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### **Governing Forest through Standardization and Certification: Understanding the Politics of Neoliberal Governance of Forestry Stewardship Council**

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#### **Abstract**

In recent decades, governments around the world have been experimenting with neoliberal approach in forest resource management through environmental standardization and certification in an endeavour to lessen financial and operational constraints and tensions between multi-stakeholders. Neoliberal era invites distributive politics that show a growing transfer of authority from public realm to private agents, civil society, whether non-profit or corporate—a clear sign of diminution of that power. Under these circumstances, a new managerial system develops for forest resource management in global context, which is Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC), the first independent non-profit global standardization and certification network. Though limited by secondary analysis, this paper does not focus on the strengths or the weaknesses of FSC but to argue this new governance under two different theoretical perspectives of Foucauldian governmentality and neo-Gramscian hegemony in identifying whether this new forms of governance bring a better management for agencies by restructuring the existing power-politics nexus or to reproduce and ensure the interest of previous one.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism, FSC, Governmentality, Hegemony

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Neoliberal era invites distributive politics that show a growing transfer of authority from public realm to private agents, civil society, whether non-profit or corporate—a clear sign of diminution of that power. Under these circumstances, a new managerial system develops that overarches and regulates forestry sector by setting different standards and certifications (Lipschutz and Rowe, 2005). In this context of neoliberalism, the world already has witnessed a proliferation of standards in global governance by the



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last two decades which is based on the principle of ‘acceptance of shared rule by a community as appropriate and justified’ (Ponte et. al. 2011). This is the third wave of voluntary private standards which combines the first wave (social movement based) and the second wave (business to business) where producers, retailers, Banks, crushers, exporters, NGOs, industries, etc., all come together (Multi Stakeholders Initiatives or MSI) to play a role in global environmental governance.

Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) is the first independent non-profit global standardization and certification network. In 1993, Forestry Stewardship Council (best known non-profit certification group) lunched in Washington as an ‘activist regulation body’ comprises different organizations and associations from twenty five countries, initially funded by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). FSC structures with equally weighted three chambers. These chambers include: environmental, social and economic and the chambers that also equally weighted between the North and the South. FSC is often painted in the literature as one of the most ambitious and successful transnational non-governmental regulatory schemes in the world because of its ‘democratic’ structure of governance (Moog, Spicer and Bohm, 2014).

### Structure of FSC Governing Body

Decision Making Bodies	Chambers	Balance of Power
General Assembly Of FSC Members	Environmental	North
		South
Board of Directors	Social	North
		South
Director General	Economic	North
		South

(Source: FSC, 2011)



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As Klinke (2014) tells, FSC appears as a policy solution that meets-up the challenges and problems of scientific vagueness but not grows as epistemic institution and not much successful with protection. European Union and World Bank join to finance FSC but many studies show that FSC is currently very fragile due to its commitment in stopping forest degradation and maintaining equal standards for all. Even some activists and academicians tell that FSC is appeared with nothing new but a continuation of previous 'governance' (Lipschutz and Rowe, 2005; Moog, Spicer and Bohm, 2014; Taylor, 2011; Bloomfield, 2012). This essay does not focus on the strengths or the weaknesses of FSC but to approach the style of governance through the lenses of two different theoretical approaches where one aims to highlight the rationalities and technologies of this new governance processes that bring global stability over forestry sector and the other focuses on whether this new compromised governing condition brings a new equitable form of operation or just a continuation of older one with new arms. In so doing, Foucault's concept of governmentality is adopted with its focus on rationalities and governmental technologies that explain the new governance while neo-Gramscian hegemony is also adopted to expose counter rationalities and counter technologies that embedded with FSC initiatives (Burchell et al., 1991; Dean, 2010, Levy and Scully, 2007). However, the conclusion part indicates the essay's position towards the nature of this neo governance whether it is a neo form of governance or not.

