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FSC Global Strategic Plan 2021–2026

Delivering *Forests For All Forever*

Objective, Strategic Pillars and Enabling Priorities 2021–2026

Introduction

The Global Strategic Plan 2015–2020 established a strong reference point for the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®), providing a clear direction and level of ambition. It outlined a future where people recognize that the health of humanity and the health of forests are deeply and profoundly dependent on each other – and act on this understanding in the way they conduct their lives. This future is defined in the 2050 Beacon that aims for “A new forest paradigm realized”, in which the true value of forests is recognized and fully incorporated into society worldwide.

Aiming to ensure that FSC’s direction fits the opportunities and challenges for the world’s forests and forest stakeholders, the Global Strategic Plan 2015–2020 set out FSC’s identity and roles, building on two fundamental elements:

- a governance model that empowers stakeholders by giving them a vote in decisions on forest solutions that make a real difference on the ground;
- a market-based system that creates social, environmental and economic benefits through the mobilization of market forces.

FSC certification has translated into a huge market success that has surpassed the 20 by 2020 objective established in the Global Strategic Plan 2015–2020. This objective for market impact had set the FSC share of global forest-based trade at 20 per cent. With about a quarter of the global industrial roundwood volumes coming from FSC-certified forests, FSC has become a defining force for forest management, giving us a potential influence that most people saw as impossible 25 years ago.

Critical challenges in a defining moment for forests

While we take pride in this success, it is clear, however, that we have not achieved the necessary relevance for tropical forests and forests managed by smallholders and communities. The challenges faced by the world’s forests have not gone away since FSC was established 25 years ago. Most of these challenges originate far outside of forests and the scope of the forestry sector – and so out of the reach of FSC’s policies and standards.

The core challenge identified in 2015 remains today – economic and governance systems in many parts of the world incentivize deforestation and forest degradation, thereby making responsible forest management unattractive as a land-use option. In addition, the increasingly noticeable effects of climate change and the alarming rate of loss in biodiversity are also reducing the health and vitality of forests, and reinforcing social injustice and inequities for the people who depend on them. These trends will only increase the challenge of managing forests in a way that maintains their intrinsic value and sustainably delivers the products and multiple services needed by society.

However, we have reached a defining moment. The importance of forests in the global agenda is growing rapidly. Finding ways to maintain forests is fast becoming more widely recognized as a vital part of ensuring human well-being – and as a major tool to overcome the global challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and the social injustice and inequity related to both.

Responsible forest management as a fundamental part of the solution

FSC was created from a shared vision of how responsible forest management could be defined. We have developed a certification model for forest management and wood products as the main instrument to achieve our mission of promoting responsible forest management of the world’s forests. Replicated all over the world, and radically transforming both the forestry sector and the markets for wood products, the certification model has made FSC a leading pioneer in sustainability.

Yet both the potential and the value of responsible forest management to address current global land-use and forest challenges remain under-recognized. The scope of FSC certification in creating value is still too limited for forest managers, particularly in tropical forests and smallholder and community forests.

Looking ahead, however, FSC has a strong foundation and the means to position forests and responsible forest management as a fundamental part of the solution.

To fully achieve our mission and to be relevant to tomorrow's forest challenges, we see two main issues that must be overcome between now and 2026:

1. The area covered by FSC forest management certification has plateaued, meaning that our impact is not growing to new areas.
2. New FSC tools to verify impacts and to create more value in the social and environmental services provided by forests are still in their early stages. They need further development and roll-out to meet their potential to counter the land-use challenges.

An updated five-year plan towards the 2050 Beacon

The draft Global Strategic Plan 2021–2026 builds on the lessons learned since 2015 and defines the level of change and core mechanisms needed now to meet the 2050 Beacon.

The plan realizes that the true value of forests is holistic and will evolve over time. This value rests in ecosystem life-supporting functions and social services as well as in forest products. Responsibly managed and well-protected forests:

- are an asset for human well-being and our best defence against human-caused climate change and loss of biodiversity;
- create livelihoods for indigenous peoples and local communities; and
- are needed to sustainably address the challenges of growing populations and the demand for forest products and services.

