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## Engagement opportunities for Indigenous Peoples within the Forest Stewardship Council: Case studies

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### Abstract

Forest Stewardship Council responsible forest management certification ensures that - not only forests are managed through sustainable practices - but also that FSC certified forestry companies operate in a socially responsible manner, respecting the rights of the people that live in and depend on the forest. In order to achieve this, the involvement of indigenous and non-indigenous communities in the framework of FSC certification is key.

This paper describes the various engagement opportunities that FSC certification offers to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities through practical case studies across the globe: Case #1: Sweden and Finland: Sami Indigenous People; Case #2: Mexico: Indigenous communities: Ixtlán de Juárez, Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro; Case #3: Peru: Indigenous communities: Belgica, Calleria, Buenos Aires, Junin Pablo, Roya, Nuevo Loreto; Case #4: Guatemala: Association of Forest Communities; Case #5: Chile: Mapuche Indigenous People. The case studies illustrate various types of collaboration: indigenous associations proactively involved in defining national FSC standards, Indigenous communities successfully managing Amazonian and coniferous natural forest, responsibilities of forest management enterprises towards communities (consultation and mitigation of impacts), positive engagement between FSC certified entities and Indigenous Peoples (conflict resolution), dispute resolution mechanisms, workshops on forestry topics involving Indigenous communities and the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in high level political discussions at FSC. These case studies demonstrate that FSC certification provides a solid foundation for the creation of engagement opportunities with Indigenous Peoples, benefiting the communities involved and delivering on its mission of promoting socially responsible forest management worldwide.

Keywords: Governance, Social protection, Human health and well-being, Partnerships, Conflict.

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### Introduction, scope and main objectives

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC, <https://fsc.org/en>) is the world's most trusted and renowned certification scheme for responsible forest management. In this paper, FSC presents the results of research based on five case studies focusing on forest communities located in six different countries. The research objectives were to assess whether the engagement opportunities available in FSC certification are accessible to forest communities and Indigenous Peoples, collect information on whether FSC certification benefits and impacts those groups, and, if so, identify how. The scope of the research is worldwide but mostly focuses on Latin America.

This research demonstrates that FSC certification provides a solid foundation for engagement with forest communities, including Indigenous Peoples, which both benefits the communities involved in the certification process and enables the organization to deliver on its mission of promoting socially responsible forest management worldwide.

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## **Methodology/approach**

The research methodology combined field verification and desk assessment approaches. Data was collected through direct observation during field verification and in-person interviews (2015–2019). Secondary data was also collected through remote interviews (2020).

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## **Results**

The study results are presented in two main subsections to this section. The first subsection provides a brief overview of the general engagement opportunities for forestry communities in the FSC certification system. The second subsection, which forms the main body of this paper, presents the research results related to the following case studies:

- Case #1: Sweden and Finland – the Sami people
- Case #2: Mexico – Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro, Ixtlán de Juárez, and Ejido Noh Bec
- Case #3: Peru – Belgica, Calleria, Buenos Aires, Junin Pablo, Roya, and Nuevo Loreto communities
- Case #4: Guatemala – Community Forestry Association of Peten (ACOFOP)
- Case #5: Chile – the Mapuche people.

### **1. Engagement opportunities for communities in the FSC certification system**

Stakeholder engagement plays a central role in FSC certification. The main engagement opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples through FSC certification are described below.

#### **1.1 Community consultation in the FSC certification and auditing process**

Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities are involved in the FSC auditing process in the following ways: FSC-certified companies have a responsibility to consult with communities about their operations; third-party organizations verifying compliance with FSC rules carry out consultation processes as part of their auditing process (involving communities neighbouring the FSC-certified forestry operations). Through such consultation processes, FSC ensures that community members have a chance to provide their feedback in relation to FSC-certified companies. Such companies also have specific responsibilities towards Indigenous Peoples, including the need to uphold the principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent.

#### **1.2 FSC Permanent Indigenous Peoples Committee and the FSC Indigenous Foundation**

In 2013, FSC established the Permanent Indigenous Peoples Committee as an advisory body designed to create a genuine voice for Indigenous Peoples within FSC. In 2018, FSC also created the FSC Indigenous Foundation, an Indigenous-led organization with the objective of driving the implementation of initiatives and projects designed by and for Indigenous Peoples.

### 1.3 Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) communities as FSC-certified Forest Managers

An important avenue for forest communities to be directly involved in and benefit from FSC certification is to become forest managers of an FSC-certified forest area (community forestry).