### **Approaching Governmentality and Hegemony in Approaching FSC**

In the discussion of political economy of global environmental governance, Newell (2008) shows Gramscian 'hegemony' and Foucauldian 'regimes of truth'/power-knowledge as useful to address the current nature of global environmental governance that influences in adopting governmentality and hegemony to explain FSC as a global environmental governing institution. The word governmentality, developed by Michel Foucault, refers to three dimensional characteristics: the rationalities of state [action], the technologies of [exercising] power, and the process of subjectification (Foucault, 1979, cited in Bose et. al., 2012:665). Governmentality is an analytical tool which explains the ways of governance is materialized through consensus rather than violence; the technology of governing people, motivating people, and directing people to rationalize the action of government can be identified as the main features of governmentality (Bose et. al., 2012; Lovbrand and Stripple, 2014). The current green twist to



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governmentality is manifested through a notion of stewardship of nature and an all-encompassing management of its resources. Stewardship's rationalities enable the entities concerned to grasp the sphere in need of governing, while regimes of practice, based on their rationalities employ certain technologies to render them practicable (Miller & Rose 2008). In this essay, the background of FSC is explained as rationalities of new governance where consensus formation, standards and certification are analyzed as technologies of this new governmentality.

In order to grasp the other side of the nature of this new FSC governance, many scholar use Gramsci's hegemony theory. Originally, Gramsci (Italian neo Marxist) coined hegemony to explain the reasons behind socialism's failure to persistent Soviet Union and subsequently the return of Capitalism. He explained that capitalism returned due to the failure of socialism in breaking the hegemony of capitalism; hegemony which is lived and carried by civil society, intellectuals, institutions, and educational systems (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony works by consent and not by coercion (domination with consent). Many scholars (like Cox) apply Gramsci's concepts to international relations and conclude that international organizations can be seen as mechanisms of hegemony as they help to develop and stabilize the dominant order (Cox, 1983, Newell, 2008, Levy and Scully, 2007). In this essay, Gramscian perspective also used in explaining the underlying nature of FSC Governance so that it may help in depicting a broader perspective for mitigating the current challenges while delivering future directions of global environmental governance.

### **Governing Rationalities in FSC**

Since 1984, Friends of the Earth begin campaign for boycotting tropical timber products, including not only wood products but also food products from land cleared of its forest cover (Mulligan and Hill, 2001 cited in Taylor, 2011). This contributed to bring wood and paper under high scrutiny in terms of their environmental impacts. Protests become an integral part of annual meetings of Western leaders and corporate executives in recent years. Anti-globalization movement is now perceive as global justice movement that covers human rights violation to environmental destruction, working condition issues globally. On that circumstances, when the conference of 1992 ended without any agreement, that



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triggered new global non-state initiatives for forest governance. Bargaining on 'global forest agreement' (regulation viz compensation) between industrial countries (IC) and developing countries (DC) when failed during 90s, create the momentum to public regulation on forestry as a dead theorem (Fogel, 2002 cited in Lipschutz and Rowe, 2005) and simultaneously, NGOs and activists started to build a new kind of private regulation where company, community, civil society and third party certification work together within the management. These circumstances provided one of the main rationalities for the formation of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and its respective certification scheme as a means of verifying that forests were being managed to an acceptable standard as new global governance over forestry sector (Cashore et. al. 2004).

According to Gramscian explanation, the volatile bourgeois forest economy needed to develop a strong hegemonic reproduction system where political-economic constraints, and the interplay of corporate and social and cultural actors which produce existing hegemony by corporate-civic collaboration within market mechanism. FSC appeared as a new machine of bourgeois hegemony production. Politics of situational improvement is merely a tactic to maintain the dominance of particular classes. FSC, the compromised settlement that asserts control by the global North over the South by including the stakeholders in one table or cocked starta, is a potent way to deal with the aharmonic situation of governance that suited with the neo-liberal environment (Li, 2007; Bartley, 2007). In neoliberal era, politics through market is an acceptable practice because what state does now, global civil society does the same by forming a coalition with state, capital, and market which help more effectively to harmonize and stabilize the condition that are seen as disturbance to the welfare for human population (Newell, 2008; Dean, 1992). FSC is a kind of organization which is framed over these kinds of global political rationalities and appears as a trouble-shooting mechanism which contain the hegemony of dominant class or a market mechanism through managerialism.

