A PLATFORM FOR STAKEHOLDERS IN AFRICAN FORESTRY

POLICY BRIEF

FOREST CERTIFICATION: A SOFT POLICY INSTRUMENT TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Context

Forest resources and trees outside forests provide multiple benefits and have direct and measurable impacts on people's lives. Forests, trees on farms, and agroforestry systems play important roles in the livelihoods of rural people by providing employment, energy, nutritious foods and a wide range of goods and ecosystem services in most regions of the world (FAO, 2014). Over 90% of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty depend on forests for some part of their livelihoods. They have also fulfilled and continue to fulfil critical economic, environmental, social and cultural functions (FAO, 2003; Barklund and Teketay, 2004).In addition, well managed forests have tremendous potential to contribute to sustainable development and a greener economy.

Despite their critical importance, forest resources have been faced with different problems, which continue to prevent them from realizing their full potential contribution to economic and social development as well as environmental conservation. Deforestation has continued unabated in Africa as a result of destruction, clearing or incineration of forest and woodland resources for the expansion of crop cultivation spurred by an ever-increasing human population. Further, fuelwood harvesting, human settlement, mining, road construction, among others, also contribute to deforestation. Illegal logging and unsustainable forest resources utilization caused by improper and unplanned harvesting practices have resulted in wastage of wood, owing to very low recovery rates and damage to the residual trees/plants and stands.

The consequences of these and other problems include the reduction of the forest and tree cover, leading to serious wood deficits in some countries (which in turn leads to further "mining" of the remaining forest resources). Further, the reduction of forest quality through environmental degradation results into the decline/loss of biodiversity, the degradation/loss of water resources, the loss of cultural assets and knowledge, the loss of livelihoods of forest-dependent peoples, and not least enhanced global warming/climate change (Teketay, 2004-2005; Kowero et al., 2009; Chidumayo et al., 2011). Hence, stakeholders at various levels of the value chain of the forest sector are confronted with a range of challenging questions related to the current and future state of forest resources and their ability to contribute to sustainable development.

Some initiatives to tame deforestation and forest degradation

The 1980s witnessed rapid and severe deforestation and forest degradation, with the associated negative environmental, social and economic impacts, especially in tropical countries. During that time, standards or systems that could help to address these problems did not exist. Governments tried but failed to solve the problems. This opened room for dialogues among concerned stakeholders with the aim of finding a solution(s) to halt or prevent the prevalent deforestation and forest degradation worldwide. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) identified three factors indicating that action at an international level was necessary:

i) intolerable rates of deforestation and associated loss of environmental, economic and social benefits;
ii) threats to the livelihoods, culture and rights of forest dwellers and indigenous people in many parts of the world who live in and around forests; and
iii) the continuously increasing demand for forest products (Nussbaum and Simula, 2005).

However, UNCED produced no legally binding commitments on forest management, but it did result in Agenda 21 and the non-legally binding Forest Principles.

Over the years, two main policy approaches have been adopted, i.e. "*top down*" and "*bottom up*", to manage forest resources by the relevant stakeholders and authorities. In the "*top-down*" approach, fundamentals of policies are formulated at higher levels of government and implemented under the authority of the government. The success of these command and control methods heavily

depends on the strength of the governing body. The "*bottom-up*" approach, on the other hand, relies more on a participatory approach where the public agrees on the need for and the forms of the policy, and implements it through tradition, cooperative agreement or local rule. However, in modern complex societies, common interests binding the members of smaller communities are lacking, which hinders the success of this approach. Past experiences of ineffectiveness and failures of both approaches have led to a third approach, namely "*certification*", which introduced policy changes through commercial rather than central or local power, and uses market acceptance rather than regulatory compliance as an enforcement mechanism (Upton and Bass, 1995; Vogt et al., 2000; Perera and Vlosky, 2006).

