



# A Special Issue on Ensuring the Sustainability of Small Forest Landowners in the Global World

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## Narrative

Globally, small forest landowners (and forest-dependent poor) are victims of the economics of scale. They frequently find themselves unable to reach markets because silvicultural operations are relatively expensive for them. The lack of suitable financial options, dearth of supporting policy incentives, and poor infrastructure also affects their participation in markets. The participation of smaller landholders is typically low in the various forest certification programs, which further limits their market access. In this context, this special issue compiles a set of nine studies that focus on issues faced by small landowners worldwide and suggest some innovative ways by which market access for these landowners could be improved.

Malovrh et al. (2022) identified private forest landowners' readiness to perform forest management services within machinery rings, one of the organizational forms of machinery cooperation among private forest landowners in Slovenia. Per the authors, machinery rings help farmers and private forest landowners to overcome cost-inefficient forest management and more efficient utilization of mechanization. It was found that willingness to participate in machinery ring decreases with a rise in the landholding size, and therefore, a suitable mix of innovative and supportive policy instruments is needed to achieve desired forest policy outcomes, especially on smaller forest landholdings.

Two out of nine studies have characterized the role of forest-based income on the livelihood of villagers. Kassa and Nigussie (2022) surveyed 120 households in NW Ethiopia to better understand the role of boundary agroforestry in protecting biodiversity and supporting local livelihoods. They found that the woody species diversity was significantly higher in homestead boundaries than in-farm boundaries. It was also reported that boundary agroforestry contributed about 9% of the annual

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income of the local community in the study area. Magry et al. (2022) analyzed the value chain of three non-timber forest products (*Kerria lacca*, *Madhuca longifolia*, and *Tamarindus indica*) in Khunti District of Jharkhand, India. After surveying 387 households and 33 small traders across 62 villages, it was reported that wholesalers obtained the highest monetary benefit, followed by small traders. In contrast, the primary collectors received the lowest monetary benefits. It was also reported that women did most of the collection from forestlands. A need for skill enhancement and infrastructure development was emphasized to benefit primary collectors over time.

Clay et al. (2022) developed suitable models for ascertaining the impact of small landholdings on the adoption of conservation practices across about 300 family forest landowners in South Carolina, United States. It was also found that undertaking a conservation practice (e.g., prescribed burning) was directly proportional to the land holding size. Per the authors, educational and financial resources are two crucial factors for encouraging landowners to implement conservation practices and retain landowners already involved in the cost-share programs.

Four out of nine studies have characterized the impact of small landholdings on participation and compliance with forest certification standards. Tian (2022) surveyed about five hundred family forest landowners in Arkansas, United States, to understand their perceptions about forest certification. It was highlighted that about 70% of family forest landowners did not know about forest certification, and about 50% were not interested in the same. It was highlighted that education is key for increasing the participation of family forest landowners in forest certification. Abbasnezhad & Abrams (2022) performed a global analysis for a better understanding of the High Conservation Value Forest Toolkit, originally proposed as a part of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Forest Certification Standard. They found that out of six categories that are often mentioned in the existing literature, those related to biodiversity conservation are frequently covered. It was also found that the toolkit has been widely used outside of its original intended purpose in support of forest certification processes. It was also mentioned that a need exists to suitably customize the toolkit for benefiting small forest landowners in light of their special status, where actualizing significant investment is not possible to a larger extent. Dagnaisser et al. (2022) analyzed the non-compliance data related to FSC Forest Certification Standard from four South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay) to assess the differences across various landholding sizes. They reported that the Principles of the FSC standard with higher frequencies of non-compliance varied with the size of the forest management units, and therefore, more emphasis is needed to educate smaller landowners about forest certification. Ota et al. (2022) analyzed the price premiums that can be commanded from consumers by selling FSC-certified and non-certified cutting boards with different designs and sizes made of Hinoki (Japanese Cypress, *Chamaecyparis obtusa*) on a shopping website. They reported that price premiums for FSC-certified products are feasible up to 50% for small wood products such as cutting boards and, therefore, could motivate small landowners to certify their forestlands. This is especially true as only 10% of all the forestlands in Japan are certified, and there are around 830,000 households with over a hectare of forestland, with an average size of 6.2 hectares.

Finally, Charnley et al. (2022) analyzed community forest certification paradigms by developing three case studies (Mexico, Brazil, and Tanzania) to reflect on the fact that international, national, and local governments and non-profits, business partners and other market chain actors, and FSC and third-party certification bodies all have critical support roles to play in promoting community forest certification programs. It was mentioned that community-based initiatives could be a viable mechanism for increasing the market access of small forest landowners while ensuring biodiversity conservation, sustain forest ecosystem services, and alleviate poverty worldwide, especially in tropical countries.

The readers of *Small-Scale Forestry* will find this Special Issue useful for advocating meaningful changes at local, regional, national, and global levels to advance the needs of small forest landowners and forest-dependent poor in a sustainable manner.

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