

Forest Stewardship Council®



FSC INDIA

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Foreword

Forests sustain life on earth and they must be protected. The Forest Stewardship Council™ (FSC®) – a non-profit organization provides sustainable forest management solutions to protect healthy and resilient forests, for all, forever.

As the most recognized and rigorous forest certification system, FSC's "check tree" label is found on millions of products worldwide which validates sustainable sourcing from forest to consumer. FSC's responsible forestry standard, linked to a strict chain of custody certification, is a proven solution to tackle today's climate and biodiversity challenges. This means choosing FSC helps protect the future of forests and the communities which depend on them.

FSC is headquartered at Bonn, Germany and has its regional offices in Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Africa. Apart from the regional offices there are various country specific offices which are in the form of network partner, network representative/s either/or focal point. FSC India is the national representative of FSC international and it works for fulfilling FSC's mission in India.

FSC's global strategy 2021-26 provides a roadmap to achieve its 2026 objective – *“the value and benefits of forest stewardship will be demonstrated in 300 million hectares of FSC-certified area, of which 50 million hectares are natural tropical forests and areas managed by smallholders”*. FSC India is committed to play its part in accomplishment of this objective and the overall vision of the organisation - *“resilient forests sustaining life on earth”*. Therefore, co-creating solutions for responsible forest management, enhancing the market for forest products and accelerating FM and CoC certification remains our major priority.

This annual newsletter can be considered as a small step in this direction. Through this newsletter, we intend to present a holistic view of year-round activities of FSC in India during 2023. The newsletter is also an effort to engage with our stakeholders especially members, institutional partners and FM/CoC certificate holders who have been a driving force for promoting forest stewardship in India.

I would like to dedicate year 2023 at FSC India to meaningful engagements and new beginnings. We made extensive outreach to forest owners, industries, and institutions to promote forest stewardship. Identifying potential FM and CoC certification clients and initiating one-to-one dialogue and roundtable meetings remained one of our primary tools of engagement. This process allowed us to understand their needs, and present to them how FSC's suite of standards can help them achieve their sustainability goals. I am happy to inform that we are ending the year 2023 with impressive growth in FM certified area by 36 % and CoC CHs by 33 %.

These growing numbers are motivating but we are also aware of the challenges that lie ahead. Impact of EU Deforestation Regulation and launch of Forest & Wood Certification scheme by government can't be assessed at present but requires attention. Nevertheless, there are many opportunities that FSC India intends to leverage in the year 2024 and beyond. The launch of RFSS pilot will help in mainstreaming smallholders into certification regime and can help in uptake of group certification in collaboration with forest-based industries. Ecosystem Services Procedure Pro with its addition of cultural services also offers new possibilities in recognising the intangible benefits which accrues from well managed forests.

In the year 2024, we will be launching 3 national level projects and continue our association in one regional project. Although these projects are launched to achieve independent mandates but in totality they will help in accelerating FM & CoC certification, promoting sustainable trade of forest commodities and upholding the rights of local communities.

I would like to thank my colleague Anuj Sharma for his special efforts to bring out this FSC India Annual Newsletter - 2023.

Hope you find it interesting and informative.

Warm regards,

Dr Suresh Gairola
Country Director
FSC India

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1. FSC INTERNATIONAL EVENTS IN INDIA

1.1 96th Board of Directors Meeting

The Board of Directors (BoD) is the highest decision-making body in the organization after the FSC General Assembly. The FSC membership elects four members each from the economic, social, and environmental chambers to guide and provide oversight to the organization for a term of four years.

FSC's 96th board meeting was held between 31st July - 4th August in New Delhi, India. The Board discussed important matters related to Intact Forest Landscape, EUDR, Technology and Genetic Engineering and other administrative issues.

Apart from discussions on the global matters, the Board also took note of ongoing activities and prospects for FSC in Asia Pacific region. Cindy Cheng, Regional Director- APAC gave an overview to the Board on works in APAC region.

