

The approval and launch of the Uganda National Forest Stewardship Standard presents great hope for advancing responsible forest management in Uganda through Forest Certification.

By: Dr. Zake J^{1*}^.

1.0 Introduction

Deforestation and forest degradation is still a major challenge globally. Thus, for instance at a global scale, 29.7 million hectares of tree were lost in 2016 as reported by the World Resources Institute, (2016). At the national scale and the case of Uganda, 250,000 Ha of forest cover are lost annually (MWE, 2016 and MWE, 2017). This forest loss presents very serious implications on livelihoods and national economic development and growth given the reported functions and contribution of trees and forests globally. Thus, forests are known and recognized for the indispensable value and importance for human survival through their provisioning eco-system functions (*such as: a catchment for rainfall formation; regulation of local micro-climate, air & temperature regulation and stabilization of climate change through carbon sequestration and storage; and provide a catchment for water used in the generation of hydro-electric energy*) and a range of forest products (e.g. herbs, fruits, honey, timber, poles, crafts, fuel wood) (Russell et al., 2012).

According to the Uganda Forestry Policy, 2001) (MWE, 2001), Forest certification is a process of verification by a body of proven independence that the management of a forest has reached a specified standard. It has been developed as one of the mechanisms for reversing the trends of deforestation worldwide. According to the Uganda National Forest Stewardship Standard (NFSS), (2018), forest certification is recognized to contribute to responsible forest management by applying environmentally friendly, socially acceptable and economically viable approaches. Hence, as an emerging voluntary market-based incentive, forest certification adds value to tradable forest commodities such as timber and carbon credits. One example of such a mechanism is the one developed and promoted by the FSC International since 1993. Uganda adopted the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Scheme as a more suitable internationally recognized code of practice that enhances forest sustainability (Uganda NFSS, 2018). Thus, Uganda like other countries subscribed to this mechanism and committed to develop a NFSS based on the FSC principles, standards, criteria and indicators.

The FSC Principles (P) include:

- P1:** Compliance with laws;
- P2:** Workers' rights and employment conditions;
- P3:** Indigenous peoples' rights;
- P4:** Community relations;
- P5:** Benefits from the forest;
- P6:** Environmental values and impacts;
- P7:** Management planning;
- P8:** Monitoring and assessment;
- P9:** High conservation values;
- P10:** Implementation of management activities.

Source: Uganda NFSS, (2018).

¹ *Dr. Joshua Zake (PhD), Executive Director at Environmental Alert, on behalf of the SDG-Uganda Secretariat.

^Corresponding author. Email: ed@envalert.org or joszake@gmail.com.

In 2012, Uganda embarked on the process for development of the standard following the FSC principles, standards, criteria and indicators. The process was recently concluded in 2018 approval of the Uganda NFSS by the FSC and related launch of the standard by Uganda's Honorable Minister of Water and Environment, Mr. Sam Cheptoris and the FSC Director General Kim Carstensen during the event of the International conference on, 'forests for Africa's prosperity,' held on 4th June 2018 at Golden Tulip Hotel in Kampala. In this respect, the Uganda NFSS became the 1st & 8th FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard in Africa and globally, respectively. According to FSC International, the Uganda NFSS came into force and is operational since 1st September 2018.



Figure 1. Members of the SDG-Uganda meeting with the FSC Director at the Golden Tulip Hotel ahead of the launch of the Uganda NFSS by the Minister of Water and Environment. Photo by: FSC-East Africa Regional Office.

The NFSS is developed based on the FSC International guidelines, principles and criteria that is interpreted to meet the national context and requirements targeted at contributing to responsible forest management through forest certification. Thus, it provides a yardstick for responsible forest management in Uganda, and a mechanism through which progress in responsible forest management by all responsible bodies (as defined under the Forestry and Tree Planting Act, 2003) can be independently gauged, and if desired, through which forest management units can be certified under the FSC Forest Stewardship Scheme. Furthermore, it's used by FSC accredited Certification Bodies (CBs) to evaluate forest management practices for FSC forest certification in Uganda.

1.1 Why a National Standard based on FSC Principles?

Overall, the Uganda NFSS meets the Republic of Uganda Constitution, (1995) and other policies and legal framework provisions and requirements for sustainable management of natural resources. Some of the policies and legislation in this respect are: Uganda National Forestry Policy, (2001) (MWE, 2001); National Forestry and Tree Planting Act, (2003) (MWE, 2003); National Environment Policy, (1994) and Act, 1995 (NEMA, 1994 and 1995); National Forest Plan, (2011/12-2021/22) (MWE, 2011); National Development Plan II (NPA, 2015). The operationalization of the Uganda NFSS through implementation of interventions by responsible bodies and stakeholders will increase on the proportion of forest certified by products based on FSC international indicators, standards and criteria.

