FSC Modular Approach Program (MAP)
August 2013

FSC’s Modular Approach Program (MAP) is an emerging initiative aimed at providing a structured path to achieve FSC certification by verifying defined steps, starting from the legal right to harvest to full FSC certification.

FSC has drafted MAP standards (forest management, chain-of-custody, and CB requirements), support services, a Monitoring & Evaluation system, and is carrying out field-tests and consultation throughout 2013 as part of a ‘controlled’ launch.

I  Overview

The FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship are now well established as the most widely recognized international standard for the certification of environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable forest management.

However, achieving the full set of P&C requires a high level of performance from forest management Organizations. Many forest managers, especially smallholders and those in tropical countries, perceive FSC certification as prohibitive and inaccessible unless intermediate benefits are available along the path to certification that justify the efforts and investments.

As a response, in 2006 FSC approved a Policy in Modular Approaches to Forest Certification (FSC-POL-10-003). This Policy sets up minimum criteria for credible stepwise schemes. The Policy also states FSC’s own interest in exploring stepwise schemes and collaborating with entities operating credible stepwise schemes.

In June 2011, following discussions at the FSC General Assembly, FSC took the decision to develop its own set of MAP standards. A Technical Working Group was established to guide the development of MAP standards for Forest Management, Certification Body Accreditation, Chain of Custody and market claims. Through MAP, full FSC certification is accomplished in three time-bound and independently verified steps, starting with legality verification, then Controlled Wood certification, and ending with full FSC certification within a five-year period.

There are 5 main elements of draft FSC Standard for Organizations Participating in the FSC Modular Approach Program (FSC-STD-30-006):

1. An application submitted to an FSC-accredited certification body, including a self-assessment demonstrating conformance with the basic requirements for participating in MAP.
2. A Baseline Assessment, organized and agreed to by the Organization and performed by an accredited Certification Body.
3. An Action Plan developed by the Organization in response to the Baseline Assessment and submitted to the Certification Body for verification.
4. Formal participation in MAP, including annual audits from the certification body and public reporting.
5. Three time-bound Steps (legality, Controlled Wood, Full FSC), to be met within a five-year period.

Diagram 1: A Map of MAP
2 Introduction
The FSC was established in 1993 as a tool to promote environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world’s forests. Today, FSC is recognized as providing the most rigorous standards in forest management in the world and has had unprecedented success with over 150 million hectares certified worldwide. Businesses of all sizes – from multi-national brands to domestic manufacturers – increasingly choose FSC for responsible sourcing, risk mitigation and market recognition. FSC sets a standard for responsible forest management, providing certification (forest management and chain-of-custody) and a labelling system which recognizes forest management that meets this standard. The FSC certificate for responsible forest management helps to demonstrate adherence to the standard, and can be used as a marketing tool to maintain access to existing markets, to access more and/or new markets, and under certain conditions to obtain a price premium.

At the same time, awareness of the pervasiveness of controversial and illegal logging in forest products industries continues, and over the last few years, many consumer countries and businesses have taken measures to eliminate controversial and illegal wood from their supply chains. Many have turned to FSC as a means to achieve this.

Yet discouragingly, although demand for FSC products continues its rapid expansion, supply is not following a parallel trajectory. Often cited constraints include supply chain bottlenecks and difficulties faced by tropical and small forest operators in meeting the demanding FSC standards. Governments, civil society, NGOs and businesses face real challenges in shifting to FSC certified products and even to legally verified products due to these constraints.

The Modular Approach Program of FSC (MAP) provides an opportunity to change this pattern.

For the first time FSC will be able to provide structured support to non-certified producers who have a commitment to becoming FSC certified but who need help and/or motivation to achieve this goal. MAP provides a lower entry level to the FSC system and allows for a more pro-poor approach to certification. It is also FSC’s response to new demand for legal verification, but in a framework that incentivizes Forest Management Organizations to keep improving their forest management practices and not just strive for the minimum. MAP creates an effective compliance link between each step so that each incremental improvement increases both the ability to achieve the next step as well as the overall ability to the meet the full standard. Finally, MAP is designed with a claims system that allows limited market benefits at the intermediate steps.

