



Forests Can Provide Alternatives to Single-use Plastics

FSC APAC 2019 Business Forum participants offer forest-based solutions to the global plastic pollution problem

October 2019, Shanghai – Plastic pollution is one of the most critical environmental problems the world is facing today. The United Nations has called for the development of ‘beat plastic pollution’ initiatives, while industries around the planet are working to explore plastic reduction solutions. However we approach it, plastic is an issue which is tightly connected to the daily lives of almost everyone on Earth.

The plastic pollution issue was also raised and discussed during the recent FSC APAC 2019 Business Forum, held in Shanghai, China. The participants, representing wood, paper, furniture and non-timber forest product-related businesses from across Asia Pacific and Europe exchanged observations, opinions and the innovative ways in which they are tackling the problem.

For example, the founder of R cubic, Ms Zhang Miao, spoke about how single-use plastics are a key issue, as they are difficult to collect, expensive to recycle, short in service life and have a profound impact on the environment. At present, major alternatives are degradable plastics, plant materials and bio-based plastics. However, the best solution remains reduction at source and the development of the circular economy. “It is not reasonable to solve a problem by creating a new one”, Ms Zhang emphasised, “We should not destroy forests to replace plastics. The plants [for bio-based plastics] need to be obtained in a sustainable and responsible way”.

Mr Ian Blanden, General Manager of Forestry in at Stora Enso Consumer Paper Board China, talked about forest pulp and paper solutions. Stora Enso is committed to developing and promoting renewable, reusable and biodegradable materials. “Our years of research and development have shown that any product from fossils can be replaced by a forest product, said Mr Blanden. A fibre cup invented by Stora Enso now can partially replace plastic cups, which has great potential for the tableware and food packaging sectors.

Ms Zhong Fang, from Tsinghua Sustainable Design Centre, also conducted a presentation on the infinite potential of renewable materials to packaging applications. She shared innovative designs based on various biological materials, which aim to create a new plastic-free world.

Ms Audrey Cheung, Vice President of McDonald's China Supply Chain Management, shared how the fast food giant is contributing to the plastic reduction campaign from various perspectives, including supply chain management and packaging design. McDonald's has reduced the amount of paper it uses in its boxes, reduced the size of its knives and forks, replaced plastic bags with paper bags and used pulp from sustainable sources, including those that are FSC certified. They also plan to replace all disposable plastic straws with FSC-certified paper straws.

Tetra Pak has also committed to tackling the problem of plastic pollution by achieving 100 per cent FSC certification of its packaging materials, both in the Taiwan market, where it has launched a “whole plant” milk carton packaging which replaces the plastic packaging box with biomass materials, and in the European market, where they will soon launch an FSC-certified paper straw.

As a renewable, recyclable and biodegradable source of high-quality raw materials, forests can and will make a positive contribution to the world’s efforts to reduce plastic pollution. However, the use of forest products should not be uncontrolled. Choosing FSC-certified forest products can better guarantee the sustainable and responsible use of forest products, allowing consumers to use these products confidently.

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