

# FORCERT: OUR STORY OF CHANGE

2004 to 2014

## **BACKGROUND AND BEGINNING**

FORCERT (Forest Management and Product Certification Service Ltd) is a Papua New Guinean not for profit service providing company. In the last ten years FORCERT has been working with rural member communities in the New Guinea Islands and the Momase regions, facilitating and promoting sustainable forest management through a Group Certification Service Network using the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification scheme as a management, marketing and networking tool. We are also recognised as a Fair Trade Organisation under the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) and follow their Fair Trade Standards.

FORCERT facilitated the link between the communities' small scale-timber businesses and central timber yards, allowing their combined sawn timber output to service overseas certified timber markets.

The situation in 2003, prior to the start of FORCERT, was that there were many communities owning and operating portable sawmilling equipment in Papua New Guinea. They were running sawmilling businesses of various scale and intensity to produce timber for local construction, generate income and create jobs at the village level. The community producers were trying to sell their timber to town based timber yards often without proper prior arrangements.

This led to an unfavourable situation for both parties; producers did not get a good benefit for their product, as part of the timber was rejected or downgraded, and timber yards had no guarantee of any consistent supply. There was also no consideration for longer term market development linked to the actual forest resource, nor any incentive for practicing responsible forest management.

The certification of small-scale timber producers was generally seen as a logical next step in the development of a sustainable and viable small-scale forest industry in PNG. Certification helps small scale operations to achieve social and environmental sustainability, and allows them to increase their financial returns by opening export markets.

It was considered an effective tool to achieve good forest management. However for small-scale timber producers the costs of certification were prohibitive and the necessary systems and procedures were quite complex for them to participate without outside assistance and support.

Therefore the idea of an entity managing a Group Certification Service Network (GCSN) was developed in 2002 & 2003 by a wide range of stakeholders; village sawmill managers, timber yard

staff and managers, eco-forestry, environmental and social NGO's, and training, educational and research institutions.

FORCERT was incorporated in 2003, began operation in 2004 and in 2005 became the holder of a Forest Management Group Certificate covering producer communities, and Chain of Custody (CoC) Group Certificate, which covered Central Marketing Units; small-medium scale local timber yards. . Interested community groups were required to meet all FORCERT Group Certification System criteria; going through 3 certification steps, before becoming full FSC certified members under the group certificate scheme.

### **FORCERT's OPERATION AND RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE GCSN**

FORCERT has been setting up and managing a so called Group Certification Service Network (GCSN), with producers and Central Marketing Units as its members, receiving support from FORCERT and other service providers. FORCERT has been providing awareness, guidance and training on the FSC Forest Certification system requirements, business support to communities and Central Marketing Units (CMU) and assessment and monitoring to members in the Group Certification Service Network.

We gave training on chainsaw and sawmilling operation, operational health & safety (OHS) procedures, first aid, business directors roles & responsibility, chain of custody (CoC), setup preparation, business planning and management, financial management, and financial reporting using the 'Moni Stori' tool for the community groups FORCERT worked with. Community workshops and meetings were held to facilitate processes in community land use planning, business planning and High Conservation Value (HCV) identification. Regular monitoring on compliance was performed on producer communities and CMUs and external annual audits by FSC certified auditors were carried out annually on FORCERT ensuring continuous compliance with the FSC standards.

The primary role of the CMUs was to give technical sawmilling support to the community groups to ensure a more consistent timber supply and to combine the timber outputs from all community groups to supply the export market, with assistance from FORCERT in linking to the export markets.

Eight communities in the New Guinea Island were trialled on the Payment for Environment Service (PES) Project. Three of these communities were already part of the Community Carbon Forestry Inventory Trial Project initiated in 2008. FORCERT also worked at the national level facilitating the drafting of a *Proposed PES System for PNG*. The PES community level work involved training community inventory teams in conducting forest carbon inventory assessment and monitoring, conducting awareness on climate change, PES and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD).

Five communities were further prepared for trial on a group project under the Verified Carbon Standards (VCS) with two of these taken through pictorial awareness and a facilitated community discussions on the proposed benefit sharing mechanism of the PES system.

FORCERT's relationship with some communities went further in the campaign against the illegal acquisition of land through the Special Agriculture and Business Leases, which have been and still are a huge threat to many of the FORCERT producer communities and also many other communities in PNG.

## 2007 EXTERNAL EVALUATION

After its establishment in 2003, FORCERT had its first external evaluation in 2007.