Forest certification as an approach towards SFM

"*Certification*" is a procedure by which a third party, known as a certifier or certification body, provides written assurance/market labelling that a product, process or service conforms to specified standards, on the basis of an audit conducted to agreed procedures. "*Forest certification*" (FC) is, therefore, the process of inspecting particular forests or woodlands to see if they are being managed according to an agreed set of standards (FSC, 1994; Barklund and Teketay, 2004). It involves assessing the quality of forest management in relation to a set of predetermined principles, criteria as well as indicators and their means of verification. It is a *soft policy instrument* that seeks to use assessments of forest management, the verification of legality, chains of custody, eco-labelling and trademarks to promote the sustainable management, conservation and development of forest resources in a holistic manner without compromising the rights, resources or requirements of present and future generations. It does not only give consumers a credible guarantee but also aims to encourage ethical trade and commerce and improve market access through the *economically viable*, *environmentally appropriate* and *socially beneficial* management of trees, forests and related renewable resources (see Box below). FC holds great opportunities through its actual and potential economic, environmental, social and cross-cutting contributions (Teketay, 2015). It, therefore, can be a pragmatic instrument for harnessing market forces, public opinion and civil society in support of sustainable forest management (SFM) (Muthoo, 2012).

Moreover, SFM as supported by FC conforms to the green economy paradigm because it appropriately balances the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development (Muthoo, 2012; see Box below). FC is developing into a prerequisite for public procurement and market access, and has become associated with ethical trade and social responsibility.

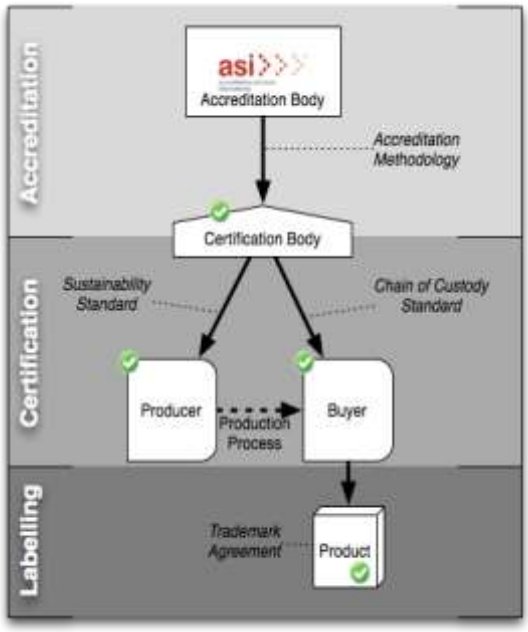
SFM is an inherent aim of FC. It is aimed at improving the quality of forest management by making sure that it is:

i) *environmentally appropriate* - ensuring that the harvest of timber and non-timber products maintains the forest's biodiversity, productivity, and ecological processes;
ii) *socially beneficial* - helping both local people and society at large to enjoy long term benefits and also provide strong incentives to local people to sustain the forest resources and adhere to long-term management; and
iii) *economically viable* - structuring and managing forest operations so as to be sufficiently profitable, without generating financial profit at the expense of the forest resource, the ecosystem, or affected communities; the tension between the need to generate adequate financial returns and the principles of responsible forest operations can be reduced through efforts to market the full range of forest products and services for their best values (FSC, 2014a; Teketay, 2015).

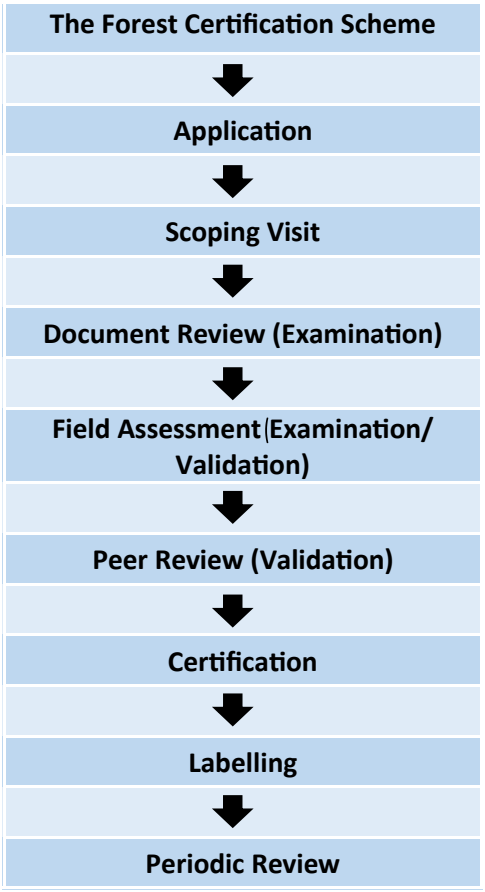
Forest certification can:

i) play an important role in combating climate change and sustaining the livelihoods of forest-dependent people through ensuring the maintenance of ecologically important forests as safety nets that conserve gene pools and support food security as well as sustainable sinks for capturing and storing carbon dioxide;
ii) help ensure the provision of forest biomass as a renewable carbon-neutral energy source and a substitute for carbon-intensive building materials, such as steel and cement, thereby, lowering the carbon footprint and contributing to a greener economy; and
iii) help to ensure that forests are not only well-managed but also properly valued by markets; healthy forests and their sustainable management, assured by FC, can contribute to the goals of the multilateral environmental agreements as well as poverty alleviation and green growth (Muthoo, 2012).