## 2. Case studies of community engagement within the FSC system

### 2.1 Case #1: Sami Indigenous Peoples (Sweden and Finland)



Figure 1. Sami reindeer herder, Sweden, Lapland

The first case study focuses on the Sami Indigenous Peoples of Sweden and Finland. As reindeer herders, the Sami people are highly dependent on forests, as their reindeer graze on the grassland in low-density forests and eat ground and tree bark lichens, which are essential in reindeer nutrition. The Sami people are experienced in sustainable forest management and have the ability of dealing with forestry related issues. Sami people have also learned how to use FSC as a tool that can benefit their communities. The main

engagement opportunities for the Sami people through FSC include the following:

- FSC provides a dialogue platform for Sami communities to engage with forestry companies.
- FSC Standards require FSC-certified companies to consult with the Sami people (participatory planning process) and disclose the location of forest management areas.
- FSC empowers the Sami people by increasing the forest area subject to consultation.
- FSC requires and enables mediation between Sami communities and forestry companies.
- FSC gives a voice to the Sami people through their involvement in FSC policy discussions, from Sami representatives in the FSC Sweden Board of Directors, with Sami reindeer associations involved as members, to participation in FSC Standard Development Committees.

The information collected during this research indicates that FSC certification drives numerous positive impacts and provides engagement opportunities for the Sami people, supports the continuity of their livelihoods, and ensures their access to forest resources.

### 2.2 Case #2: Indigenous Communities Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro and Ixtlan de Juarez, and Ejido Noh Bec (Mexico)

The second case study covers three communities in Mexico providing examples of successful community forestry and sustainable forest management.

#### ❖ Indigenous Community Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro (Michoacan, Mexico)

Nuevo San Juan de Parangaricutiro is an Indigenous community located in Michoacan, Mexico. The community manages 10,338.73 ha of FSC-certified forests and is an outstanding example of successful Indigenous community forestry. In 1944, this Indigenous community was forced to relocate after a volcanic eruption destroyed its previous settlement. Nuevo San Juan de Parangaricutiro had historically based its livelihood on agriculture. As their new home did not provide agricultural opportunities, the relocation forced the community to learn about forestry to better harness the available resources. The community learned the forestry business, going from

rudimentary forest management methods in those early days to the successful management of 10,338.73 ha of forest today. The community is involved at all stages of the timber processing value chain (sawmill, furniture factory, etc.). The company owned by the entire community employs over 900 people, all of whom are members of that community. The Nuevo San Juan de Parangaricutiro business model is based on the concept of collaboration, with the entire community jointly managing the business. Interviewees from the community expressed the view that FSC is a tool which has created numerous positive impacts for the community:

- FSC has brought the community international recognition.
- FSC certification promotes discipline and structure across their organization.
- FSC has driven multiple improvements in their forestry management operations, including increased transparency and monitoring, improved internal processes and stronger governance structures.
- FSC certification and auditing processes motivate the community to continue to work in ensuring their practices are aligned with social and environmental values.
- FSC supports and facilitates communications and awareness-raising around sustainable forest management.
- Achieving FSC certification has presented multiple opportunities and enhanced their involvement in numerous environmental projects outside FSC certification.
- FSC certification has led to economic market benefits for the community.

This study demonstrates that FSC certification has provided tangible benefits and opportunities for the Nuevo San Juan de Parangaricutiro community (<http://comunidadindigena.com.mx/>) in supporting their path and development towards sustainable forest management.

#### ❖ **Indigenous Community Ixtlán de Juarez (Oaxaca, Mexico)**

Ixtlan de Juarez Indigenous Peoples community in Oaxaca, Mexico is an example of successful community forestry. The community has achieved FSC certification of a forest area of 16,062.00 ha within their Indigenous territory. The Ixtlan de Juarez case is outstanding for two reasons: the community has put environmental protection at the very centre of their values, and their forestry business is run on a communal model, in which all community representatives are involved and benefit. In 1981, the community founded the first of their community forestry enterprises. From there onwards, the community has diversified their business and created nine companies to commercialize their Forest products. All their businesses follow a community forestry approach, where the business model is built around the sustainable harvest of the natural resources. In addition, the community also has been involved in the past decades in multiple initiatives promoting environmental protection and conservation. In the year 2000, the community received the “Award for Forest Management” by the Ministry of the Environment of Mexico.

The community manages 7,354.94 ha of low impact forest Management and 11.120 ha of protected areas. The community is involved in projects related to ecosystem services involving carbon credits, ecotourism, and water.

Interviewees confirmed that obtaining FSC certification has had a positive impact on the community. They described the same positive impacts as those mentioned above in relation to the Nuevo San Juan de Paragaricutiro community. Interviewees emphasized the international recognition of the sustainability of the community’s products as the single most impactful benefit of FSC.