3 An entry-level opportunity and a pro-poor approach
FSC MAP will formalize a lower minimum entry point into the FSC system. This is especially important for small and community producers who require more support to reach full FSC certification when faced with development barriers such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of market access, lack of financial resources or low business and entrepreneurial capacity. By engaging smallholders at an earlier stage, we can better understand how to help them overcome these barriers in a ‘pro-poor approach’ - where poverty reduction is a key outcome.

Through MAP, FSC is partnering with the UN FAO’s Forest & Farm Facility to strengthen small forest management business viability by integrating their highly successful Market Analysis & Development (MA&D) toolkit. MA&D is a facilitated entrepreneurship development program with 4 phases to help smallholders develop their entrepreneurial
skills and understanding as they pursue FSC certification. The end result is an enterprise development plan which complements the MAP Action Plan.

This will be coupled with a comprehensive modular training program, delivered by qualified FSC trainers in local languages and covering all aspects of FSC certification requirements, forest management practices, value-chain analysis, small business management and marketing.

With responsible management come lower levels of deforestation and better value from timber and non-timber products, which can help communities preserve their ecosystems for environmental, nutritional, cultural, and religious values while providing sustainable revenue streams. Furthermore, by progressing to FSC certification through a structured, stepwise manner communities are empowered to maintain decentralized control over their forest resources, secure clear tenure and use rights, and then given the resources to make entrepreneurial and business development decisions that mirror their progress in improving their forest management practices.

4 The Steps of MAP towards Full FSC Certification

4.1 Step 1: Legality

In an effort to serve businesses seeking to demonstrate timber legality, there has been a recent proliferation of private and public sector initiatives for legal verification. Yet these, too, face challenges. While they all aim at verifying product legality, procedurally and normatively there is significant variability between initiatives. Moreover, there is not one umbrella scheme or system to ensure consistency in standards or practice. And currently, there is no accreditation system for these legality verification systems. Simply put, while legality verification schemes have given businesses a place to turn, they fall short of providing continuity and independent credibility that FSC certification has built up over the past 20 years. Nor do they provide the incentive for moving producers to full FSC certification after they have reached legality.

In response to these issues and the adoption of new laws and regulations in consumer countries such as the USA, Australia and the European Union, MAP includes legal verification as the first step into the FSC system. In order to pass this step, the MAP Participant Organisation must be compliant with the Criteria & Indicators of FSC Principle 1 and it’s Annex of all applicable legislation for the country of operation. These Annexes are currently being compiled by FSC’s global network of national and regional offices.

FSC envisions that this step will require strong partnerships between governments, MAP participants and their Certification Bodies who will provide the compliance verification services. Field-testing is scheduled specifically for this step and also to research if/how existing national legal verification systems might be integrated into MAP compliance assessments.

4.2 Step 2: Controlled Wood

The second step in MAP is the already existent FSC “Controlled Wood” (CW) system. This system requires demonstrating a level of forest management performance which eliminates controversial sources but is lower than required for full FSC certification. Verified controlled wood may be processed with 100% FSC-certified material to produce an FSC mixed product according to strict accounting and labelling rules. Controlled Wood has its own Standard (FSC-STD-30-010), which will be used as the verification tool for assessing compliance at MAP step 2.
4.3 Market incentives to ‘step up to the standard’
In MAP, each step is designed to incentivize participants to keep moving up. Forest managers are mandated to plan out how they will achieve each step using an action plan which they are audited against annually. Lack of progress with the Action Plan, measured in major and minor non-conformances, can lead to suspension or even termination of their participation in MAP. However, progress is rewarded by increasing access to FSC trademarks and business to business (B2B) claims allowing market recognition.

Some are concerned that interim benefits will discourage Participants from progressing. To counteract this, full consumer recognition via FSC logo use is reserved for full FSC certification.

5 MAPME: MAP’s Monitoring & Evaluation Program

5.1 Overview
FSC has heretofore struggled with demonstrating its direct impact on certified forest management units because the baseline prior to certification is often not defined. MAP offers FSC the unique opportunity to establish a monitoring and evaluation system (M&E) that follows the progress of MAP participants right from the outset and measures the impact of the FSC certification process on forest management units all through the steps and beyond. M&E will be focussed equally on the changes brought about to forest management practices, livelihoods and entrepreneurship.