To achieve the 2050 Beacon, forests must be managed as vital ecosystems within the wider landscape. A good portion of forests must be set aside for their intrinsic value and the services they provide, with limited further human impact, while sound forest management practices must be used for the parts of forests that are actively managed for products and services – practices as defined by FSC's stakeholder-agreed Principles and Criteria.

Figure 1 shows how change towards the beacon needs to occur. FSC, as a **platform for co-creation**, is the foundation, bringing people together to jointly define and promote the **global benchmark for responsible forest management**. This benchmark is operationalized through mechanisms (policies and standards, together with assurance systems) that create shared-value **forest solutions** and incentives for sustainable use, conservation and respect for all. Together, the platform for co-creation, the global benchmark and the forest solutions represent **FSC's core strength**.



Figure 1. How FSC's core strength support strategies towards the 2050 Beacon

Certification of forest management and forest products remains at the heart of what FSC offers – but it needs to be developed, refined and complemented with other forest solutions. To translate and enable the impact of our Principles and Criteria on the ground, **markets need to adopt** shared-value solutions, and **society actors need to drive them**. These solutions and their support will ultimately lead to **growth in FSC's impact**, resulting in the following long-term outcomes.

- *Market transformation* – a variety of different products, services and market mechanisms work in favour of forests and the landscapes they are part of, and market actors adopt FSC solutions.

- *Shifted land-use and forest governance systems* – governments improve policy and regulation, and provide incentives that leverage FSC solutions as best practices.
- *Societal recognition and incorporation of the true value of forests* – people and institutions act with a sound understanding of how their decisions impact forests, and how forests impact their lives.

Together, these outcomes will indicate that the world is on track to reach the 2050 Beacon. FSC will support this journey by contributing to landscape management that achieves:

- *Stable forests* – net forest loss is stopped.
- *More forests* – degraded lands have been restored back to forests, increasing the global forest area.
- *Quality forests* – the social, economic and environmental quality of forests is high and sustained because best practice has been applied.
- *Empowerment* – people who depend on, defend and sustainably use forests are empowered to secure their rights and interests.
- *Respect for all* – everyone is treated with equity and fairness, regardless of gender and diversity.
- *Shared value and benefits* – forest management leads to value that is shared among stakeholders, and the benefits accrue equitably for stakeholders through conservation and sustainable use.

This Global Strategic Plan 2021–2026 focuses on the following two areas. They are closely connected, and much of what FSC does will have elements of both:

- Unleashing the **potential of certification to provide greater value** to forest managers, including tropical forests, smallholders and communities, focusing on user relevance, market access and documented impact.
- Using our core strength to **adapt the certification tool and develop new solutions** to create value in responsibly managed and well-protected forests, and to promote and position forest solutions in the broader landscape – thereby addressing global challenges more fully.

Together, these areas of focus embody our core strategy, which – as seen in the overview diagram below – will interact with the supporting strategies of transforming the market and catalysing shared action with stakeholders.

Growing our impact: FSC's 2026 objective

Towards the 2050 Beacon, everything we do must aim to grow our impact: increase forest quality and area; support and empower people who depend on, defend and sustainably use the forests; transform markets that create shared value; and promote recognition by society of the true value of the forests.

All strategies and related activities should lead to impact, and it is something FSC must be able to demonstrate. The 2026 objective for impact has two specific goals – the first for documenting impact through certification, and the second for demonstrating impact using FSC solutions.

Growing our impact: 300 million hectares certified with documented impact

Within this 50 per cent overall growth to 300 million hectares, FSC will double the certification of natural tropical forests and areas managed by smallholders, communities and indigenous peoples, increasing it to 50 million hectares.

Growing our impact: 200 million additional hectares demonstrate impact using FSC solutions

By 2026, new FSC solutions for forest management, conservation and restoration will generate essential value to those closest to the forest, in the regions where they are most needed, and at a scale that shifts the current trends of forest destruction in priority places. This will include solutions that build on our existing certification model, such as ecosystem services, together with new solutions that deliver action on the ground for key global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss and forest restoration.

