

Results of the social surveys to support FSC certification in Bulgaria

One of the first steps in preparing for FSC® certification is to undertake social surveys to determine who are the interested and affected forest stakeholders, what are their key challenges (in terms of forest management) and how are these issues to be addressed.

This is exactly what the WWF team set out to do towards the end of 2015 when they carried out FSC® surveys in the eight FMUs.

Interviews were carried out with different stakeholders including mayors of local villages, directors of some of the FMUs, loggers, tourist associations, private landowners and hunters. Below are some of the key findings.

First, the good news

- The primary concerns and needs of local people are generally being met by the FMUs. Free access to the forest is not restricted (including for non-timber forest products and hunting), firewood demands are satisfied (despite some delays at places), grazing areas are adequately coordinated and private ownership is respected.
- Foresters have a strong presence among the local community and are respected; however, they need to be more proactive in their communication with the different stakeholders. More regular communication amongst the hunters, loggers, local communities, tourism operators etc., is also required.
- Society is becoming more and more aware of the role forests play to ensure clean air, pure water, preserved biodiversity etc. There is now more scrutiny on what foresters and loggers are doing in the field and this bodes well for inclusive and open management processes.

Areas of concern

- There is generally poor awareness and understanding of FSC® in this region. In fact, many stakeholders were not even aware that their FMUs were in the process of preparing for FSC® certification.
- Those in the know have mixed feelings about the certification scheme. For some logging companies, the involuntary nature of the certification process by government is problematic. However, some stated that since being FSC certified, they have a “better image” which has attracted new clients from other countries in the EU.
- One issue that became apparent during the interviews with stakeholders is that when there are complaints (e.g. for damaged roads from logging operations) the forestry units tend to shift their responsibilities for resolving the issue to their sub-contractors and just stay as onlookers instead of taking the lead role as FSC® requires.
- Negative demographic trends (depopulation of villages) are having an impact on the availability of forest workers which in turn affects the successful implementation of forest management plans.

FSC® is underpinned by three key pillars namely, environmental appropriateness, social beneficiation and economic viability.