Dr Suresh Gairola, Country Director, FSC India delivered a talk on 'Introduction to FSC's work, achievements, opportunities and challenges in India' and replied to the queries from the Board members.

1.2 Stakeholder Consultation Meeting with BoD

A stakeholder consultation meeting was organized on 1st August 2023 on the sidelines of the FSC Board meeting in New Delhi. The meeting built on some of FSC's existing relationships while also seeking inputs on plans to amplify the work and partnerships in the coming years. The participants ranged from forest industries, civil society organisations, certification bodies, certificate holders and FSC international members from India who gave their valuable feedback and suggestions under following main themes:



- Supporting SFM and forest products in India
- Disseminating and adoption of sustainability solution
- Collaboration with industry organization and NGOs
- Building brand visibility of FSC



2. PARTICIPATION IN APAC REGIONAL EVENTS

2.1 APAC Regional Membership Meeting, Vietnam

FSC's global strategy 2021-26 identifies membership engagement as one of its core mission to enable co-creation of solutions for complex forest related issues. In this backdrop, APAC Regional Members Meet (RMM) was organised in Ho Chi Min City, Vietnam from 31st Aug – 1st Sept 2023.



A total of 50 FSC international members of APAC region along with senior representatives from FSC secretariat and FSC APAC staff participated in RMM. During these two days, members deliberated on wide ranging issues of membership value, impact of EUDR, conversion & remedy framework, and ecosystem services. Apart from the combined deliberations with all the members, there were parallel breakout sessions of environment, social and economic chambers. Additionally, members also participated in country specific parallel breakout session on government engagement for Indonesia and India.

The breakout session on “Government Engagement – India” was held on the 2nd day of the RMM.



This one-hour session was attended by 18 Indian members and was chaired by Cindy Cheng, Regional Director, APAC. During the session, the members were apprised about the ongoing government engagement activities and their feedback and suggestions were sought on following topics:

- Creation of awareness about FSC’s mission in general
- Advocacy with Governments for forest certification and policy
- Participation in creating market demand for certified forest products
- Mobilizing group entities for smallholders’ certification

2.2 FSC APAC Summit: Markets & Responsible Sourcing

FSC APAC Summit was organised on 25th October at Foshan, China. The summit was organised with the objective of building and strengthening action on responsible sourcing for forest product value chains – bringing in opinions, perspectives, insights, and analysis from value chains like rubber, textiles and tropical timber.

With the support of multiple partner organizations and stakeholders in China, the event helped in developing concerted effort on responsible sourcing for forest product value chains. Signing of Fashion Forever Green Pact by global brands such as Birla Cellulose, H&M, Jiangsu Dasheng Group, Yibin Grace Group and Value Source was one of the highlights of the event.

FSC India participated in the event and gained important insights on responsible sourcing. The event also helped in developing valuable networks with prominent companies which are active in India such as IKEA, Olam Agri, CMO, Agridence, H&M and Birla Cellulose.





2.3 Workshop on Ecosystem Services Procedure & Regional Network Meeting

Asia Pacific Regional Office organised a two-day program for APAC staff during 23rd - 24th October. Day 1 of the program was dedicated to building core competency on various aspects of FSC's Ecosystem Services Procedure. Day 2 of the program was focused on understanding regional priorities and their integration in country specific Tier - 3 projects for 2024.



3. PROMOTION OF FM CERTIFICATION IN INDIA

Promotion of forest management certification in India was taken as the highest priority after the launch of India Forest Stewardship Standard (FSS) in 2022 and approval of project for this purpose.

3.1 Government Engagements for promotion of FM certification

State forest departments and forest development corporations are the biggest stakeholders for the promotion of India FSS as almost all the natural forests in the country are owned by them. All the states were informed about the approval and highlights of India-specific forest management standard and the pilot test of India RFSS. Their engagement was sought to create awareness about these standards. Though the response was lacking from some of the states, most of the states responded positively. During the year, engagement meetings were held with the State Forest Departments and Development Corporations of Telangana, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Kerala, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Meghalaya. In all, 25 engagement meetings were held with government organizations.