Overview of the FSC Global Strategic Plan 2021–2026



One core strategy, two supporting strategies

1. DEVELOP FOREST SOLUTIONS – core strategy	
<p><i>FSC convenes actors to co-create adapted forest solutions, with robust proofs of concept, delivering high quality and credible impact on the ground.</i></p>	
<p>This strategy seeks to unleash the potential of certification solutions and adapt and develop additional solutions that are relevant beyond the current reach of FSC (including social and environmental services and restoration).</p>	
<p>The problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scope of FSC’s current main solution (certification of forest management and forest products) is too limited to promote, as an attractive land-use solution, FSC’s global benchmark for responsible forest management. • The way internal FSC processes are currently designed makes FSC overly complicated, costly, bureaucratic and slow, leading to stakeholder disappointment and fatigue. • There is a lack of data and verification tools to demonstrate the impact of FSC’s solutions. Impact verification of ecosystem services is in the early stages of adoption. 	
<p>The approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalize, diversify and target FSC’s certification to stakeholder needs, and develop innovative additional solutions that build on FSC’s core strength and generate shared value for all while upholding FSC’s integrity and values. • Re-energize FSC’s governance and role as a convener to promote our solutions for responsible forest management. • Develop and enhance mechanisms in the FSC system to ensure a focus on outcome orientation and to provide impact data and credibility. 	
2. TRANSFORM MARKETS – supporting strategy	3. CATALYSE CHANGE – supporting strategy
<p><i>Existing and emerging FSC market tools translate into increasing benefits for forests and the people who depend on them.</i></p>	<p><i>FSC works with other actors in society to leverage FSC solutions and the role of forests, while inspiring commitments and actions that reflect the true value of forests.</i></p>
<p>This strategy seeks to invigorate existing markets and mobilize new ones for forest products, such as wood (with a focus on strengthening FSC’s role in solid wood markets), non-timber forest products, and services and benefits (environmental and social values).</p>	<p>This strategy includes the creation of alliances and coalitions, government engagement, and working with key sectors outside forestry, such as the financial sector.</p>
<p>The problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main value proposition of certification as we know it has not delivered responsible forest management at large scale where most needed: natural tropical forests are under-represented, and certification is not accessible enough for smallholders and communities. • Some market actors see weaker systems as attractive alternatives to FSC’s complexity, high cost, lack of supply and other negatives. • FSC has not achieved sufficient relevance in solid wood markets, when demand is growing for wood from areas where responsible forest management is not the common practice. 	<p>The problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to develop targeted solutions often do not reflect shared value, but focus on single issues such as carbon sequestration, forest productivity or biodiversity conservation, without taking into account the interrelationships and wider context. • Stakeholder fatigue, push-back and the critique of certification as a relevant tool (including credibility issues), as well as weakening support by some nongovernmental organizations. • Inability to articulate and tackle global, systemic threats to forests as well as their implications for the forestry sector, such as poor governance, illegality, social unrest, conversion to agriculture, infrastructure development, climate change risks (fires, pests), timber market volatility, and so on.
<p>The approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance high-visibility/differentiation strategies in key sectors by working with large international market players. • Create local and global market solutions for smallholders, indigenous peoples and communities. • Create incentives for data collection and impact verification in social and environmental services. • Grow the interest in viable business models that address value-chain risks and impacts at a large scale, leading to comprehensive and credible new solutions. 	<p>The approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with key stakeholders and other providers of solutions – to seek synergies, common ground and comprehensive approaches for global challenges, with FSC solutions included and differentiated. • Unfold FSC’s potential to become an instrument in the growing interest in sustainable investments (e.g. impact investment and green bonds) linked to global challenges. • Partner with key accounts and market players to use FSC storytelling to tap into and strengthen growing social awareness on the value of forests.
Enabling priorities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set regional priorities based on potential for impact. • Strengthen the platform for co-creation: membership and network development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strive for operational excellence. 	

1. Develop forest solutions – core strategy

Building on the essence of Strategy 1 of the Global Strategic Plan 2015–2020, we will further refine certification while using our core strength to create and spread new tools to complement certification and more fully address global challenges.

