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**EMERGING ISSUES IN SUSTAINABLE
FOREST MANAGEMENT:
EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FOR NIGERIA**

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A REVIEW OF FOREST CERTIFICATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Forest certification has evolved as a promising market-based tool to promote sustainable forest management. Yet, the rate of deforestation is still alarmingly high in Africa. Therefore, this paper examined the evolution of the concept and practice of forest certification with regards to Africa and its potential for achieving sustainable forest management on the continent. It was observed that a number of certification schemes have emerged with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) being the most dominant in Africa. However, other types of certificates have also emerged from some African countries. As of September 2015, the total area of forests certified by FSC in Africa is 7,406,437 ha in 10 countries, representing on a global scale about 4% of the total area of FSC-certified forests and about 2.8% of the total area of PEFC-certified forests. Republic of Congo (33%), Gabon (27.8%), South Africa (19.6%) and Cameroon (12.7%) have the largest areas of FSC-certified forests while Ghana (0.01%) has the lowest. South Africa has the highest numbers of FSC-FM certificates (41.6%) while Ghana still has the lowest (2.0%). The total numbers of FM and CoC certificates issued by FSC are 48 (3.5% of total) in 10 countries and 168 (0.6% of total) in 12 countries, respectively. South Africa (61.9%), Egypt (9.5%), Cameroon (7.1%) and Gabon (6.5%) have the highest numbers of CoC while Mozambique, Seychelles and Tanzania (0.6% each) have the lowest numbers of CoC certificates. The areas of forests certified in Africa remain abysmally low. There is need to explore the strengths and opportunities offered by forest certification. This will entails putting in place the necessary capacity, an enabling policy/legislation environment, appropriate institutional arrangements as well as marketing structures and information systems for certified forest products/services.

Keywords: Forest certification; forest stewardship council; programme for the endorsement of forest certification; chain of custody; controlled wood certification.

Introduction

Despite the critical importance of forest resources, which has been affirmed and re-affirmed empirically by many authors, global rate of deforestation is still alarmingly high in many parts of the world (IPCC, 2007; Kowero *et al.*, 2009; Chidumayo *et al.*, 2011). Over the last several decades, forest resources have been faced with different problems, which prevented them from realizing their potential contribution to economic and social development as well as environmental conservation objectives. Meanwhile, various mechanisms have been proposed and tried over the years for promoting sustainable forest

management (SFM) around the globe. One of these mechanisms that has received little consideration and attention on the Africa continent is *forest certification* (FC). Yet, many authors have considered *forest certification* as an effective tool for enhancing responsible forest management (Yadav *et al.*, 2007; Watts *et al.*, 2012).

In a general sense, *certification* is a procedure by which a third party (called certifier or certification body) provides written assurance/market labeling that a product, process or service conforms to specified standards, on the basis of an audit conducted to agreed procedures (Barklund and Teketay, 2004; Nussbaum and Simula, 2005). *Forest certification* is the process of inspecting particular forests or woodlands to see if they are being managed according to an agreed set of standards. Forest Certification also gives consumers a credible guarantee that the product comes from forests in which their management is environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable (van Kuijket *al.*, 2009; ETFRN, 2010).

Forest certification has evolved as a promising market-based tool to promote sustainable forest management. Forest certification has many dimensions and many stakeholders with different interests: (1) for industry and trade, it provides an instrument for marketing and market access; (2) for buyers and consumers, it provides information on the impacts of products they purchase; (3) for forest owners, it is a tool for forest management and market access or market advantage; (4) for governments, it represents a soft policy instrument to promote sustainable forest management; and (5) for Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations, it can be a means to influence policy reform and management.

More than twenty (20) years after the emergence of forest certification, many African countries including Nigeria has not embraced the initiative. A number of countries in Africa has no certified forest. Therefore, this paper by drawing from extensive literature survey, examined the evolution of the concept and practice of forest certification with regards to Africa and its potential for achieving sustainable forest management in the continent and beyond.

Evolution and Historical Context of Forest Certification

During the 1980s, the general public in developed countries became sensitized to the seriousness of forest loss, particularly tropical deforestation. Frustrated by lack of progress to address the menace through governmental efforts, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) started a range of actions against the tropical timber trade, perceiving this as the only way in which they could influence the situation. Actions embarked upon included campaigning, demonstrations at the premises of traders and retailers as well as advocating total bans on the use of tropical timber. The NGOs took the view that banning trade would result in reduced deforestation (Nussbaum and Simula, 2005).

