

Certification as a new system of non-state global forest governance system

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Stéphan Guéneau, IDDRI France / gueneau@iddri.org

Traditionally, international environmental governance has focused on the issue of global public goods that states cannot provide individually, with intergovernmental cooperation being aimed at the creation of an international regime (Krasner 1983; Young 1997 2001). Over the past decade, this governance ‘model’ has been marked by a crisis of multilateralism that is notable for the refusal of certain large countries, such as the United States, to engage in international collective action on environmental protection. In addition, other multilateral agreements, notably on trade and production sectors, are struggling to meet objectives that are ecologically acceptable. This crisis has given rise to new forms of global environmental governance.

Alongside mechanisms for international coordination between sovereign states, a hybrid form of governance is gradually emerging: it is characterized by global policy networks (Reinike 1998; Streck 2002) where public and private actors share authority and a common goal. At the same time, a third ‘non-state market-driven governance’ (NSMD) model, where authority is diffuse and based in the marketplace (Cashore 2002; Bernstein and Cashore 2003), has asserted itself.

This new order raises questions on the nature of international collective action and on the legitimacy of these governance systems, their comparative effectiveness – their ability to provide solutions to global environmental problems – and their complementarity. These questions are particularly pointed where global forest governance is concerned.

No form of international coordination focusing specifically on forest conservation and management has really materialized. Although global forest governance is a topic that continues to prompt heated intergovernmental negotiations, at the same time, other governance systems are bringing non-governmental actors into play – NGOs, the private sector, local institutions – actors who have had very little influence over the globalization process up until now. In relation to the weaknesses of multilateral solutions, a pragmatic view of forest governance is emerging. This view entails forming ‘coalitions of the willing’ that include public actors (governments and international organizations) as well as private actors with different viewpoints (NGOs and private sector) for the purpose of reaching a common goal.

Moreover, NGOs active in the international forest policy debate have markedly improved their ability to influence forest governance systems (Bass 1996; 2003; Haufler 2003; Meidinger 2003). During the 1980s, several NGOs, frustrated with government inaction and the absence of clear agreement at the intergovernmental level, called for a tropical timber boycott. The retailer companies looked for new ways to protect their activities from boycott threats. They recognized that they could arrive at the most credible alternative to boycotts through greater collaboration with NGOs on the joint development of a non-state network-based governance system. Thus the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an international private association that provides standard-setting, trademark assurance and accreditation services for companies interested in responsible forestry, was born in 1993.

Do these newer systems of global governance represent a viable solution? Do they make it possible to overcome the constraints associated with a classical governance system in the form of a legally binding multilateral agreement on forests? This paper attempts to answer these questions. After reviewing the evolution of global forest governance, we will analyse the main points of contention surrounding the new forms of governance.