



SOCIAL IMPACTS

Have the needs of local communities, indigenous peoples and workers been addressed?

Excerpts from the report: *Sustainable Procurement of Wood and Paper-based Products: Guide and Resource Kit*

Nearly 500 million people, 200 million of whom are indigenous peoples, depend on forests for their livelihoods (Chao, 2012). Social well-being is one of the three pillars of sustainability, and social aspects cannot be ignored in sustainable procurement. If poorly managed, social aspects can lead to conflict between forest companies, communities, and governments with negative effects for all.

Social aspects involve a variety of topics including:

- **Respect for the rights of indigenous peoples** – recognition and support of the identity, culture, and rights of indigenous peoples.
- **Rights of local communities** – may or may not include indigenous peoples. Refers to the rights of forest communities to own and access forests.
- **Property, land tenure, access and use rights** – definition and protection of property rights, and land tenure and use of the forests by communities—including indigenous peoples—governments, and forest enterprises.
- **Recognition of customary rights** – indigenous peoples’ rights to regulate their access to and management of forests based on their customary laws and institutions.
- **Health, safety and labor** – levels of pay and minimum wages, security of employment, access to training, medical care and welfare benefits.
- **Cultural, spiritual, and recreational impacts** – cultural, spiritual and recreational uses of the forests.
- **Participation and access to information** – the right of stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process that affect the management of forests or in dispute-resolution mechanisms. Access to relevant and accurate information enables stakeholders to meaningfully participate in these processes.



Addressing Social Aspects

Some of the emerging best practices to address and manage social aspects (compiled from Wilson, 2009) include:

- Forging effective, equitable, and meaningful partnerships with other players, including communities, civil society organizations, research organizations, and governments.
- Promoting constructive multi-stakeholder dialogue and capacity building to build a shared understanding of the rights and responsibilities of communities, government, and industry.
- Promoting meaningful dialogue, beginning with the provision of on-time information through appropriate channels.
- Building capacities to develop and implement effective conflict management procedures and processes, and empower local communities to effectively understand and exercise their rights.
- Although forest certification systems address social impacts differently, requesting certified wood is a pragmatic way for buyers to purchase products that are produced in a socially responsible manner. Certification requirements often involve a social impact assessment.

Factors to Consider Regarding Social Impacts

- Logging and timber processing is dangerous work that is often conducted in remote areas where compliance with accepted social laws and standards (e.g. safety training, underage or illegal labor, unfair pay) might be difficult to monitor and verify. Consider partnering with local organizations to better understand the social context of the operations.
- Beware of logging operations that may be run by the military with proceeds used to finance war-like activities.
- Social impacts arise in both natural forests and intensively managed forest plantations.
- Local civil-society organizations can facilitate business relationships between community forest enterprises and buyers.
- Participation is important to the “social contract” between forest companies and communities. In some cases, and to some extent, community participation might be required by law; all relevant stakeholders have the right to receive a reasonable response.
- Consider the use of a social or human rights impact assessment to better evaluate the social context and the possible implications of the operations on communities.
- As in other aspects of sustainable procurement of wood-based products, tracing the production chain back to its beginning will help assess the risk and opportunities associated with social impacts. In some areas monitoring and verification have important roles to play.



For more information on these issues and to download a copy of the guide, Sustainable Procurement of Wood and Paper-based Products: Guide and Resource Kit, visit www.sustainableforestproducts.org.

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