However, many of the NGOs involved later realized that this was too simplistic since forests that do not have value for local populations are likely to be converted to other uses rather than protected in their natural state. Positive instruments were, therefore, needed to create such value in the marketplace and link it to responsible management. At the same time, as a result of the campaigns, a number of key retailers had realized that they had very little information about the sources of their wood and paper products, and had not taken any control over the environmental and social impacts of their purchasing decisions. Therefore, they saw the value in a mechanism that would provide a straightforward and credible way for them to source wood and paper products from forests with acceptable social and environmental management. This was the breeding ground from which the idea of certification of forest management and related product labelling emerged (Nussbaum and Simula, 2005).

Against the above background, a group of timber users, traders and representatives of environmental and human rights organizations concerned about accelerating deforestation, environmental degradation and social exclusion met in California in 1990 to come up with the concept of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The group highlighted the need for a system that could credibly identify well-managed forests as the sources of responsibly produced wood products. Two years after (1992), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, also provided a forum for many more NGOs to come together and gather support for the innovative idea of FSC and an independent and international forest certification scheme.

Following intensive consultations in some countries to build support for the idea of a worldwide certification system, the FSC Founding Assembly, in which 130 representatives from around the world representing a wide range of economic, social and environmental interests (including many major environmental NGOs and global retailers) participated, was held in Toronto, Canada, in 1993. In October 1993, an agreement was reached to launch FSC, and by August 1994 a definitive set of *Principles* and *Criteria*, with the *Statutes* for the Council, were agreed and approved by the votes of the Founding Members (Barklund and Teketay, 2004). The FSC Secretariat, which has since been relocated in 2003 to Bonn, Germany, opened in Oaxaca, Mexico, and the FSC was established as a legal entity in Mexico in February 1994. However, very importantly for subsequent developments, governments and a significant part of the mainstream forest industry were not involved (Nussbaum and Simula, 2005).

Until 1997, the FSC remained practically the only operational forest certification system in the world, and served as a focus for policy discussions and promotion of certification in the forest industry. Without the FSC, certification would certainly not have made a fundamental impact on the setting of forest standards, auditing their compliance for forest management and labelling certified products in the international marketplace. A number

of other certification schemes have also emerged emphasizing the national context of certification. These schemes were developed by a wide range of different groups using a number of different approaches (Nussbaum and Simula, 2005). However, they were all faced with the problem of broader acceptance in export markets, which were concerned with the need for getting support from campaigning NGOs, global coverage of the schemes and sufficient supply. This prompted the idea of mutual recognition among the different schemes, which has not been very much realized so far, since the various interest groups tended to support their own schemes and set of assessment criteria while remaining critical of those developed by other interest groups. In the light of this, a number of national initiatives in Europe decided to set up the Pan-European Forest Certification (PEFC) scheme, re-named Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) in 2003, as a mechanism to allow mutual recognition of their national certification schemes in 1997. Currently, an African-based forest certification scheme namely; African Eco-Labeling Mechanism (AEM), is being developed with forestry as one of its main priority focus. In addition, certification to verify legality of mainly timbers, which are making their ways to the international markets, has also emerged.

Mechanisms for Forest Certification

In order to provide consumers with a credible guarantee that materials and products come from forests in which their management is environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable, two types of certificates are being issued by forest certification schemes/systems (FCSs) namely; *Forest Management (FM)* and *Chain of Custody (CoC)* certificates. These certificates relate to the different origins of forest products, stages of production and subsequent progress of forest products through the value chain. *Forest Management* certification is awarded to forest managers or owners whose management practices meet the requirements of the standards used by the FCSs. *Chain of Custody* certification verifies certified material and products along the production chain and applies to manufacturers, processors and traders of certified forest products. In addition to the FM and CoC certificates, a Controlled Wood (CW) certificate is issued by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which is designed to allow organizations to avoid the categories of wood considered unacceptable. Also, other types of certificates have emerged for the verification of legality of timber and timber products from some African countries. The main steps followed in the actual forest certification process by the different certification schemes are more or less similar and, in general, involve accreditation, certification and branding/labelling (Figure 1).