It also contributes towards addressing illegal forest products on the market thereby contributing to overall sustainable and responsible forest management. A case in point is the timber, for which over 80% of the total timber traded in the industry in Uganda is illegal, thus doesn't meet the minimum requirements for sustainable forest management as provided for under the forestry policies and laws (WWF, 2012).

2.0 The process for development of the Uganda NFSS - focus on the key milestones

The NFSS development process in Uganda started in 2012. The process involved highly consultative involving active participation of various stakeholders based on their mandates, roles and responsibilities including both the duty bearers and rights holders. It was guided by the FSC principles and procedures in this respect. Thus, the process was led by the Standards Development Group (SDG) – Uganda that comprised of members (i.e. forestry sector stakeholders) categorized based on the 3 chambers of

Environment, Social and Economic. These were selected from the NFSS National Consultative Forum Members. The forum provided space at the national levels for consultation and soliciting stakeholder's views and concerns on several drafts of the NFSS as part of the processes.

The role for spearheading the development of the NFSS in Uganda was delegated to the SDG-Uganda by the Uganda Forestry Working Group (UFWG). The SDG-Uganda selected their leaders comprises of the Chairman and Vice Chairman and these ensure that the process was on course and meeting all the FSC requirements and principles. They were regularly and routinely supported by the SDG-Uganda Secretariat hosted at Environmental Alert. The Secretariat mobilized and coordinated stakeholder participation in the process. Besides, working with partners they mobilized resources (*both financial and technical*) to support implementation of the agreed actions as part of the process.

Who was involved?

The process for development of the Uganda NFSS involved key forest sector stakeholders including: *key government ministries, departments and authorities; civil society organizations; academic institutions; private sector (such commercial tree plantation companies); trade unions; religious institutions; cultural institutions; community based organizations; indigenous peoples organizations.*

These forestry stakeholders were targeted and actively involved in the following engagements as part of the process for development of the Uganda NFSS based on the FSC International principles and requirements:

A) Engagement with key duty bearers based on their policy and legal mandates

With due consideration of the mandates, roles and responsibility as stipulated in the forestry policy and legislation, the SDG-Uganda engaged key duty bearers such as: the Ministry of Water and Environment; the Forest Sector Support Department (FSSD); the National Forestry Authority; the Uganda Wildlife Authority; Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS); and the National Organization of Trade Unions. This was through structured meetings, during which FSC forest certification principles scheme and the initiative of developing a national standard for Uganda highlighting its potential environmental, social and economic benefits were popularized, introduced and discussed to solicit there support and leadership.

B) National Consultative Forum

This served as a National forestry stakeholder's forum during which awareness about the FSC certification principles scheme was conducted and discussion and decisions to pursue this scheme in form of a national standard was made. It was attended by 60 forestry stakeholder representatives and organized as part of the national week-long activities in commemoration of the International Day of forests and the Tree in Uganda.

Furthermore, during this engagement the decision to establish the SDG-Uganda made and the UFWG was given responsibility to oversee based on the FSC principles and criteria.

C) Capacity building of SDG-Uganda members to enhance their knowledge on forest certification

The targeted technical capacity building engagements through meetings with the SDG-Uganda members enhanced their knowledge and skills in respect to forest certification in general and related interpretation of the FSC indicators, principles and criteria. Were as this was done side-by side the process for development of the draft NFSS and related contextualization on the international IGIs to Uganda's situation, it facilitated

the overall interpretation and generation of required content for the several drafts of standard to meet the minimum requirements by the FSC before submission at the different stages. The trainings were facilitated by Mr. Edward Mupada, the FSC Focal point for Uganda and the National FSC consultants i.e. Mr. Steve Nsita and Stephen Khauka of Havilah Company Limited.

D) Stakeholder consultations at national and sub-national levels

Consultations with stakeholders at national and sub-national levels on the draft International Generic Indicators (IGIs) and standard for purposes of awareness raising on forest certification and generation of new ideas to improve both the draft IGIs and the standard. Thus, 2 rounds of multi-stakeholder consultations on draft of IGIs were carried out in August 2013 (for the 1st draft IGIs) and February-March 2014 (for the second draft IGIs). In each round, members of the SDG participated first by reviewing the draft IGIs and identifying key issues requiring continued stakeholder consultations at national and sub-national levels.