FORCERT's overall idea of working with communities was well reflected in what the communities themselves and others were saying as reported by the evaluation team:

- ❖ *“We cut the trees but the forests are still there, we catch the fish but the fish are still there, we get the prawns but the prawns are still there.”*
- ❖ *“Before FORCERT came we women saw ourselves as just housewives and cooks. After we did our family trees we realised we were landowners and we all clearly know who owns which portions of land.”*
- ❖ *“FORCERT's awareness opened our eyes to realise that we can manage our own forest sustainably.”*
- ❖ *“What FORCERT tells us is what my grandfather used to teach me!”*
- ❖ *“FORCERT is the most important component of eco-forestry work in PNG as it includes social, environment and economic aspects. FSC certification will enable PNG to take advantage of market shifts. FORCERT also pushes the government to create market and transport infrastructure. “*
- ❖ *“FORCERT is playing pivotal role in gaining high value to producers via the group certification structure.”*
- ❖ *“FORCERT has done well for a young organisation - expanded into many target areas in a short time”.*
- ❖ *“The original vision for FORCERT has come to fruition. It was a lot of work to get it established and to develop FSC standards appropriate to PNG.”*
- ❖ *“I care about the people and I care about FORCERT.”*
- ❖ *“FORCERT is a doing good work and I fully support the certification because it helps the small people to benefit from their own resources”.*
- ❖ *“I very much support the FORCERT concept and PNG really needs it to reduce the amount of unsustainable logging.”*

## **2010 EXTERNAL EVALUATION**

The second external evaluation in 2010 had mixed stories. The actual functioning of the FORCERT Group Certification Service Network (GCSN) Model was being considered critical, especially on the communities' inability to consistently supply timber to the CMUs for export market due to various reasons. However, there were also some success stories. FORCERT chose to give more time to test the GCSN model by restructuring its operation, separating it into two branches.

The two branches were; Awareness & Training Capacity Building Branch (ATCB) and Group Certification Service Network (GCSN) Branch. The ATCB branch was supposed to concentrate on awareness, training and capacity building while the GCSN branch would be mainly doing certification assessment, monitoring and marketing work. Unfortunately, the separation was mainly made on paper, as FORCERT was not able to test this arrangement due to financial constraints.

Also in 2010 FORCERT began implementing the Payment for Environment Service (PES) trial project at the community level and at the national level. At the community level this project looked at exploring PES as additional resource management & income generating option. At the national level FORCERT promoted the development of a transparent and equitable PES system for PNG. The campaign against SABL land grabbing in the Pomio area of East New Britain Province started also in this same year.

## **2013 EXTERNAL EVALUATION**

The third evaluation in July 2013 also covered FORCERT's work on the PES trial Project at the community level plus the National Level work. The key findings of the evaluation were that for various reasons the original GCSN concept had not worked, although it was realised it was never really fully tested, due to the mentioned financial constraints on implementing the full 2010 recommendations. It was thought that FORCERT was limiting its possibilities and flexibility by focussing on community-level portable sawmilling enterprises, as the main means to support communities in implementing and maintaining their sustainable land use plans.

The PES project was considered to have done well, including the design of the community benefit sharing mechanism, but there were questions raised on the form of presentation of PES to communities, with the risks of raising expectations that could not be met. The evaluation team recommended for FORCERT to take great care not to increase confusion or raise expectation in how it moves forward in its member communities. However, at the same time it was acknowledged that the combination of community trial and national level work on PES provided FORCERT the leverage to be able to influence major government policy decisions on climate change and REDD.

The evaluation found that FORCERT staff has developed a good working relationship and have built trust with communities, show flexibility in their support for communities, however need more understanding of community development. This led to the conclusion that FORCERT needs more extension staff and a team approach.

The external evaluation report recommended FORCERT to relook at its original ideas and concepts, formulate a vision, revisit its mission, goal and objectives, and reconsider its strategies and way of working with communities. This external evaluation and its recommendations gave way to a series of reflection, learning and planning workshops.

## **PARTICIPATORY PROCESS OF CHANGE RESEARCH (PPOCR) AND THE STRATEGIC PLANNING EXERCISE**

Following on from the external evaluation 4 separate workshops were held. The first was a reflection workshop at the national level with relevant stakeholders facilitated by an expert consultant, the second was between FORCERT staff only; the third was a process of change research planning workshop facilitated by the same consultant with all FORCERT staff only and the fourth was a model design workshop for the FORCERT staff only facilitated again by the same consultant.

At the first two workshops assessments from the evaluation report on FORCERTs strengths, weakness, and recommendation were made. From the context of the evaluation report, the opportunities and threats for FORCERT were considered at the local or community level, National (Country), Regional (Asia Pacific) and International level.

Provocative questions were drawn out during the assessment and were used to assist and explore the direction FORCERT should take. Questions on the spaces and topics where FORCERT did not know the direction to take but did know the knowledge gaps, provoked discussions on how to try and find the answers. The options of a new FORCERT Organisational model were discussed and draft models designed by participants considering all the above. The conclusion was that there was insufficient information to proceed with any further planning.

Therefore, at the third workshop, a Participatory Process of Change Research was designed to organise further interviews with communities, partner organizations, and relevant Government Departments and development partners to complete the findings of the external evaluation and collect the identified missing information. This research was done by the FORCERT staff from February to June 2014. Midway in this 5 months period data gathering period a check-in meeting was organised to update each other on the progress of the research. In June 2014 the fourth workshop was held to compile all the research data that had been gathered over the previous months, and the actual strategic planning for the 2015-2019 period was done.