3.2 Trees Outside Forests (TOF)

As per FSI's 2020 "TOF resources in India", the extent of TOF is approximately 29.38 million ha constituting 9 % of India's geographical area. These woodstock outside natural forests provide livelihood to millions of farmers and fulfil the major raw material requirement of industries such as pulp, paper, plyboard, furniture etc. Accordingly, for promotion of forest certification outside natural forests, engagement meetings were held with Grasim Industries Ltd, Plantation Corporation of Kerala, Kerala Rubber Ltd and forest corporations of various states.

Grasim Industries Ltd is working with 10,000 farmers for adopting sustainable agroforestry practices and exploring possibilities of taking FSC group FM certification.

Plantation Corporation of Kerala (PCK) is a government owned company which manages 8 estates of rubber plantation covering 6452 ha leased forest land in Kerala. The discussion with Dr James Jacob, MD, PCK provided insight into the rubber sector and what future holds for rubber value chain in India.





3.3 Regional Forest Stewardship Standard (RFSS) Pilot Workshops

Smallholders play an important role in Indian wood industry. Their plantations are generally in the form of agroforestry, farm forestry, block, and strip plantations. However, these smallholders face challenges in FM certification such as technical language of the standards and high cost of audit and compliance. To streamline these issues, FSC has launched RFSS pilot, which is simple, easy to understand and comes with reduced complexity. Smallholders having less than 20 ha can apply individually or in a group for FM certification.

Accordingly, with the intention of launching the RFSS pilot, FSC India had organised three workshops during the year at Hyderabad in January 2023, Kottayam (Kerala) in September 2023 and Panchkula (Haryana) in November 2023. The launch and first calibration workshop of "The FSC Forest Stewardship Standard for Smallholders in India" was held at Hyderabad, India during 18-19 January 2023. Certification bodies (CBs), existing forest management (FM) certificate holders (CHs), prospective CHs, progressive farmers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), consultants and senior forest officers attended the workshop in large number. On this occasion, talks were delivered by Dr Suresh Gairola, FSC India Country Director on 'The FSC and India Standards for Forest Management Certification', by Mr Ashutosh Mahana, Manager (Plantations), JK Paper Ltd on 'Engagement with smallholders: The JK Paper experience', by Mr Joachim Meier-Dörnberg, Social Policy Manager, FSC International on 'standard operating procedure for the pilot test' and by Mr Thesis Budiarto, FSC Policy Manager Asia-Pacific on 'Pilot test roll-out: The Indonesia and Vietnam experience'. Intense interactions with CBs and other stakeholders were held on the pilot test. Subsequent two workshops in Kerala and Haryana involved the smallholders and other stakeholders in these two important states.

These three workshops helped in improved communication with relevant stakeholders including plantation owners, CBs and industries about the benefits of RFSS pilot and how they can participate in this pilot project.

3.4 Community Forests

In continuation of its efforts to reach out to multitude of stakeholders to create awareness about the solutions offered by FSC for responsible forest management, FSC India reached out to the community forest owners of the north-eastern state of Meghalaya.

About 76% of the state is under forest cover and more than 90% of it belongs to the communities including individuals and clans. Workshop to deliberate upon the possibilities of forest certification of community forests in Meghalaya was held at Shillong on 14 December 2023 which was well attended by a large number of community forests representatives, apart from state government functionaries.

The talk delivered by Dr Suresh Gairola, FSC India country director was well received by the participants. It was agreed that the communities will have internal discussions about certification with ecosystems services procedure and action will be initiated for early approval of the working schemes/plans, demarcation of the community forest areas, networking with prospective sponsors and mobilizing group entities. The centre of excellence for NRM&LI, government of Meghalaya coordinated the workshop.





4. BUSINESS & MARKET DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

4.1 Roundtable Meetings

Roundtable meetings provide us the opportunity to have candid discussion with stakeholders and potential CH's. In 2023 FSC India engaged in multitude of roundtable meetings.

