



HCV Resource Network's Technical Discussion Workshop:

Queen Elizabeth Park, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: 16 November 2007

Discussion Summary

1. Introduction

As part of a week-long regional event in Africa, the HCV Resource Network convened a technical discussion workshop in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa on 16 November 2007

Attendance: Members the Network's Secretariat (represented by ProForest) present were: Nilofer Ghaffar (Network co-ordinator), Anders Lindhe, (Associate), and Tim Rayden (Project Manager).

Discussants present included: Kevin McCann (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife); John Scotcher (ForestLore/ FSC South Africa); Carl Oellermann (Sustainable Forestry Management Africa); Doug Macfarlane (Institute of Natural Resources); Douglas van Zyl (Mondi Business Paper South Africa); Vaughan Koopman (Mondi Wetlands Project); Peta Hardy (Sappi Forests); Brent Corcoran (Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Project); Steve Germishuizen (African Environmental Services); Augustus Asamoah (Ghana Wildlife Society); Mustapha Seidu (WWF-WARPO); Yaw Kwakye (Ghana Forestry Commission) and David Raingo Maingi (WWF EARPO)

Objectives: The primary aim of this workshop was to consider:

1. The relevance of Principle 9 to the current situation in South Africa, and how it may inform the forthcoming FSC National Interpretation process.
2. The implications of expanding the current definitions in the FSC's Principle 9 to include other ecosystems.
3. The corresponding changes that would need to be made to the definitions in Principle 9 and guidance provided in the global toolkit.

A full agenda for the workshop is available from the Network's website; the main outcomes of the discussion are summarised below.

2. Main Outcomes

2.1 Relevance of Principle 9 to the South African context

The forthcoming FSC National interpretation process in South Africa begs the question of the relevance of Principle 9 in this instance. Over the course of this discussion, and in the preceding days of the stakeholder meeting (see summary available at www.hcvnetwork.org), there was much debate as to the added value of implementing the HCV concept (embodied in Principle 9). It was argued that in the South African context, where a robust conservation framework already exists to

protect valuable ecosystems, the other FSC principles (especially Principle 6) might in themselves be adequate to ensure the maintenance of HCVs.

Two problematic issues were discussed:

1. Currently applicants seeking FSC certification are only required to protect HCV forests (which in South Africa are all protected anyway), and the FSC will not arbitrate on issues other than HCV forests, for example in cases of conversion of valuable grasslands.
2. There is no consistent way to ensure that Principle 6 delivers adequate conservation of these areas as FSC certified operations could (in theory at least) plant over HCV areas. Principle 6 would ensure adequate protection for such lands within the FMU, but does not require forest managers to take a wider view in the way that Principle 9 does.

As an example of the above, there was reference to forestry applications that have been approved in the mist belt grasslands, despite their status as critically threatened ecosystems. Additionally, there was a perception that there may be real value in achieving some agreement over what might constitute HCV areas in light of planned plantation expansion activities in the Eastern Cape.

A potential solution offered by the group to address these issues was to clarify the use of Principle 6 within the South African FSC standard, and to simultaneously reword the definition of Principle 9 to encompass all highly valuable conservation areas. The general consensus to emerge was that, even in the context of a highly regulated system such as within South Africa, there is still likely to be a need to incorporate Principle 9 to ensure the maintenance of critically important areas.

The discussants agreed that there should be widespread consultation which engages all stakeholders in the standard setting process, and that this should recognise the gaps in existing legislation which the HCV approach could help to identify. The value of having an internationally recognised system to define HCV areas, and the potential of the HCV framework as a policy tool for the conservation sector, were repeatedly emphasized.

2.2 Extending the definitions in Principle 9

There was unanimous agreement amongst the discussants that there is a need to consider expanding the definitions in Principle 9. From a global perspective, as well as in the specific case of South Africa (see above), it was suggested that it would be sensible to extend the current FSC definitions to apply to non-forest ecosystems. Furthermore, a number of individuals highlighted the potential benefits of doing this, and thereby providing a tool that could function in many different land use/production contexts. Using the HCV concept as a framework for collaboration across sectors might in turn lead to an integrated land management strategy across a variety of production systems.