### Nature of Technologies of government in FSC

In Foucauldian perspectives, rationalities provide the field to produce the technologies of government. Consensus is a governmental apparatus which aims at striking a vision, a way of presenting facts and a





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direction of their interpretation (Ranciere, 2005 cited in Dajma, Fouitteux and Vagneron, 2011). FSC provides different types of forums to members and stakeholders through different level of discussion, which accelerate consensus on diverse issues. The principal forum is the General Assembly that meets every three years but is frequently asked to decide on various issues by mail or email. The nature of decision making process is almost based on consensus not in ballot or compromised (Dajmaet.al. 2011). The positionalities in FSC provide the scope for sales talk, which is an important aspect of environmental governance through forest certification that escalates the consensus environment between the stakeholders (Albrecht, 2013). The FSC develops auditing standards that are designed to ensure that the world's forests are well managed, and accredit auditors who certify the quality of forest management (FSC, 1994; WWF, 1994). The certification builds a type of managerial expertise. Audit also reinforces managerialism within standard setting. On the one hand, consensus provides the internal legitimacy while the audit provides the external legitimacy on the other. The FSC planned to achieve these goals by establishing auditing standards and by evaluating and accrediting forest management auditors worldwide on the basis of ten primary principles. In this way, behavior of stakeholders is controlled from the distance (Rydin 2007; Higgins and Larner 2010).

Gramscian scholars (Newell 2008) are agreed that FSC is quite innovative in its apparatus and technologies of government but the intention of these mechanisms is not to break the existing structure rather to reinforce the dominant hegemony. Forest degradation is continuing without any significant development in forest management is appeared while monoculture or industrial plantation is encouraged by FSC and also it closes the door of community-based forest management (Lohmann, 2003). The Quebec case demonstrates a serious violation of FSC basic principle and present a reverse site of consensus where FSC certified company deployed enforcement agency to extract forest resource in facing aboriginal resistance (Russ, 2012). The most conflicting nature is seen in FSC, when certified bodies are paid or sponsored by the companies those are in the queue to be certified; only large businesses with rigid structures even can afford the process of assessment and maintenance on this schemes. Moreover, FSC works within the neoliberal trade rules and its principles (followed WTO regulations) give same treatment to any company whether it is domestic or international. FSC becomes a new empire in market regulation.



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According to the 'Facts and Figure, 2016, FSC currently operating 186,410,374 ha forest land (FSC, 2016) over 80 countries with 860 stakeholders, and some 40,000 certified companies (FSC, 2009). These explanations indicate that the business as growth hegemony is embedded in underlying charter of FSC rather creating counter hegemony of environmental governance. Moreover, many founding stakeholders like FERN, FOE-UK, and the Rainforest Rescue leave the platform by blaming FSC as a body, which works as a capital accumulation machine rather than responsible forest management. In such, hegemonic nature of FSC becomes clearer day by day.

### Conclusion

This essay presents a critical view of the responsible forest management under FSC. It also explores that it is a kind of distributive politics rather than constitutive politics that deals with how points are scored about the what, when, where and who are the partner of new governance which maintain and reproduce the existing hegemony of forest governance. In fact, FSC has very limited ability to change the governmentality of business as growth structure due to its embeddedness with market civilization. Moreover, FSC is one of the disciplinary bodies that work in the forestry sector by creating a stark of utopia to depoliticize and reduce the tension between industrial countries and developing countries regarding forestry regulation. It is appeared that Gramscian explanation has an edge over Foucauldian interpretation in approaching the underlying charter of global environmental governance especially in the case of FSC. However, these approaches are less applicable to estimate about the outcomes of governance processes by explaining the actual sustainability or suitability of the employed rationalities and technologies but it provides broader understanding to disclose how governance processes are produced in a relational and rational space which may able to show the development alternatives.

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