4.1.1 Linking FSC certification with India's export aspirations

A meeting was held in July 2023 with Director General Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industries Govt. of India on promotion of FSC certification to boost export of forest products. The event, coordinated by Invest India, included a detailed presentation by FSC India followed by Q&A session. It was decided that:

- Invest India to get information on types of wood and mapping of state or district level forests being sourced from by key companies. Additionally, requirements of rubberwood by these companies to be understood.
- Post identification of states, organize meetings between FSC and State authorities to take forward discussion.

4.1.2 Identifying barriers and challenges in sustainable natural rubber in India

India is the 5th largest producer and 2nd largest consumer of Natural Rubber (NR) in the world. At present, rubber is grown over 827,000 ha area and the average landholding is approx. 0.57 ha. There are 1.32 million smallholder rubber growers and additional 0.60 million labourers who are engaged in rubber growing activities. Natural rubber is an environmentally friendly choice, but only if it is sourced sustainably. When natural rubber comes from uncertified plantations, there is an imminent risk that it may contribute to deforestation and human rights violation issues. Moreover, natural rubber supply chains are complex, involving several tiers from plantations to factory, resulting in traceability challenges.



In this regard various roundtable meetings were held with Rubber Board of India, Rubber Industries Ltd & Plantation Corporation of Kerala with following objectives in mind:

- i. Create network with all stakeholders of rubber value chain and understand their challenges.
- ii. Generate awareness amidst rubber stakeholder about FSC's work in sustainable forest management.
- iii. Deliberate on how FSC can contribute in socially acceptable, economically viable and ecologically tenable management of rubber plantations.
- iv. Develop a mutual understanding on what can be done to improve sustainability in the rubber sector.

4.1.3 Institutional collaboration with WWF India

WWF has been a long-standing partner with FSC for promoting responsible management of forests. To reinvigorate this partnership a meeting was held in WWF India office to discuss ongoing works related to sustainability and explore collaboration opportunities. FSC and WWF India are working closely to develop a ToR to collectively work on forest product value chains in India.

4.1.4 Discover Green - Greenathon

Kimberly Clark is existing CoC CH and it intend to promote use of FSC certified paper and hygiene products in commercial spaces through its various facility manager companies. In this regard FSC's support is sought by KC to organise Discover Green – Greenathon. FSC India looks forward to actively participate in this year-round awareness campaign.



4.1.5 Strengthening Fashion Forever Green Pact

H&M is one of the signatories to Fashion Forever Pact and has committed to procure 100 % of its raw material requirement through responsible sources. Fashion value chain has many intermediary companies and for ensuring integrity of whole supply chain H&M is interested that all its intermediaries also become CoC CH's. Accordingly, FSC and H&M are working together to organise webinars for these Tier -2 intermediaries such as yarn and fabric manufacturers for generating awareness about FSC's suit of sustainability solutions and how it can help in ensuring responsible sourcing.

4.1.6 Meetings with forest based associations & federations

Forest enterprises in India face several challenges including increasing global competition, shortages of raw materials and consequent policy restrictions. In order to address such multitude of challenges, various federations are active in India. FSC India has made efforts to engage with such associations and federations from time to time, to understand their issues and how FSC sustainability solutions can help forest enterprises in gaining market access and wider recognition.

In the meeting held at Chennai in March, 2023 with the office bearers of All India Timber Federation and Chennai Timber Merchants Association, the procedure, and benefits of FSC FM and COC certification were explained. The association requested FSC India to address the AGM of the association to make all the members aware of the benefits of FSC certification.

In the meeting held with the officials of Goa Sawmill Owners association in April 2023, the benefits of FSC FM and COC certification were explained.

4.2 National Workshop on Agroforestry and Farm Forestry for Sustainable Land and Ecosystem Management

The workshop was held in Dehradun during 5th – 6th January 2023. Senior forest officers, researchers, NGOs and other stakeholders from different parts of the country attended. Dr Suresh Gairola chaired the session on – ‘Quality planting materials for scaling up of agroforestry and farm Forestry practices’ and delivered the lead talk on ‘Certification framework for plantations, quality planting material and nurseries’.