Some of the relevant concerns/particular issues cited by participants in favour of this proposition were:

- Most countries were likely to be considering expansion into non-forest lands (for example, a number of planned biofuel projects which target grasslands).
- Extending the concept would allow for the identification of HCV areas upfront, and not post-plantation establishment (which is typically when FSC certification is sought).
- Having a standardized level of formal assessment by promoting HCV assessment prior to plantation establishment / conversion , especially in countries without a more holistic conservation plan, could allow for a degree of regulation e.g. in the context of Mozambique where there is some 11 million ha of plantation expansion planned, and Tanzania where currently afforestation into pristine grasslands is being conducted.
- The need for standardized assessment processes at both the landscape, scoping level, and the FMU level.
- NGOs could use the identification of HCV areas in the landscape to lobby government pre-conversion / land-use changes; having an internationally accepted yardstick would also give NGOs much greater leverage than local opinions.
- The approach taken by EIA processes is sometimes very site led and localised; development agencies are often able to circumvent recommendations. Open systematic application of the HCV framework at a landscape level would provide a good basis for a localised EIA, and HCV processes could also inform critical threshold decisions within site level EIAs.
- Recognizing the utility and strength of the HCV approach as a conservation planning tool, a possible way of institutionalizing it (outside of simply an FSC context) may be by incorporating it into EIA procedures (so that it is made mandatory).
- Even in a country such as South Africa, where there are many restrictions that apply to grasslands and wetlands, significant concerns were expressed that existing systems do not successfully resolve some conservation-related conflicts.

The group therefore concluded that now is an appropriate, and possibly even necessary, time to adjust the HCV concept to include non-forest ecosystems, especially in the context of conversion scenarios in countries other than South Africa (which is unusual in having such a highly regulated number of conservation initiatives to safeguard the conversion of valuable habitats).

However, it was recognised that the implications of extending the concept, both from the perspective of the FSC and certified organisations, and for other land users, would need to be carefully thought through. It was pointed out that any blanket ‘no’ to conversion of natural ecosystems, for example to plantations, would be counterproductive, and that the focus should be on regulation rather than prevention.

2.3 Review of Principle 9 wording, and associated toolkit guidance

The precise wording of the existing FSC Principle 9 and glossary definitions of HCVFs was examined by the group. It was agreed that a simple substitution of most of the uses of the term “forests” and/or “forest areas” with just **areas** would work in most instances. The term areas was generally preferred over “ecosystems” as being more inclusive and avoiding some of the difficult issues of scientific definitions / terminology of ecosystems.

In the case of HCV 2 , discussants recognized that the current definition focuses very much on the “intact nature” of landscapes, and this may not work well in certain instances e.g. grasslands that have been substantially altered / degraded compared to their ‘natural state’ and yet are of very high conservation value. However, as the current definition works well for forests, the group suggested that it may be better to develop another, related definition for ‘impacted’ ecosystems, rather than to attempt formulations that apply to everything. Additionally, there may be scope to relate the definition of HCV 2 to aspects of systematic conservation planning approaches which identify the “best” examples of each major habitat type.

Notwithstanding the exact changes which may be needed in reformulating the current HCV definitions, the group confirmed the importance of maintaining the distinction between areas of high conservation value as opposed to simply all valuable areas.

There was some consideration of the existing guidance provided in the global toolkit which relates to forests, and how this would have to be altered and /or improved in light of the inclusion of other ecosystems, although this was curtailed due to limitations on the time available. The group however recognised that, from the perspective of non-forest ecosystems, there was a need for specific examples to inform toolkit guidance, and agreed in theory at least to establish a more dedicated network of practitioners to further explore this issue.

3. Follow-up

The workshop participants requested that in due course a number of specific recommendations should be made to the FSC:

- To extend the concept to other ecosystems, at the very least to include grasslands, wetlands and non-forest savannah and woodlands;
- To make the associated changes necessary to reflect this in the FSC Principles and Criteria, including in the glossary definitions
- To make simple changes in the HCV definitions by substituting the current terms “forest” and “forest areas” with only “areas” for HCV 1 and HCV 3-6
- To reformulate HCV 2 by restricting the existing definition to forests, and having a related definition for other ecosystems

- To maintain the 'high bar' linking to global, regional, and national value frameworks in any new definitions of HCV areas

The Network Secretariat agreed that these suggestions would be tabled on the agenda for further discussion at the HCV Resource Network's next Steering Group Meeting (scheduled for February 2008).