### ❖ **Ejido Noh-Bec (Quintana Roo, Mexico)**

Ejido Noh-Bec is the third case identified in Mexico of how community forestry can lead to sustainable and thriving businesses which benefit entire communities while respecting the environment. 'Ejidos' are a juridical figure in Mexico that refers to communities who hold land tenure rights under a communal ownership structure. Despite Ejido Noh-Bec not being an Indigenous community, the community's livelihood and lifestyle follow deeply rooted Mexican traditions and customs. The Ejido Noh-Bec was founded from populations displaced from the states of Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz, which all had a large presence of Tzotzil Indigenous Peoples of Mayan descent. However, the Ejido Noh-Bec community does not currently identify itself as Indigenous.

The Ejido Noh-Bec community was one of the first in Mexico to obtain FSC certification of its forest management areas. Today, the Ejido Noh-Bec hold a total forest of 24,122 ha, of which 18,500 ha are FSC certified.

In 2007, Hurricane Dean (category 5) devastated the community and all their forest areas, but they persevered and managed to restore their village, forest, and economy. Since achieving FSC certification in 2010, the Ejido Noh-Bec community has improved its expertise in forest management and diversified its business to become the success story that it is today – a thriving community with 18,500 ha of FSC-certified forest.

Ejido Noh-Bec interviewees identified similar benefits and opportunities derived from FSC certification to those mentioned by the Nuevo San Juan de Parangaricutiro and Ixtlan de Juarez communities. International recognition and internal operational improvements (safety measures, transparency, and strengthening of systems) were the most impactful benefits identified.

### **2.3 Case #3: Indigenous communities Belgica, Calleria, Buenos Aires, Junin Pablo, Roya, and Nuevo Loreto (Peru)**

Within the scope of this study, research was conducted and data collected in relation to six Indigenous communities located in the Peruvian Amazon rainforests. The communities can be found in two geographical locations: Madre de Dios and Ucayali, both of which have forests with tremendous biodiversity value. These case studies are described below.

#### ❖ **Indigenous Community Belgica (Madre de Dios, Peru)**

The Indigenous community Belgica has been managing 50,835 ha of FSC-certified tropical forests in the Amazonian region of Madre de Dios (Peru) since 2011. The community belongs to the Amazonian indigenous 'Yine' ethnicity.

A great majority of the community are involved in the forestry business. The community has found in sustainable community forestry a way to provide itself with livelihoods and economic development. With the revenues obtained from their forestry practices, the community has improved the public school and the medical clinic, both of which provide open access to members of the community.



**Figure 2.** Leaders of the Indigenous community Belgica, Madre de Dios (Peru), 2018

The case shows how, by combining an Indigenous community's hard work with the technical expertise provided by external organizations such as FSC, community forestry can be conducted successfully and in harmony with nature to produce positive results in terms of the community's economy, infrastructure, and access to resources.

❖ **Indigenous Communities Calleria, Buenos Aires, Junin Pablo, Roya, and Nuevo Loreto (Ucayali, Peru)**



**Figure 3.** Women of the Indigenous communities managing FSC-certified forests, Ucayali (Peru), 2018

The second example of community forestry in Peru considered in this study is provided by the Calleria, Buenos Aires, Junin Pablo, Roya, and Nuevo Loreto communities located in the Amazonian region of Ucayali. These communities belong to the Shipibo Konibo Indigenous Peoples. To achieve FSC certification, these communities had the support of the Asociación para la Investigación y Desarrollo Integral (AIDER, <http://aider.com.pe>), a nongovernmental organization supporting Indigenous communities in the Amazon. These communities used to

harvest the forest individually, but over time they realized that by managing forests in a collaborative manner, more families within the communities could benefit economically. Today, the communities are organized and collaborate to manage an FSC-certified area of 25,456 ha of natural tropical forests. These communities have seen and benefited from the positive impacts of their collaborative and sustainable approach to managing their forests, including the following:

- Empowerment of the Indigenous communities. The international recognition provided by FSC and the collaboration with AIDER has positioned the communities as a successful example of community forestry at both the regional and national levels in Peru.
- Opportunities to participate in events and international cooperation projects.

These Indigenous communities have become a role model for other Indigenous communities in Peru and the wider Amazonian region who also aspire to work and manage their forests in a responsible manner to provide their communities with sustainable livelihoods and development.

#### **2.4 Case #4: Association of Forest Communities of Peten (Guatemala)**

Our fourth case study focuses on ACOFOP (<https://acofop.org/en/sobre-acofop/>), which is composed of multiple local communities (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) living in the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala. ACOFOP manages a forest area of over 500,000 ha (over 70 per cent of the total area) within the reserve.

In 1990, the Maya Biosphere Reserve was created, covering the forest areas where numerous local communities' villages and resources were located. The communities were left in a precarious situation in the first five years after the reserve was created, as the Government of Guatemala's strict conservation regulations applicable within the natural reserve prohibited the communities from harvesting forest products. That situation left all the communities living within the Maya Biosphere Reserve, and dependent on those forest resources for their livelihoods, with no legal right to harvest from their ancestral forest lands.