4.3 Delhi Wood Expo 2023

The 7th edition of Delhi Wood which took place from 2 -5 March 2023 at India Expo Mart, Greater Noida (Delhi NCR) was attended by FSC India and Devendra Gupta, VCD manager, FSC International. It featured major domestic and international companies specializing in woodworking and furniture production technologies, providing a global platform for showcasing the latest innovations, forging partnerships, and exploring investment opportunities.

The Indian Furniture Market stood at USD23.33 billion in FY2021 and is growing at a CAGR of 6.04% during the forecast period to reach the value of USD32.75 billion by FY2027. The development of e-commerce channels has further expanded the reach of the Indian Furniture Market to a wider audience. India is the fifth largest furniture producer at a global level and the fourth largest consumer of furniture.

Following were the key learnings:

- Mango wood, Acacia wood and Sheesham wood are in demand, but the supply chains are complex. The supply of these species is erratic as it is coming from numerable known/unknown sources. Traders procure from their contacts only when firm demand or orders exist.
- Most of the VC operators do not find the need for going for COC certification as there is no such demand from their principals. Some of the VC operators have tried getting COC certifications but they find the entire process very complicated.
- There is a mismatch between the species available in India under FSC FM certification and the species required by woodworking industry. Eucalyptus, Casuarina, Poplar, Acacia auriculiformis species which are available in FM certified forest in India and mostly being consumed in-house by the paper companies. Any additional requirement of FSC certified wood is mostly being met through imports.
- CBs need to be more proactive in approaching potential COC CHs.
- Better visibility needed for forest certification needed in terms of publicity, capacity building and training material.

4.4 North-East Wood Expo, Guwahati

Northeast Wood Expo is the flagship trade show for woodworking, furniture manufacturing and allied industries. This B2B Expo offers an opportunity to expand operational presence in the emerging destination for furniture manufacturing and woodworking in India. Stakeholders get a comprehensive understanding of technological advances and the most recent manufacturing trends in the areas of furniture manufacturing, woodworking accessories, and raw materials.

FSC India participated in the second edition of the Expo organised in Guwahati, Assam during 29th Sept – 2nd October 2023.



Event takeaways for FSC

- **Wood Composite:** The major takeaway from the event was the high participation and interest of market as well as customers in Wood composites. FSC India will focus on developing network with industry players and explore the possibility of COC certification.
- **Rubber:** Rubber plantation and rubber processing in northeast India is on the rise due to government focus on finding non-traditional areas for rubber cultivation. As most of these rubber planters are smallholders, FSC India will explore potential for launching RFSS pilot in this region.
- There is lack of awareness about FSC and its sustainability solutions. General perception being that the FSC certification is required only if they want to export their products in European markets. Therefore, concerted efforts are required from FSC to raise awareness level through social media campaigns and event participations.



4.5 India and Sustainability Standards Summit New Delhi by CRB

FSC India participated in the ISS Summit organised by CRB during 6th –8th November at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. The Summit convened a diverse set of stakeholders to dialogue and develop roadmaps across key sustainability issues and industry sectors – in supporting the momentum towards Sustainability.



4.6 PAPEREX, New Delhi

The 16th edition of PAPEREX was organised by Indian Paper Mill Association during 6th-8th December 2023 in New Delhi. The event saw participation of more than 600 industries related to paper and pulp. Anuj Sharma, FSC India Deputy Country Director was invited to speak in the inaugural session of the event on the topic “Importance of certification in paper industry and its market relevance.”



FSC India also participated in the second day of the event and interacted with major paper and pulp industry stakeholders. They were apprised about FSC’s sustainability solutions and its relevance in ensuring sustainable supply chains. Interaction with Orient Paper Mill, Sehshayee Paper Mills, Edicon and others have helped in opening possibilities of group certification of smallholder eucalyptus and casuarina plantations.