At sub-national level, the SDG engaged a wide range of stakeholders including: smallholder tree farmers, local government officials, vulnerable forest adjacent communities, and indigenous peoples (such as: *the Batwa in South Western Uganda and the Bennet in Eastern Uganda*), and commercial tree growers were involved. The later were particularly targeted to raise their awareness about the standard being developed and the social dynamics required of the standard to ensure responsible forest management and forest certification.

These were consulted during the 8 sub-national consultations held in Eastern, Northern, South Western, Mid-western and the West Nile sub-regions of Uganda. Overall, 286 individuals (26% women) provided input to the draft IGIs and the national standard, which was being developed side-by-side. Throughout the consultations process, the FSC certifying scheme and IGIs were popularised.

In practice, stakeholder consultations sought to achieve two main objectives namely:

- i) To raise awareness about forest certification in light of the current status of deforestation and forest degradation in the country. This involved demystification of FSC in terms of how it operates and its role in the process of standard development in Uganda;
- ii) To seek stakeholder input to the zero draft standard.

This involved: examination of FSC Principles, criteria and indicators. Stakeholders adopted most of the indicators while some were adapted. Several verifiers were also proposed to further define the domesticated indicators. Whereas the process did not generate significant changes to the draft IGIs, it set pace for stakeholders to comprehend the design of the national standard being developed as a parallel process.

E) Forest/field testing of the draft standard

In 2015, the draft standard was tested with the overall objective of assessing its suitability as a reference material for forest practitioners as well as certifying bodies that will be operating in Uganda. The process helped in demystifying forest certification as alien by forest owners but instead as a best practice in forest management. Forest testing was conducted by the Soil Association as a certifying body, which implemented the following activities:

- i) Reviewed the draft national standard clarity, appropriateness, and applicability and gaps in the indicators, and suggest any necessary improvements. Furthermore, advised on applicability, formulation of indicators, means of verification and the language used;
- ii) Assessed the application of the standard on natural forests, plantations, low impact organizations and medium/high impact organizations;
- iii) Worked with the members of the SDG-Uganda and local consultants to enhance their capacity to apply the NFSS;
- iv) Debriefed the SDG-Uganda and key informants about the findings from forest testing for consensus building;
- v) Generated a forest tested draft with comments for addressing and integration.

Notable is that standard was tested on all types of the forests in Uganda. At the same time, the process catered for the scale, intensity, risk aspects, Free, Prior and Informed Consent, and High Conservation Values. The forests where testing was conducted included: Government Central Forest Reserve of Kalinzu (40,000ha natural forest), one of three small holder natural forests in Kalangala under Ssesse Island Nature Conservation and Tourism (SSENCATA) Association (488ha comprising of Robison, 80ha; Kawanga, 209ha; and Kibonge 199ha), and the private plantation owners under the Uganda Timber Growers Association (UTGA) (300ha) in Mubende district.

The process of field testing of the standard also engaged representatives of indigenous peoples (*i.e. Batwa from the Buhoma Community in Kanungu District; the Iks - also known as the Teuso from Kaabong District, the Tepeth from Moroto District, the Benets - also known as the Ndoboro from Mt.Elgon forest areas in Bukwo, Kapchorwa and Kween Districts*) on the contents in respect to Principle 3 (Indigenous Peoples' Rights) of the draft NFSS for Uganda. This engagement generated views and concerns in indigenous peoples, which were included in the subsequent NFSS before submission to the FSC.

F) General engagements with the public

The general public was engaged through interactive radio programs. Thus, in this respect the SDG-Uganda conducted total of 8 radio interactive talk shows spread in the eight sub-regions of Uganda. These were broadcasted during the same timing for the sub-national consultations. The talk shows popularized FSC forest certification scheme and the national initiative to develop domesticated FSC Principles, Criteria and Indicators in Uganda. In terms of live call-in feedback from the general public, the existing high rate of deforestation in the country made the general public appreciate the development of a national standard for responsible forest management and forest certification in Uganda. In addition, forest certification was popularized during the National Forest Week, 2014 celebrations organized by the SDG-Uganda Secretariat in collaboration with the Government of Uganda. FSC-SDG forest certification information, education and communication materials were disseminated during the series of activities organized over the week-long celebrations with the SDG show-casing forest certification through exhibition.