**Figure 4.** ACOFOP women workers collecting ramon seeds, 2019 (Guatemala)

In 1995, ACOFOP was created as an association of the communities within the reserve. Through ACOFOP, the communities jointly requested the rights to concession areas for productive purposes. The government accepted that request and issued 12 concessions to the communities, on the condition that they would obtain FSC certification within three years. By achieving FSC certification in 2005, these communities demonstrated that they could manage forests in a sustainable manner, and guaranteed that they could maintain their right to harvest from their ancestral lands. In the years

since, ACOFOP has implemented numerous steps to promote the empowerment of women and increase their involvement in the forestry business. Today, women make up 30 per cent of the workforce, with the non-timber forest products business managed exclusively by women.

ACOFOP interviewees identified the following as the most relevant positive impacts of FSC for their communities:

- FSC is a credibility and international recognition tool.
- FSC supported ACOFOP in external communications around forestry topics.
- FSC certification has driven improvements in systems, procedures, and operations.
- FSC certification has provided access to external financial support opportunities from various national and international organizations.

In the case of these communities, the revenues produced by their forestry activities are invested in infrastructure, health, education, and forest monitoring and control, for the benefit of all community members and to ensure their future livelihoods.

## 2.5 Case #5: Mapuche Indigenous Peoples (Chile)

The fifth case study is provided by the Mapuche Indigenous Peoples (the only Indigenous ethnicity in South America to resist Spanish occupation). Due to that resistance, the occupiers gave the Mapuche autonomy over the land in the Araucania region. However, in the 19th century, the Chilean State promoted a process of occupation (disregarding the Mapuche people’s land tenure rights and selling land titles to private institutions).

In today’s south-central Chile, large areas of private forestry plantations overlap with land over which the Mapuche Indigenous Peoples held ancestral rights, leading to an ongoing conflict over land tenure. This case study shows how FSC can, despite the existing frictions, provide a series of engagement opportunities to support these Indigenous Peoples in Chile. Research has identified that FSC is driving positive impacts in the forestry sector in Chile by: providing a platform for dialogue among stakeholders involved in the forest sector, thereby providing the local communities with an arena for speaking up about their issues; driving collaboration and communication between forestry companies and communities.



**Figure 5.** Mapuche leaders meeting during the ‘Koyaüwe’ design phase under Arauco’s ‘KÜNY’ project, Chile 2020

Such engagement between the parties has promoted multiple social and environmental projects where Indigenous Peoples and forestry companies have collaborated in their implementation (an example of these projects is provided below). These projects have positively impacted communities – the Mapuche and beyond – in Chile.

The KÜNY project was implemented by the FSC-certified company Arauco ([www.arauco.cl](http://www.arauco.cl)) in collaboration with Mapuche communities, with the objective of improving relationships between companies and communities. To achieve this, a traditional Mapuche meeting infrastructure of ‘Koyaüwe’ was built. The meeting space (‘Koyaüwe’) provides a neutral space for open and constructive dialogue during meetings between Arauco and Mapuche leaders.

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## Discussion

This research provides evidence through five case studies demonstrating that FSC certification promotes favourable changes at the community level which positively impact Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities across the globe. The main impacts of FSC certification on forest communities identified in this study are: community empowerment, strengthening of communities’ rights, providing international recognition, and promoting collaboration between companies and communities. This study shows that the FSC strategy for community engagement is moving in the right direction, but it also demonstrates that many of initiatives are still in their early stages and require further development.

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## Conclusions/ wider implications of findings

This research demonstrates through five case studies that FSC certification promotes favourable changes at the community level with positive impacts on Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities across the globe. The case studies analysed within the scope of this research include Indigenous communities across the world, including: the Sami people in Sweden, Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro, Ixtlán de Juarez, and Ejido Noh-Bec in Mexico, Madre de Dios and Ucayali communities in the Peruvian Amazon, the Indigenous Peoples ACOFOP in Guatemala, and the Mapuche people in Chile. Although these case studies represent a variety of geographies and circumstances, a common trend was identified across all cases. The main engagement opportunities and positive impacts of FSC certification identified at the community level in this study are:

- community empowerment through inclusion in high-level policy discussions and dialogue platforms, thereby empowering Indigenous leaders to share their perspectives while promoting and defending their communities’ rights;
- strengthening of communities’ rights by placing consultation responsibilities on companies;
- providing an internationally recognized framework accessible to communities;
- bringing stakeholders in the forest sector together and promoting collaboration in company-community projects with positive benefits for the communities involved;
- providing opportunities for communities to access international projects and funding.

The research findings indicate that FSC should continue to invest effort in engaging with local communities to further strengthen their role and address social issues in the forest sector.



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