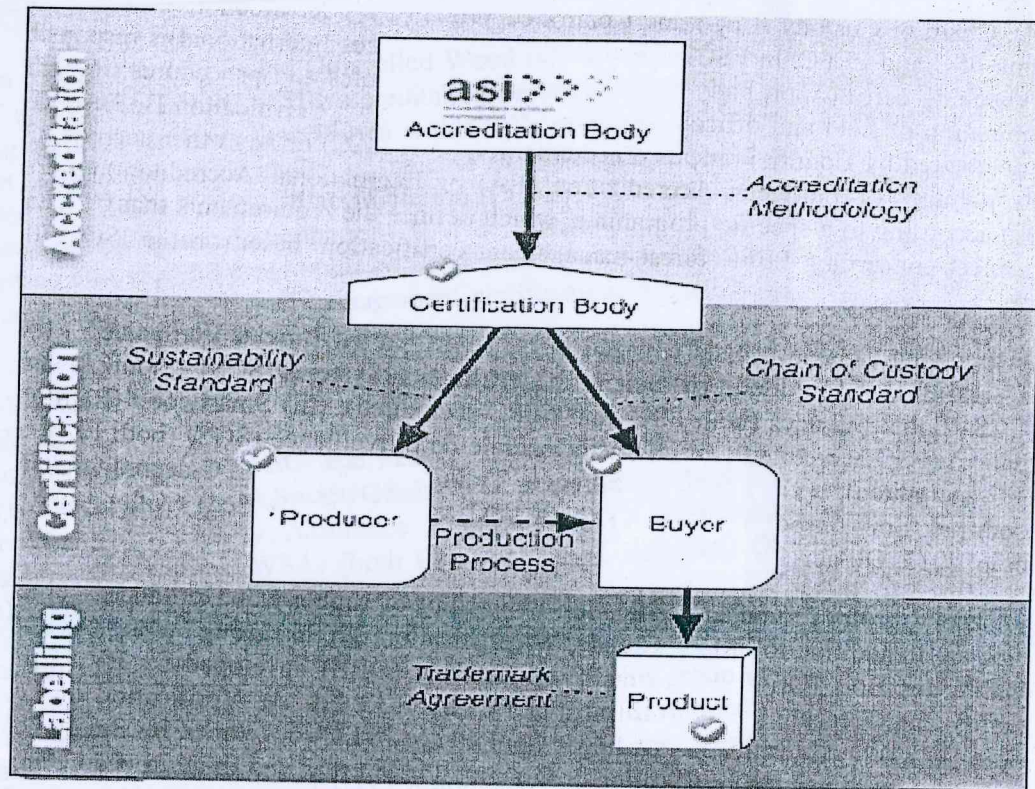


Figure 1: The process of FC involving accreditation, certification and labelling
 Source: Nussbaum and Simula (2005).

The actual steps involved in the process include submission of an application by the forest operator/owner to the FCS, followed by a scoping visit, document review, field assessment, peer review, certification, labelling and periodic review by the FCS.

Standards are required for forest certification to be implemented on the ground. A 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).

Forest Certification in Africa

Two different groups have emerged over the years, which are promoting and implementing forest certification in Africa. The first group promotes Forest Management

(FM), Chain of Custody (CoC) and Controlled Wood (CW) certification. To this group belong FSC and PEFC. In FSC, ASI (Accreditation Services International) is responsible for checking certification body compliance with FSC's rules and procedures through a combination of field and office audits. In the case of PEFC, Certification Bodies (CBs) are accredited by Comité Français d'accréditation (COFRAC) or any other accreditation body member of European Accreditation (EA) or International Accreditation Forum (IAF) according to a specific programme, which defines the requirements that CBs have to respect concerning PEFC forest management certification, based on the ISO 17021 norm.

The following CBs have been engaged in FC in Africa: (i) Bureau Veritas (BV) (both FSC- and PEFC-accredited); (ii) Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) – doing business as SCS Global Services (both FSC- and PEFC-accredited); (iii) Smartwood (Rainforest Alliance) (FSC-accredited); (iv) Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS) (both FSC- and PEFC-accredited); (v) Quality Assurance Training (QAT) (PEFC-accredited); (vi) Woodmark Soil Association (WSA) (both FSC- and PEFC-certified) (Kalonga, 2015; Mbolo, 2015; Olivier, 2015).

The second group promotes verification of legality of timber/wood products, some of which are in addition to FM, CoC and CW certification. To this group belong Origine et Légalité des Bois (Origin and Legality of Timber) (OLB) developed by BV, Timber Legality and Traceability Verification (TLTV) by SGS France, Verification of Legal Origin (VLO) and Verification of Legal Compliance (VLC) developed by SmartWood, the Rainforest Alliance's certification programme for forestry, and the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (EU-FLEGT) Action Plan.

Forest Certification Achievements in Africa

Few forests in Africa have been certified with FM certificates through the FSC. The types of certified forests include natural as well as semi-natural and plantation forests, exotic hard and soft-wood plantations, and miombo woodlands/forests including community natural forests (FSC, 2014; Kalonga, 2015). Some forest certification processes are still ongoing (see details in Kalonga, 2015; Mbolo, 2015).