FC is a third-party process, which includes *accreditation, standards-setting, certification and branding/labelling* (see Box below). Compliance with standards for SFM certification requires, among other things, recording forest flora and fauna, monitoring ecologically important forest areas, deploying reduced impact logging, building public–private partnerships, and the equitable sharing of benefits among stakeholders. If it brings tangible benefits to local communities and certified forest management units (FMUs), FC can be an effective tool for promoting sustainable livelihoods, safeguarding the biodiversity of ecosystems, combating climate change and reducing carbon emissions through avoided deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). It can, thus, serve as a back-stop for the verification and monitoring of projects on REDD+ and payments for ecosystem services (PES), which would translate into opportunities for new resources for the conservation and restoration of forests (Muthoo, 2012).



The process of FC involving accreditation, certification and labelling (source: adopted from http://www.accreditation-services.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/accreditation.png, accessed on 08-12-2014).



The processes involved in forest certification.

Source: (Teketay, 2015)

Status of SFM and forest certification globally and in Africa

Key findings, relevant to FC, are reported under "*Policy measures to enhance forest-related benefits*" in a report on "*State of the World's Forests*" (FAO, 2014; Teketay, 2015). According to this report, the global assessment of the status of SFM indicates that all countries that have revised their national forest programmes (NFPs) or forest policies since 2007 have included SFM as a policy goal; and both as a concept and term, SFM has become popular in national forest policies and, in particular, country reports. Since 2007, at least 37 countries, *(including 10 African countries),* have passed and promoted new policies promoting SFM and aiming at socioeconomic development.

- *Accreditation*: a formal third-party recognition that a body fulfils specified requirements and is competent to carry out specific conformity assessment tasks (FSC, 2005). Organizations that provide certification, testing and inspection services are assessed by a third party against internationally recognized standards. Accreditation demonstrates the organization's competence, impartiality and performance capability and is the key to reducing risk and ensuring that consumers, suppliers and purchasers can have confidence in the services provided. It is the internationally accepted basis for confirming that certification bodies are credible, independent and operating properly.
- Independent organizations called *certification bodies* (CBs), also known as *conformity assessment bodies* (CABs), *certifiers*, *registration bodies* and *registrars* (Nussbaum and Simula, 2005), regularly conduct audits to determine whether a given company complies with the standard's criteria. CABs are organizations providing the following conformity assessment services: testing, inspection, management system certification, personnel certification, product certification and calibration.
- *Standard*: is a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose. It is established and approved by a recognized body and sets out the requirements that must be met by any organization wishing to be certified and against which certification assessments are made (Nussbaum and Simula, 2005). Standard-setting is a multi-faceted process involving the custodians of the forest and related resources, owners, workers and managers, local communities and societies, retailers and consumers, producers and processors, business, and civil-society organizations. Harmonized standards are required to bring synergy between the various stakeholders and their diverse expectations regarding economic return, the environment and social justice (Muthoo, 2012).
- *Certification and branding*: actual steps involved in the process of FC, i.e. submission of an application by forest operator/owner to the forest certification scheme (FCS) followed by a scoping visit, document review, field assessment, peer review, certification, labelling and periodic review by the FCS (Teketay, 2015).

In addition, at least six countries, *(including one African country)*, have reported having further elaborated criteria and indicators as a way of operationalizing SFM, supporting policy development, monitoring and reporting. Countries have also developed numerous policies and measures to promote SFM since 2007, many of which have the potential to enhance socio-economic benefits.

