

## FSC General Assembly Highlights Climate Change and Community Forestry

The [Forest Stewardship Council](#) (FSC) has taken decisive steps to engage in two of the key issues currently facing the world of forestry: what is the role of forests in the challenge of responding to climate change; and how can the market for certified forest products translate into benefits for forest-dependent communities?

The FSC holds a General Assembly (GA) once every three years. The latest meeting was in Cape Town, South Africa, during 3–7 November 2008. Over 250 representatives from around the world gathered to discuss, debate, and decide on over 60 motions, and thus chart the direction of FSC until 2011.

FSC's membership is divided into Economic, Social, and Environmental "chambers," according to interest, and all three chambers must approve a motion in order for it to pass. The GA therefore begins with a period of negotiation as the three chambers attempt to reach consensus before the main business session, and voting, gets underway.



In setting priorities for debate, the assembly clearly assigned highest importance to climate change issues. FSC's globally-acknowledged criteria for assessment of sustainable and responsible forest management could become a valuable part of a verification system for the emerging forest carbon market. The assembly mandated a working group to examine this possibility and to engage, on FSC's behalf, in the ongoing climate change negotiations.



A key priority for the Social chamber (which includes RECOFTC among its members) was improvement of FSC's performance in reaching small-holders and community-managed forests, particularly in the developing world. The GA therefore agreed to revise its system for targeting Small and Low Intensity Managed Forests (SLIMF) and, furthermore, to explore the feasibility of a "community origin" label for forest products from FSC-certified community forests.

FSC released a new [global strategy document](#) in April 2008, wherein securing the credibility and integrity of the certification system was highlighted as a key goal for the organization's immediate future. To this end, the GA approved a series of motions to strengthen the role of [Accreditation Services International](#) (ASI). FSC has suffered from criticism in recent years over the allegedly poor quality of some certified forest areas. ASI was established, accordingly, to act as guarantor of the FSC accreditation process and to take swift, remedial action if standards fall. Despite some high profile examples of such action in recent months, ASI requires an improved mandate and additional resources to conduct this role to the satisfaction of all members.

It is yet to be seen whether the steps taken at this GA will be sufficient to address the concerns of FSC's more vocal critics. The meeting concluded in a positive atmosphere and the priorities for the next three years were clearly laid out. The commitment of the membership was evident but the quality and transparency of the FSC certification system will be judged, rightly, on results, not motions.

RECOFTC became a member of FSC's Social (South) chamber in August 2008 (read [article](#)).

For more information on the FSC General Assembly 2008, please click [here](#).

Ben Vickers  
RECOFTC Senior Program Officer  
[ben@recoftc.org](mailto:ben@recoftc.org)