Critical result areas

1.1 Advance the role of FSC as a platform for co-creation

i This is an update of critical result area 1.3 in the 2015–2020 plan, focusing more on the membership's ability to work as a platform for co-creation and to drive change on the ground. This will build on the core elements of governance that have secured well-earned credibility, such as balanced representation, transparency and shared decision-making processes.

Intended outcome:

■ FSC's membership leveraged as a platform for the co-creation of forest solutions that drive change on the ground.

1.2 Streamline policies and standards towards outcome orientation

i This is an update of critical result area 1.1 but is bolder – aiming to bring more purpose to continual change in the normative framework and to improve the efficiency and user-friendliness of the system.

Intended outcome:

■ FSC's policies and standards (the normative framework) are fit for purpose to ensure relevance, reliability, focus on outcome orientation, and a proper balance between global consistency, regional flexibility and integrity.

Policies and standards should have enablement mechanisms in place, focus on areas where risks are high, and reward good performers with a reduced effort to demonstrate compliance.

1.3 Enhance verification mechanisms

i This is a new version of what was critical result area 1.2. It explores ways to improve monitoring at the forest level, introduce new technologies, provide more forest data and reduce the cost of certification. It makes impact data an important component of what FSC offers.

Intended outcome:

■ Enhanced verification mechanisms ensure high-quality assessments, credibility and improved impact monitoring at the forest level.

FSC is nimbler and allows new approaches for collecting monitoring information that improve our credibility and the reliability of data, and lower the costs of demonstrating conformance with our standards.

1.4 Expand the scope of FSC solutions

i This is an update of critical result area 1.4, and more ambitious so that solutions can be articulated and implemented as robust new offerings built on FSC's core strength. Currently, forest management certification mainly works within certain enabling conditions and its potential is under-recognized.

Intended outcome:

■ FSC solutions for conservation, restoration and sustainable use are scaled up and articulated within the wider landscape.

FSC will focus on solutions in high-impact areas (including natural and tropical forests, and areas managed by smallholders, communities and indigenous peoples) and in areas of high importance for human well-being such as urban forests.

2. Transform markets – supporting strategy

This Strategy 2 is in support of Strategy 1, the core strategy of developing forest solutions. It takes Strategy 2 of the Global Strategic Plan 2015–2020 further. It seeks to promote a market-based system with incentives in place to realize the true value of forests, resulting in benefits being delivered back to forests and people.

Critical result areas

2.1 Overcome value chain barriers

i This revitalizes what was 2.2 in the 2015–2020 plan, which was about overcoming certification barriers. This critical result area aims to address the complex issue of increased demand not resulting in area growth, going against an assumption in the Global Strategic Plan 2015–2020. This critical result area has been redesigned to build on the work on market intelligence (including for forest management) and on information for value-chain development to identify the right measures and to drive results for this strategy cycle.

Intended outcome:

■ The most critical value chain barriers are identified, and targeted interventions lead to increased impact through a higher uptake of FSC certification and FSC solutions.

FSC will play a proactive role in identifying barriers and levers by understanding the data and insights most relevant to landowners and key stakeholders. We will look at forests more holistically than before: (1) as supply for our certification of forest products; and (2) as a 'space' with potential market opportunities to grow our impact. The latter will be through incentives arising out of the value created by solutions for social and environmental (ecosystem) services.

2.2 Accelerate the market uptake of FSC-certified products

i This critical result area builds on 2.1 and refers to targeted actions that are needed to capture the full potential of the certification of wood products and non-timber forest products. This critical result area should happen in tandem with the new 2.1 above.

Intended outcome:

■ Strategic marketing interventions with key partners promote increased demand for FSC-certified products in high-priority geographical areas and sectors.

2.3 Unleash the power of data for valuing the management of forest services

i This is an update of critical result area 2.3 in the previous Global Strategic Plan but articulated differently. It also builds on what was 3.3, to unleash the power of knowledge. Solutions created in Strategy 1 above would need to connect to new markets. This critical result area addresses verified data for responsible forest management as a new market opportunity for valuing forest management for its environmental and social services.