MAPME will also allow for the adaptive management of the Program itself and indicate the midcourse corrections needed to ensure that MAP achieves its intended impact. MAPME is designed to measure the efficacy and reach of the program and assess if the incentives in the system are sufficient to both support participants and keep them focused on full FSC certification as the final goal.

It is estimated that MAPME will facilitate better investment opportunities for small and community forest producers who face challenges accessing finance, as the impact data being reported motivates companies and financial institutions to link their investments directly to positive impacts.

5.2 Methodology and data collection tools
MAPME is intended to be simple to implement, without placing undue costs or burden on the MAP Organization or the Certification Body, while yielding valuable information. Thus, the M&E data to be collected has been entirely embedded into the normative templates and reporting formats that form part of the MAP system, as illustrated below:

![Figure 2: MAPME data collection tools](image-url)
Collection of baseline Information
Some basic monitoring data will be collected in the Application Form template, right from the moment each Organization first applies to be part of MAP. Extensive detailed information will then be collected by the Certification Body during the Baseline Assessment and reported in a standardised Baseline Assessment report template.

Monitoring
Ongoing monitoring data will be gathered annually by the Certification Body and reported in standardised annual surveillance audit report templates. Regular review and reporting against Action Plan targets will help assess the Participants’ progress towards FSC certification and the impacts of the process to date, and determine subsequent annual workplans for learning and improvement.

Evaluation
Evaluation of the monitoring data will be done subsequently by FSC International once the results of the annual surveillance audits have been reported into a centralized database. MAPME will be continuously evaluated and adapted on an ongoing basis in order to meet FSC’s monitoring and evaluation needs.

6 Implementing the FSC Modular Approach Program

6.1 2011-2012: MAP Technical Working Group, template development, and MAP Support Plan
Made up of experts, members, and stakeholders involved in the FSC system, the Technical Working Group stewarded the development of forest management, accreditation, and trademark standards for MAP. Templates for the Self-assessment Form and the Action Plan were drafted in 2012 along with the M&E questions.

The MAP Support Plan (see Figure 3) ‘bundles’ the services of the Smallholder Support Program and makes them available at key stages to facilitate development, incentivize progress, and help smallholders utilize the benefits of FSC effectively.

Figure 3: Smallholder Support Plan
6.2 2013: Field-Testing
Throughout 2013, FSC will work with FSC National Offices and accredited Certification Bodies to conduct 3 projects, representing the elements of MAP that are brand new to FSC:

- **Jan - May 2013 Development & field-testing of MAP ‘package’**
  Field-testing the draft standards, templates, MAPME framework and impact assessment methodology.

- **June - Dec 2013 Application, Baseline Assessment & Action Planning**
  Field-testing the earliest phases of MAP, initial training and engagement with Certification Bodies, finalising the relevant documentation and guidelines.

- **June - Dec 2013 Reaching Step 1: Legal verification**
  Field-testing the process of getting legally verified, combined assessments with national legality verification systems and B2B claims related to legality.

All of these stages are fundamental to get right, as making access and legality too difficult will dissuade small and community producers from pursuing MAP and FSC to the point where they can maximize the benefit of being in the system and where FSC certification can have a lasting impact on their livelihoods. These pilots will be conducted in Africa, Latin America and South East Asia will likely include non-certified smallholder members of the WWF Global Forest and Trade Network (GFTN).

6.3 2014: Launch of MAP
FSC will review the results of the field-testing phase, make corrections to the program based on our learning, complete the consultation on the draft standards and launch MAP in Q2 of 2014.

7 Outlook

While MAP is in its initial phase, FSC and stakeholders will learn how the program can respond to the challenges for certification outlined above as they implement it. Throughout September and October 2013 FSC will be holding a public consultation where expert opinions are welcome. If you would like to be submit comments, please contact Vanessa Linforth, MAP Program Manager: v.linforth@fsc.org.