As of September 2015, the total area of forests certified by FSC in Africa is 7,406,437 ha in 10 countries (12.5% of all countries with FSC-certified forests worldwide), representing only about 4% of the total area of FSC-certified forests worldwide (183,863,540 ha) (FSC, 2015; Tables 1 and 2) and about 2.8% of the total area of PEFC-certified forests worldwide (268,331,160 ha) (PEFC, 2015). The areas of certified forests (with FM certification) in Africa represent only about 1.6% when compared with the total areas 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 largest areas of FSC-certified

forests in Africa (in descending order of areas of forest) while Ghana (0.01%) has the lowest (Table 10). South Africa has the highest numbers of FSC FM certificates in Africa (20 = 41.6%) while Ghana still has the lowest (one = 2%).

Table 1: Global FSC-certified forest areas by region

Region	Country	No. of Countries	Forest Management Certificates				Chain of Custody Certificates	
			Area Certified (ha)	Proportion from Total Area Certified (%)	No. of Certificates	Proportion from Total No. of Certificates (%)	No. of Certificates	Proportion from Total No. of Certificates (%)
Africa		10	7,406,437	4.0	48	3.5	12	0.6
Asia		13	8,266,088	4.5	199	14.7	28	26.8
Europe		32	87,756,634	47.7	579	42.7	41	52.9
South America and Caribbean		17	13,124,155	7.2	249	18.3	19	5.0
North America		3	64,921,680	35.3	245	18.0	5	13.2
Oceania		5	2,388,546	1.3	38	2.8	7	1.5
Samoa		-	-	-	-	-	1	< 1
Total		80	183,863,540	100.00	1,358	100	113	29,508

Source: FSC (2015).

Table 2: FSC-certified forest areas and numbers of forest management (FM) certificates in Africa

Country	Area Certified (ha)		Number of FM Certificates	
	Total	Proportion (%)	Total	Proportion (%)
Cameroon	940,945	12.7	4	8.3
Gabon	2,062,494	27.8	3	6.3
Ghana	3,367	0.1	1	2.0
Mozambique	59,905	0.8	3	6.3
Namibia	137,514	1.9	4	8.3
Republic of Congo	2,443,186	33.0	3	6.3
South Africa	1,452,527	19.6	20	41.6
Swaziland	124,794	1.7	4	8.3
Tanzania	142,731	1.9	3	6.3
Uganda	38,974	0.5	3	6.3
Total	7,406,437	100.0	48	100.0

Source: FSC (2015).

The total numbers of FM and CoC certificates issued in Africa by FSC are 48 (3.5% of total) in 10 countries and 168 (0.6% of total) in 12 countries (10.6% of all countries with FSC CoC certificates worldwide) (Tables 1 and 3), respectively. South Africa (104 = 61.9%), Egypt (16 = 9.5%), and Cameroon (12 = 7.1%) and Gabon (11 = 6.5%) have the three highest numbers of CoC (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 (Table 11). All of FM and CoC certificates in Africa have been issued by FSC (FSC, 2015) except five PEFC CoC certificate issued in Egypt (two), Morocco (one), South Africa (one) and Tunisia (one) (PEFC, 2015).

Table 3: FSC chain of custody (CoC) certificates in Africa

Country	Number of CoC Certificates	Proportion (%)
Cameroon	12	7.1
Egypt	16	9.5
Gabon	11	6.5
Ghana	7	4.2
Morocco	5	3.0
Mozambique	1	0.6
Namibia	3	1.8
Republic of Congo	2	1.2
Seychelles	1	0.6
South Africa	104	61.9
Tanzania	1	0.6
Tunisia	5	3.0
Total	168	100.0

Source: FSC (2015).

The types of certified forest products in Africa include logs, lumbers, plywood and carpets, wood, wooden products and paper products, household toilet and towel paper, tissue paper and cosmetic wipes, kitchen accessories like cutting boards, furniture for children's rooms, bedrooms or living rooms, outdoor furniture for gardens or terraces, wood for construction and gardens, many tools with a fist or a wooden handle, bags for markets commissions, grilling accessories, like pliers-grill or charcoal, etc. (Kalonga, 2015; Mbololo, 2015).

Conclusion

Despite the efforts made to promote and implement forest certification across the globe, the areas of forests certified in Africa remain abysmally low. This suggests that forest certification has a long way to go if Africa in general. There is need to explore the strengths and opportunities offered by forest certification through putting in place the

necessary capacity, which can be generally categorized under human, financial and physical resources, technical capability, an enabling policy/legislation environment, appropriate institutional arrangements as well as marketing structures and information systems for certified forest products/services.

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