With regard to the global status of FC, the assessment revealed that: (i) voluntary certification is by now well established as a widely applied private instrument that complements public forest policy instruments; (ii) governments in developed countries are continuing to strengthen public procurement schemes and green building programmes, thus reinforcing demand-side incentives for products from sustainable sources; (iii) verification of the legality of timber harvested is slowly expanding, enhancing the role of the private sector in strengthening sustainable forest management (FAO, 2014). FC and promotion programmes were mentioned in over two-thirds of recently revised NFPs and three-quarters of country reports.

The global assessment also reported that *FC is the most widely known voluntary instrument in the forest sector*, with the proportion of global round-wood supply from certified forests estimated at 28.3%, i.e. 501 million m³ (FAO, 2014). National standards for FC have been elaborated for FSC in 39 countries worldwide, and 32 national standards have been endorsed by PEFC. Where certification is already developed, it is often used as an "off the shelf" SFM policy for state-owned forests and protected areas. As of 2013, there were 61 countries with public forests certified by the FSC and around 30 countries with public forests certified by PEFC, mostly in Europe and North America. About 20 countries, mainly developed market economies, continue to promote and strengthen green procurement and green building certification systems, including criteria that promote wood from sustainable sources. Voluntary instruments, other than FC, were explicitly dealt with in only four of the 22 NFPs or forest policies issued since 2007, and by only 35% of country reports, while systems for verifying and certifying the legality of timber traded are increasingly being implemented in importing and exporting countries.

*Voluntary instruments, such as FC, are increasingly accepted as useful tools to support and complement government policies towards SFM***.** They also help strengthen the role of the private sector as an accountable partner. However, many policy challenges remain, including the high cost of certification for small-scale producers, addressing the lack of domestic demand for sustainably produced forest products that are costlier than products from unsustainable forest exploitation, using the purchasing power of governments on markets, and fighting deforestation and illegal logging.

With regard to development of standards, the following national forest stewardship standards (FSSs) have been developed in Africa and endorsed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), one of the leading international FCSs (Teketay, 2015):

- Cameroon (FSC-STD-CAM-01-2012: Natural and Plantations);
- Cameroon (FSC-STD-CAM-01-2010, SLIMF);
- Central African Republic (CAR) (FSC-STD-CAR-01-2012, Natural and Plantation);
- Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (FSC-STD-DRC-01-2012: Natural and Plantations);
- Gabon (FSC-STD-GAB-01-2012: Natural and Plantations);
- Republic of Congo (ROC) (FSC-STD-RoC-01-2012: Natural and Plantations); and
- Ghana (FSC-STD-GHA-01-2012, Natural and Plantations).

One of the major achievements of FSC in the African continent is the very first sub-regional FSS in the history of FSC (FSC-STD-CB-01-2012, Regional Standard), that was approved in 2012 for countries in the Congo Basin, namely Cameroon**,** CAR, DRC, ROC, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon. Gabon has also developed a national standard endorsed by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) Schemes, the other leading international FCS. The African Eco-Labelling Mechanism (AEM) has also developed a pan-African FSS (ARS AES 3-2014 Forestry - Sustainability and Eco-Labelling - Requirements), which has been approved by the AEM Executive Board in 2013. A few international standards are also used for the verification of legality and traceability of timber from Africa.

Many countries in Africa have mentioned sustainable development and SFM in their constitutions without making any specific reference to FC while others, e.g. Namibia, South Africa, and Uganda have made reference to FC as a tool to promote SFM in their policies, strategies, programmes, etc. Apart from the official representation of FCSs, there are no institutional arrangements put in place to cater specifically for FC by the different countries in Africa.

As of September 2015, the total area of forests certified by FSC in Africa was 7,406,437 ha, representing only **4%** of the total area of FSC-certified forests worldwide (183,863,540 ha) in 10 countries (12.5% of all countries with FSC-certified forests worldwide) (FSC, 2015; Teketay, 2015); and **2.8%** of the total area of PEFC-certified forests worldwide (268,331,160 ha) (PEFC, 2015; Teketay, 2015). The areas of certified forests (with FM certification) in Africa represent only **1.6%** of forests certified worldwide by both FSC and PEFC (452,194,700 ha), the two FCSs that have their footprints in Africa. Republic of Congo (33%), Gabon (27.8%), South Africa (19.6%) and Cameroon (12.7%) have the three largest areas of FSC-certified forests in Africa (in descending order of covered forest area) while Ghana (0.01%) has the lowest area of FSC-certified forests in Africa. South Africa has the highest (20 = 41.6%) while Ghana has the lowest (one = 2%) numbers of FSC FM certificates in Africa.

