ending Poverty, is relevant, as 80 per cent of the world’s poorest people live in and around forests. Goal 2, Ending Hunger, requires a “landscape approach” to forest management for maintaining multiple benefits. Goal 6, Clean Water, is highly pertinent, as 75 per cent of the world’s clean water comes from forest catchment areas. He also stated that SFM is instrumental to achieving 10 other SDGs. Gunneberg is also seeking to build on the outcomes from COP 21 in Paris, held in parallel with PEFC’s Forest Week, positioning forest certification as a vehicle for turning commitment into action on climate change.

Closing remarks from William Street, outgoing PEFC Council Chairman, cautioned not to move forward using PEFC as a market-driven process only, but rather treat it as an association of members committed to SFM. He advised: “Manage forests for the next generation, not for the next quarterly report.”

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