

The Social Side of Certification: The Influence of Social Networks in the Adoption and Longevity of Timber Certification in Community Forests of Quintana Roo, Mexico.

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As timber certification initiatives continue to be promoted by conservation and development agencies worldwide, it is necessary to assess the socioeconomic and ecological impacts these programs have had as perceived by their intended beneficiaries. This study will document the main factors that influence the decision-making process of Mexican forest communities (ejidos) to adopt and maintain FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification practices within their timber operations. This research specifically focuses on ejidos located within the tropical forests of the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico, due to their pioneering efforts as the first FSC Certified forests in the world obtained fifteen years ago. The research proposes to measure the weight of the following three factors on an ejido member's decision to vote for certification: 1) potential benefits of the FSC certification program, 2) feasibility assessment of their resource base and 3) social relationships with certification promoters, opinion leaders, and external agencies. It is hypothesized that the success of certification within these communities, defined as ejido member satisfaction and long-term use, is more dependent on the structure and strength of social relationships than the perceived benefits or resource-base feasibility assessment. This study will use cultural consensus and network analysis techniques to test and measure the variability that exists between certified and non-certified ejido members. Analysis of data collected through preliminary summer fieldwork in 2008 with four ejidos (Botes, Caoba, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, and Noh Bec) will be presented that demonstrate the relationships between knowledge transfer, certification status and social position within the community.

Keywords: Tropical community forestry, Timber certification, Social networks.

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