Intended outcome:

■ Emerging market opportunities for impact verification of environmental and social services are captured and get translated into robust business models for responsible forest management.

2.4 Scale up the benefits for people who depend on forests for their livelihood and well-being

i This is an extension of what was critical result area 2.3 but serves as a guiding principle of any market strategy. If benefits are not created for all, strategies will fail.

Intended outcome:

■ Existing and emerging market activities effectively translate into increased benefits of FSC solutions for people who depend on forests for their livelihood and well-being – thus rewarding responsible forest management.

This outcome is related both to a growing uptake of FSC solutions by these people, and to proactive engagement with business. This engagement will enable businesses to demonstrate their adherence to social safeguards through FSC certification.

This critical result area is key to scaling up FSC's value proposition to smallholders, indigenous peoples and communities, and to increasing the benefits for landowners and certificate holders. It is also about finding new ways to provide incentives for responsible forest management that do not depend directly on timber markets (e.g. incentives for restoration/reforestation/rehabilitation, social and environmental services, investment, climate change mitigation and resilience, and biodiversity protection).

3. Catalyse change – supporting strategy

This supporting strategy replaces Strategy 3 of the previous Global Strategic Plan, which was to transform the way we work. This transformation is now covered partly in the core Strategy 1 and the supporting Strategy 2 above, and partly in the Enabling Priorities below. This supporting Strategy 3 builds on the realization that FSC cannot do everything by itself and needs the multiplier effects of others.

Critical result areas

3.1 Advance the mission through alliances, coalitions and partnerships

i This is a scaled-up version of one of the four commitments in the Global Strategic Plan 2015–2020. Efforts will involve working with others at several levels, including global and regional organizations and initiatives, business coalitions, and so on. Similar to other strategies, this needs strategic direction for priority setting, and clear objectives.

Intended outcome:

- Redefined collaboration with other relevant actors translates into increased demand for forest solutions, responsible consumption of forest products, and related positive impacts.

This critical result area will strengthen our existing activities of engagement and advocacy by redefining our value proposition to these groups. It implies connecting our solutions with mechanisms for establishing impact data, such as on carbon sequestration, biodiversity, water, and social benefits.

3.2 Strengthen government engagement

- i Governments – in addition to nationally regulating forest management – are important owners and/or managers of forests in many countries, as well as being important consumers of forest products. For solutions developed by FSC to become widespread or even the norm in society, FSC needs to work with governments.*

Intended outcome:

- Governments accept, endorse and/or incorporate FSC solutions in their regulation of forest management and/or procurement of forest products, thereby enabling and supporting responsible forest management on the ground.

This critical result area will strengthen our engagement with governments so that FSC certification for forest products is used as a tool. Ultimately, it aims to translate FSC solutions into means for achieving government-related targets such as nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, restoration and biodiversity commitments, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

3.3 Leverage sustainable finance/investment for forest management

- i This aspect has emerged as a key existing and anticipated opportunity for FSC.*

Intended outcome:

- FSC solutions are recognized by investors as the most credible validation and verification tools for responsible forest management (including forest restoration and conservation) and its underlying positive impacts.

FSC certification has the potential to become the main tool for responsible investments that lead to positive impact, backed up by the data to show it. Over time, access to verified impact data will represent a core value of FSC certification.

3.4 Accelerate awareness of the value of forests

- i Learning from our success, we know that our certification business model for forest products is not enough to reach our 2050 Beacon. We also know that a consumer movement that promotes a label and buys products is not enough for the amount of change needed. Actions by individuals and groups that promote and achieve impact are also needed. This will reflect the values behind our brand and, ultimately, the true value of responsible forest management.*

Intended outcome:

- Forest solutions, as well as the true value of forests and the FSC label, are increasingly recognized and reflected in the actions and behaviours of society.

Communications and messaging are key. There will need to be a mix of promoting the label and promoting the forest, plus a mix of working alone and working with partners and in alliances. This could include communicating directly to consumers or businesses, promoting the label, or promoting sustainability more generally. It is also important for the membership, network and alliances to deliver FSC messages to stakeholders.