G) Targeted SDG meetings

These meetings target members of the SDG-Uganda and aimed at generating technical inputs into the draft NFSS and IGIs. Furthermore, approval of the respective drafts before submission to the FSC for consideration and review. Thus, the SDG-Uganda also integrated subsequent comments on the draft NFSS by the FSC through such meetings. In the same vein, the SDG-Uganda as well reviewed, addressed comments on the forest tested draft before re-submitting it to the FSC.

3.0 Key achievements

The following are the key achievements registered as part of the process for development of the Uganda NFSS:

- a) Formation of the National Consultative Forum and the SDG-Uganda as key structures for overseeing and spearheading the Uganda NFSS development process, respectively;
- b) Approval of the standard by the FSC;
- c) Enhanced coordination and collaboration among forestry sub-sector stakeholders at all levels i.e. community, local, national, sub-regional and international;
- d) Recognition of role and contribution of NFSS in forest management by all stakeholders;
- e) Enhanced knowledge and skills of the forestry stakeholders (especially the members of the SDG-Uganda) in respect to forest FSC certification standards and their application to advance responsible forest management at different scales. This helped in steering the development process, because at all stages there was resident national technical expert and guidance provided through the National FSC focal point and National Consultants (i.e. Havila Company Limited);
- f) By-in by Government agencies to mainstream the standard e.g. FSSD, UNBS, private sector and small forest growers.

4.0 Key challenges and lessons learnt

4.1 Challenges

- a) The experience for development of a national standard has been a “learning-by-doing” process for the SDG and other stakeholders involved which often affected the pace of comprehending the technical requirements and at the same time develop required content in the standard;
- b) The process for development of the Uganda NFSS partly depended on the timelines for revision of the FSC IGIs and at the same time integrate them into the draft standard;
- c) The process took a long time and resources, yet it largely depended on project based funding. Thus, this meant the key project cycles through which resources were derived for facilitating the process ended before conclusion of the process. This meant that facilitating subsequent engagements in respect to development of the standard became difficult. However, this was addressed along the way by soliciting financial and technical contributions from the key stakeholders to support the subsequent engagements.

4.2 Lessons learnt

There are various initiatives by stakeholders including: civil society and government that are promoting commercial forestry and responsible forest management. These supported the processes side by side as they implemented their own independent interventions. Forest certification in Uganda benefited from leveraging on such initiatives and focusing on capacity building for small holder farmers to ensure adherence to the required FSC Principles and Criteria. The FSC Modular approach to forest certification is likely to be successful especially amongst small holder farmers that are spread across the country.

5.0 Conclusions and moving forward

5.1 Conclusions

It is quite evident that the process for standard development as exhibited during stakeholder’s consultations at the national, sub-national, local and community levels and during forest testing of the draft standard resulted in meaningful comprehension and understanding of the FSC Principles and Criteria and contextualizing them in Uganda’s own situation. Thus, the process led to increased awareness and

appreciation of the value forest certification and responsible forest management will contribute socially, economically and environmentally for sustenance of livelihoods and overall development of the country.

With the approval, launch and coming into force of the standard since 1st September 2018, all forestry sector stakeholders are looking forward to implementation of the standard because it will contribute to responsible forest management in Uganda through forest certification. Some stakeholders have already initiated processes for operationalization of the standard. Some of these include: the private sector i.e. the timber plantation companies and the Uganda Timber Grower's Association in collaboration with the WWF-UCO are applying the standard to inform group certification process by smallholders.

5.2 Next steps

Moving forward, after approval and launch of the Uganda NFSS, the following are some of the key steps and actions to advance full operationalization of the standard to contribute to responsible forest management through forest certification.

a) Organizing a national stakeholder's workshop to disseminate the approved standard and development of a shared road for implementation/operationalization of the standard. This will involve active participation of members of the National Consultative Forum and the SDG-Uganda;

b) Further actions will be pursued based on the SDG-Uganda roles and responsibilities. These will include:

i) Popularizing the standard among key stakeholders (including: Local Governments, Universities, Training Colleges) by printing hard copies and conducting targeted dissemination;

ii) Development and implementation of the National Risk analysis and the social and environment impact assessment for the standard;

iii) Technical backstopping and support to users of the standard;

iv) Monitoring of implementation of the standard;

v) Conducting survey to further define High conservation value areas in Uganda;

vi) Identification of sites that qualify to be intact forest landscapes in Uganda;

vi) Domesticating and implementation of the FSC ecosystems services procedure;

vii) Support the process for regulation and certification of the chain of custody at all scales in Uganda;

viii) Providing technical guidance on conflict and grievance redress mechanisms for use of NFSS.

c) The SDG-Uganda Secretariat hosted at Environmental Alert, will continue advancing the coordination role for the SDG-Uganda and other forest stakeholders for active participation in the implementation these earmarked actions. Besides, they will pursue structured resources mobilization with partners for full operationalization of the Uganda NFSS.