4.7 IDH Sustainable Trade Summit, Gurugram

IDH convened the first edition of Sustainable Trade Summit – SUTRA at Le Meridien Gurugram during 16th-17th December 2023. The summit was abuzz with thought provoking discussions on sustainable trade, biodiversity conservation and related topics.

Anuj Sharma, Deputy Country Director, FSC India presented his view during a lively panel discussion on the topic “Biodiversity conservation and deforestation free trade.” Anuj reiterated FSC’s long term commitment to build socially responsible, environmentally sustainable, and economically viable value chains in forest products. He also discussed with the panelist on the need to build capacity of smallholders through industry collaboration to build narrative and actions on responsible sourcing. During the discussions delegates also showed keen interest in understanding the impact of upcoming EUDR on Indian smallholders.



4.8 Destination Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit

The Investors Summit was held in Dehradun during 8-9 December 2023 and inaugurated by the honourable Prime Minister, of India. Dr Suresh Gairola, FSC India Country Director was invited to deliver a talk on the topic “Forest certification: Leveraging forest products and ecosystem services.” Apart from the prospective investors, this event was well attended by Uttarakhand Forest Minister, senior forest officers, research institutions, forest-based industries, private plantation owners, environmental groups, nature lovers and trainee officers from IGNFA and CASFOS. The forest minister announced the state's resolve to work towards forest certification and verification of ecosystem claims.





5. ENGAGEMENT WITH CERTIFICATION BODIES

FSC certification bodies (CBs) are critical in actual implementation of the vision and mission of FSC on the ground. Regular engagements with CBs have been held by FSC India to promote forest management certification and pilot test of regional forest stewardship standard (RFSS) for smallholders in India, apart from the growth of chain of custody certification. During the year, engagement with CBs started with the launch and calibration workshop for pilot test of India RFSS in January 2023 at Hyderabad. Most of the representatives of CBs including SCS-Eco Stewardship Pvt. Ltd., Control Union, Preferred by Nature and Cotecna (outsourcing partner of Russian register) participated in the discussions.

One-to-one liaison with CBs continued during the year and meetings with SGS, Bureau Veritas, Preferred by Nature, SCS-Eco Stewardship Pvt. Ltd and Control Union were held to understand the status of their activities and the areas of collaboration to increase forest certification in India.

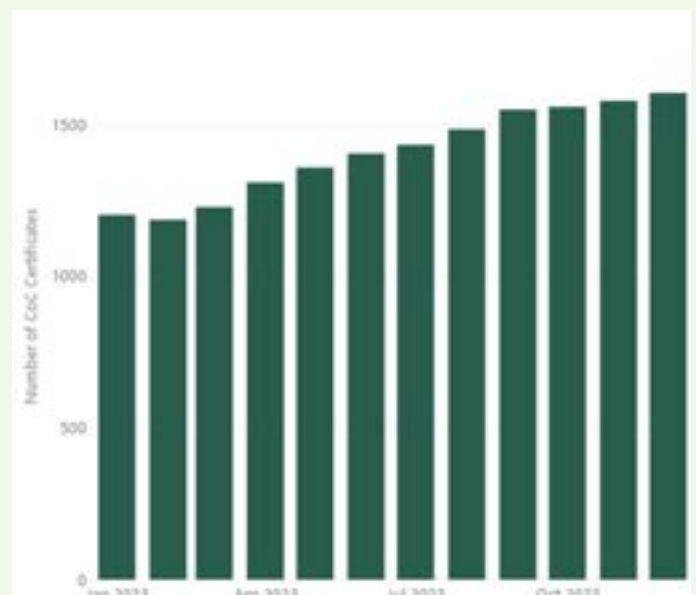
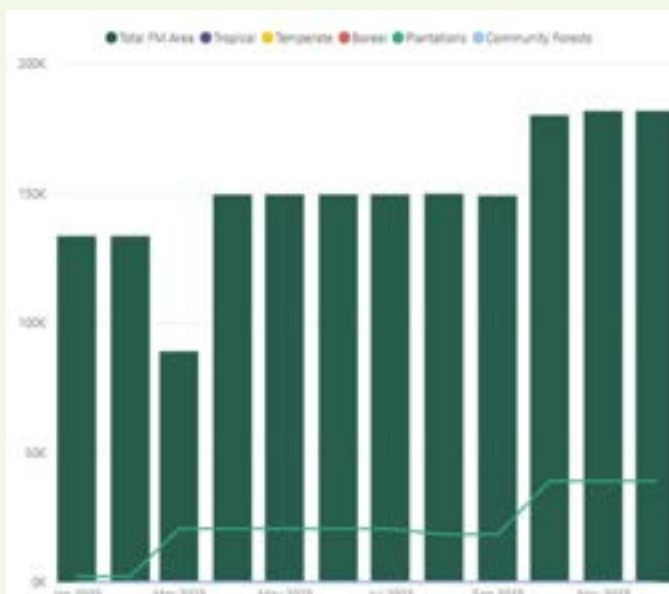
As part of ASI-FSC calibration workshop on core labour requirements for CoC certification, all the CBs and their auditors were invited to participate in the workshop held at Bengaluru in October 2023. On this occasion, FSC India also held one - to - one deliberations with them.