Enabling priorities

As a basis for delivering the three strategies of this Global Strategic Plan 2016–2021, FSC will work on three sets of enabling priorities:

- Set regional priorities based on potential for impact.
- Strengthen the platform for co-creation: membership and network development.
- Strive for operational excellence.

Set regional priorities based on potential for impact

As *One FSC*, we will work together to define the priorities for our global, regional and national presences and associated investment and fundraising, based on where FSC can achieve the greatest impact through its engagement.

On this basis – and building on the overall objective for 2021–2026, Growing our Impact – FSC will increase its focus in regions and countries that have:

- natural tropical forests
- high numbers of smallholders and communities managing forests
- significant areas of forest with high conservation value
- forests that play a major role against climate change and protecting biodiversity.

This will necessarily have to go in tandem with the existing potential for:

- certification of wood-based products within existing productive forests
- adoption of new solutions to global challenges
- creating or maintaining market pull for FSC solutions for products and services.

The priority should be to build on robust qualitative and quantitative analysis while allowing the space for opportunities to present themselves. This requires sound monitoring mechanisms, and knowledge to be shared from the learning gained out of existing initiatives.

Strengthen the platform for co-creation: membership and network development

FSC network development

FSC is a decentralized organization that relies on its network partners to build local supply and demand, to represent FSC at the local level and to engage with governments and local stakeholders.

The FSC network consists of network partners representing FSC in a country or subregion under a collaborative agreement. Some are independent organizations, while others are offices

established by FSC, or individuals contracted by the organization to represent it in a regional, subregional or national setting.

The FSC network is a global community of individuals and organizations that believe in and contribute to FSC's mission of *Forests For All Forever*. Participants in the FSC network contribute to *One FSC* by embracing its bottom-up, voluntary and member-based approach.

Strategic decisions for network development will focus on achieving the defined regional priorities and on the ability of the overall network to deliver on the objective of this Global Strategic Plan 2016–2026. These decisions will be based on a set of success criteria, including in the following areas:

- social, environmental and economic impact through an increase in certified area or the uptake of other FSC solutions
- increase in chain-of-custody or other market-related FSC solutions
- engagement with governments and stakeholders in collaboration to drive the development and use of FSC solutions
- balanced growth of international membership (geographical and chamber)
- improvement in certification consistency, and reduction in false claims
- progress towards funding self-sufficiency
- cost-effectiveness of the country operations.

These strategic decisions are made by the FSC Board. They include the setting of the strategic direction for network development, and the following specific items:

- definition of prerequisites to become and remain an independent network partner
- principles of the framework for funding from FSC International to the network
- defining annual priorities for the joint efforts of the secretariat of FSC International working with independent network partners to enable and deliver impact on the ground
- recognizing or ending the recognition of an independent network partner.

FSC membership engagement and mobilization

The membership, representing the three chambers in all major forested countries around the world, is one of FSC's major assets, providing the basis for the organization's ability to be a convener of very different interest groups and find solutions to complex and controversial forest-related issues.

FSC's members are the owners of the organization and the ultimate decision-makers. These decisions are through the general assembly, such as to approve the statutes and the Principles and Criteria, and to elect the board of FSC International.

FSC will continue to increase its efforts to engage the membership in the implementation of the Global Strategic Plan at global, regional and national levels. These efforts will include:

- ensuring effective and engaging communication and information-sharing with members;
- increasing dialogue through regional members' meetings, solutions forums and similar;

- appointing member coordinators to help the membership engage with strategically important issues;
- engaging with members to help identify FSC solutions to complex and controversial forest-related issues.

Strive for operational excellence

The FSC International secretariat will build on its commitment to excellence and service delivery to ensure that FSC information and resources flow openly across FSC organizations by:

- exhibiting leading sustainability and social responsibility practices;
- retaining and attracting a talented workforce;
- managing the finances of the organization with high reliability and transparency;
- delivering best practice IT systems and management;
- keeping the organization legally safe;
- realizing the resources to support our work;
- collecting and using data to measure our impact and inform decision-making;
- communicating our impact.

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