The total numbers of forest management (FM) and CoC certificates issued in Africa by FSC are reported as 48 (**3.5%** of global total) in 10 countries (12.5% of all countries with FSC FM certificates worldwide) and 168 (**0.6%** of global total) in 12 countries (10.6% of all countries with FSC CoC certificates worldwide) respectively. South Africa (104 = 61.9%), Egypt (16 = 9.5%), and Cameroon (12 = 7.1%) have the three highest numbers of CoC certificates (in descending order of numbers of CoC certificates) while Mozambique, Seychelles and Tanzania (each with one = 0.6%) have the lowest numbers of CoC certificates. All of FM and CoC certificates in Africa have been issued by FSC (FSC, 2015; Teketay, 2015) except five PEFC CoC certificate issued in Egypt (2), Morocco (1), South Africa (1) and Tunisia (1) (PEFC, 2015; Teketay, 2015).

In spite of the few encouraging achievements on FC in Africa presented above, there is a need to address the negative lessons, gaps, challenges and constraints, weaknesses and threats identified related to FC in Africa, which are summarized elsewhere (Teketay, 2015).

The call to action

If FC is to bring about the desired benefits, the necessary capacities of actors at various levels have to be built and appropriate institutional arrangements put in place to create the necessary enabling environment. The actors include, but are not limited to, policy makers responsible for making decisions in state and private forest management, stakeholder representatives, forestry professionals, contractors, other operators, forest owners, auditors as well as certification and accreditation bodies. The necessary capacities include optimum human, financial and physical

resources coupled with relevant technical skills and capabilities as well as adequate information systems. In this regard, although encouraging initiatives are emerging in the different sub-regions of Africa, the major bottleneck in the promotion of FC in Africa is either the complete lack of or inadequate capacity for undertaking FC, suggesting the need for developing appropriate demand-driven capacity building programmes for FC in Africa (Teketay, 2015).

Certification provides a mechanism for reliable, independent verification that a particular standard has been met. However, it also costs both time and money. Certification in the forest can be a long and expensive business. Therefore, it is particularly important for forest managers to be sure that it is the right decision before starting. The benefits do not come free since implementing the standard and undergoing certification add costs. In addition, some of the requirements of the standard can lead to foregone benefits for forest owners. To what extent potential benefits can be achieved in practice, and how costs can be minimized will vary from one local situation to another depending upon how certification is promoted and implemented. It is important to consider carefully where the expected benefits will exceed the costs as these are the situations in which certification is most likely to be appropriate (Upton and Bass, 1995; Nussbaum and Simula, 2005).

Studies carried out in the different sub-regions of Africa indicate that there are initiatives of FC and/or FSS development in different African countries, i.e. Cameroon, Central African Republic, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Republic of Congo in the central African sub-region (Mbolo, 2014a); Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda in the eastern Africa sub-region; Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe in the southern African sub-region (Kalonga, 2014); Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia in the northern African sub-region (Mbolo, 2014b); and Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo in the western African sub-region (Olivier, 2014). The processes involved in the development of FSSs are very complex and require appropriate technical skills as well as longer periods for completion. As a result, the decision to develop the national FSSs should be taken by the stakeholders in their own countries. In other words, the development of national FSSs should be demand-driven. Hence, interested parties and development partners that are willing to support the development and implementation of national FSSs should approach and work with the national stakeholders and in close collaboration with national, regional and international FCSs, like FSC, PEFC, African Eco-Labelling Mechanism, Pan-African Forest Certification Gabon and Cameroon as well as those that are engaged in the verification of legality of timber, e.g. Bureau Veritas, Société Générale de Surveillance, SmartWood and European Union.

In conclusion, despite the encouraging efforts made to promote and implement FC by various organizations in Africa, the areas of forests certified are very low as already presented above. This suggests that considerable investments have to be made in FC in the African forest sector for the continent to significantly benefit from it in ways that successfully promote and facilitate implementation of SFM. This requires investing in exploiting the strengths and opportunities that come with FC, as well as addressing the weaknesses, threats, gaps and challenges and constraints to effective and successful implementation of FC. This requires putting in place the necessary human, financial and physical resources for undertaking FC, in addition to cultivating an enabling policy and legislation environment and developing appropriate institutional arrangements like marketing structures and information systems for certified forest products and services.

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