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6. INDIA FACTSHEET

The year 2023 has brought with it certain challenges. The impact of recently announced intent of certification scheme by Govt. of India and other prevailing competing certification scheme needs to be assessed in totality. Despite these uncertainties, we end the year 2023 with impressive growth in FM certified area by 36 % and CoC CHs by 33 %. The increase in FM and CoC certification is an indicator of increasing awareness and acceptability of FSC’s sustainability solutions. FSC India intends to build on this impressive growth in the upcoming years and have already planned series of projects for the year 2024.





7. UPCOMING PROJECTS 2024

FSC India will be working on four projects in the year 2024 with an aim to strengthen FSC's presence in India. These projects in totality will not only help in accelerating FM and CoC certification but would also strengthen FSC's presence in rubber, paper, fibre and solid wood value chains.

7.1 Accelerating FM certification in India

This project will aim to accelerate forest management certification of natural forests and plantations by improving stakeholders' understanding of FSC solutions (India FSS, ES Procedure, CIP). Following outputs are targeted through project implementation:

- Create better understanding amongst stakeholders about FM certification process through workshops, meetings and effective use of information and communication tools.
- Enhancing group certification of smallholder's forests/plantations through identification and mobilisation of group entities
- Quadruple FSC FM certified forests from current 0.15 Mha to 0.60 Mha in India by the end of 2024.



7.2 Kickstarting FSCs presence in Natural Rubber

India is the fifth largest producer and fourth largest consumer of natural rubber in the world. However, FSC FM/COC certification and PLAs has not developed in line with its potential. With the intention to enhance FSC’s footprint, the project will aim to deliver following outcomes:

- To improve FSC footprint in the natural rubber sector in India.
- To engage with rubber plantation owners, manufactures, processors, traders and consumers of rubber in India to promote sustainability
- Value chain development in rubber
- To identify and engage intensively with key account holders in rubber
- To increase FM/CoC certification in rubber sector



7.3 New market development

This project aims to address and unlock this potential through improvement in awareness, understanding and facilitation by engaging with different industries. This will improve Chain of Custody certification and Promotional Licence Agreements in India.

- Understand the barriers, challenges and potential for CoC certification and PLAs in India.
- Improve CoC certification and PLAs in India
- Make Indian forest-based industries focus more towards sustainability



7.4 Regional Forest Stewardship Standard Pilot (APAC project)



The certification needs of small forest owners (<20 hectares) in South-East Asia are not well addressed by the current FSC normative framework, being too complex and costly. For unlocking high potential for FM certification, new tools are required. RFSS pilot is launched to cater to the needs of such smallholders. This regional project involves following components:

- Two Workshops for CHs/CBs/Potential CHs/Potential Group Entities/WBIs
- CB-Implementation of 5 pilot testing
- Marketing and Communication (publication of brochures/publicity material) in English and Hindi



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