6.0 Acknowledgements

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About the FSC International

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®) is an international multi-stakeholder organization established in 1993 to promote responsible management of the world's forests. Further information about FSC International is available at: <https://ic.fsc.org/en>

About the Uganda Forestry Working Group (UFWG)

UFWG was formed in **2001** to provide a platform where the various stakeholders in forestry sector met and deliberated on and influenced developments in the sector as well as independently monitor implementation of the National Forestry Policy and National Forest Plan. The **UFWG Secretariat** is hosted by **Environmental Alert**.

Vision: The Vision of UFWG is, *'sustainably managed forestry sector contributing to improved livelihoods, national economy and ecological integrity.'*

Mission: The Mission of UFWG is, *'to promote the development of the forestry sector and stimulate all forestry stakeholders to respond appropriately to changes and challenges within the sector.'*

For More Information contact: The Secretariat of the ENR-CSO Network, C/O Environmental Alert, Kabalagala off Ggaba Road, Behind Kirabo Kya Maria Building, P.O. Box 11259, Kampala; Tel: +256414510547; Email: envalert@envalert.org; Website: <http://enr-cso.org/>

About the Forestry Standards Development Group Uganda (SDG-Uganda)

The **SDG-Uganda** comprises of key forestry stakeholders including: *research and academia, civil society, private sector and government ministries, departments and authorities*. These were selected during the national consultative forum, which informed the development of the NFSS for Uganda. The stakeholders are categorized into the social, economic and environment chambers to meet the FSC requirements for stakeholder engagement.

The SDG Uganda has 25 members and is certified by FSC International. Its major role was to develop the Uganda NFSS based on the FSC guidelines and principles. This is a role which was delegated to them by the UFWG during the national consultative forum on the Uganda NFSS.

The SDG Uganda has a Secretariat, which is currently hosted at Environmental Alert. The role of the secretariat is to mobilize and coordinate stakeholder's participation in the formulation and implementation of the Uganda NFSS.

About Environmental Alert (EA)

EA was founded in **1988** and this year (**2018**) marks **30 years** of contribution to improved livelihoods and development in Uganda through several interventions in sustainable agriculture, environment, natural resources management, water, sanitation and hygiene. EA is officially registered with the NGO Board as a Ugandan non-governmental organization, incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. EA is governed by an independent Board that is responsible for providing strategic oversight of the organization including ensuring its integrity as a voluntary service organization.

EA is a 1st prize winner of the Energy globe award for environmental sustainability-2005 under the category, earth.

EA is a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and a Member of The IUCN National Committee for Uganda.

EA envisions, *'Resilient and dignified communities, managing their environment and natural resources sustainably.'*

EA's mission is to, *'advocate for an enabling environment, sustainable natural resources management and food security for targeted communities through empowerment and policy engagement.'*

Program and institutional Components:

- a. *Environment and Natural resources management;*
- b. *Food security and Nutrition;*
- c. *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene;*
- d. *Finance and Administration;*
- e. *Resource mobilization and Investment.*

Scale of Implementation:

EA operates in selected districts for generation of evidence to inform policy engagements on agriculture, environment and natural resources at National and International levels. Currently EA's operations are in over 23 districts across the country. EA undertakes area wide targeted awareness on selected issues in agriculture, environment and natural resources engagements

EA hosts Secretariats for following CSO networks:

- a) The Network for Civil Society Organizations in Environment & Natural Resources Sector (ENR-CSO Network) - <http://enr-cso.org/>;
- b) Uganda Forestry Working Group - <http://ufwg.entalert.org/>;
- c) The Standards Development Group (for promotion of responsible Forest Management in Uganda); and
- d) Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resources management (PROLINNOVA-Uganda Network) - [http://www.prolinnova.net/uganda](http://www.prolinnova.net/uganda;);
- e) **National CSO network on Renewable Energy.**

Further information about Environmental Alert is available at: <http://entalert.org/>