The PPOC research looked at gathering additional data in the same areas as recommended by the 2013 External Evaluation; community organising, community development, community Business, Fair trade and Organic certification for other cash crop potentials, FSC and PES, and national level work. The data was collected through one on one meetings, interviews with selected FORCERT communities and selected stakeholders and partners, and some of their partner communities. Some other selected stakeholders, development partners and Government agencies were also interviewed. Additionally a desktop study of available relevant studies and publications on all these topics was done.

The synthesis of all information was done in two batches; the first analysis was done midway in April at the check-in meeting, and the second in June, just before the strategic planning workshop. The results were combined and analysed, and led to clear conclusions and recommendations that were used to design FORCERT's new model in the strategic planning workshop at the end of June.

## **FINDINGS AND WAY FORWARD**

Below are the four strategic outcomes from the findings and the strategic planning workshop. After 10 years of the old FORCERT, it is now time for a change in which new ideas have to be adopted. It is evident that the GCSN concept, which was the centre of all FORCERT work, has not worked out.

1. FORCERT will maintain in communities most of what it is doing in its sustainable land use and conservation related activities (land use plans, HCV, FCS, PES), however it will now approach the communities in a more Melanesian way. This is one of the significant areas of change in FORCERTs work on its community entry and engagement process. This process has to be facilitated well in order to allow and empower communities to participate more in discussions and make their own decision for their future. FORCERT is mindful not to raise expectations and create an environment for dependency and hopelessness.
2. FORCERT will have a separate social enterprise arm and will commission a feasibility study to research on the Social Enterprise Arm, which will be a core Program of the new organizational structure once fully developed. The plan is for it to function independently as a separate entity. The research will determine if that is possible and exactly how it will operate and function, and what types of forest and agricultural community products it will deal with. The Social Enterprise program is planned to facilitate marketing and product development of ethical and environmentally certified community products.
3. FORCERT will continue its work at the national level to influence government policy & practice to create an enabling environment for communities.
4. There is still a gap in the understanding of a viable business at communities that needs to be explored further. However the general idea of it having a balance between economic, social and cultural values is there. FORCERT still needs more information on Fair Trade and other commodities and should continue to collaborate with stakeholders with experience and those with projects on the ground.

## MODEL and OVERALL PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Overall FORCERT will have three program activity areas of focus;

- Community Enhancement Program – Undertake community empowerment to facilitate communities taking the lead in their own process of change.
- National Level Program - To work at the national level to influence the government policy and practice.
- Social Enterprise Program - Operate a social and ethical enterprise that is trading in Fair Trade, FSC and Organic products that works with ethical and green village-based enterprises (a separate business arm).

FORCERT's **core activity** will be in the Community Enhancement Program facilitating processes and empowering communities to take the lead in their change, balancing their environmental, economic, social and cultural values & interests. The detailed changes and facilitation guide together with tools and selection criteria for communities to work with within this program are captured in the FORCERTs Participatory Process of Change Manual that FORCERT has developed as a live, regularly updated document.

The main change in FORCERTs strategy is that instead of using FSC certification requirements as the means of engagement with communities, FORCERT now will use a thorough general community participatory process of change approach. The sustainable land use planning and environmental conservation, based on responsible forest management, will still form the basis for all FORCERTS work with its partner communities. Where previously FORCERT engaged with communities specifically on FSC certified timber products, in this new approach assistance will be provided based on the land based livelihood and change options identified by the community itself.

The other two programs align and assist the work of the Community Enhancement Program to jointly work towards our vision: a resilient and self-reliant community living in harmony with nature, maintaining their traditional culture and meeting the needs of the present. *Yesterday for now and tomorrow.*

FORCERT's new goal is: Communities are smart, wise, fair, healthy and happy. They are implementing their community action plan which is recognised, supported and strong. They have successful ethical and green village based enterprises supplying to the best possible markets. They respect their Land Use Plan, conservation rules and maintain their cultural heritage.

The new FORCERT model and strategy are captured in the FORCERT Strategic Plan 2015-2019. To implement the new strategy an Operational Manual (2015-2017) has been drafted. The most important document in this manual is the Participatory Process of Change Manual, which guides us in our work with our partner communities under the Community Enhancement Program. FORCERT has also developed a set of strategies and guidelines for partnerships with other organizations and Government agencies and institutions.

There were debates to change the organizational name, however after thorough discussions it was decided to retain the well-known name FORCERT, but that, considering the change in focus and the new scope of FORCERTs work, this name no longer stands for “Forest Management & Product Certification Service”. It now means *Forests for Certain: Forests for Life!* , and this together with the Tok Pisin phrase *Tingim laif: lukautim bus na graun , na mekim senis yu laikim* captures well FORCERTs new way of work.

FORCERT now looks forward to working together with its partner communities and all other stakeholders on implementing its new strategic, starting in January 2015.

Thank you,

The FORCERTeam, January 2015.

