

Sustainable forest standards in relation to small timber growers: lessons from KwaZulu Natal

A briefing note for policy makers in land use and environmental departments in the Republic of South Africa and other countries in the region.

Forest certification standards form part of a market-based instrument designed to encourage sustainable management of the world's forests. Of these standards, the Principles and Criteria of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), founded in 1993, are the most well known. Small-scale timber growers wishing to engage in forest certification are often excluded because of barriers such as cost, language difficulties, low literacy levels and irrelevant bureaucratic requirements.

This briefing note draws on a study that explores the relevance of certification standards to small-scale timber growers in the region of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The research provides critical information at a time when the South African Government is involved in the continuing process of developing a National Forest Standard. The study was funded by the UK Department for International Development's Forestry Research Programme and carried out by Fonda Lewis and Steven Ngubane at the Institute of Natural Resources in the University of Natal.

Policy findings

Small timber growers are excluded from certification

In South Africa, small growers are excluded from certification procedures because of:

- Lack of awareness and training, especially about environmental best practice or labour regulations;
- Inadequate literacy and other skills required to develop a management plan, to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and to undertake regular environmental monitoring;
- Difficulties in investing in the health and safety equipment required to meet both legal requirements and certification standards;
- Difficulties in monitoring cumulative social and environmental impacts.

South African small-scale timber growers argue for a single national certification standard with flexible requirements that cater for their needs. They do not see any merit in having a separate forest standard specifically for small-scale growers as this has the potential to exclude them from mainstream timber markets.

Standards should be applied at the appropriate institutional level

Although all aspects of forest standards have relevance to the smaller grower, it is not feasible for all to be implemented directly. Instead, requirements such as the production of management plans and impact assessments should be dealt with by appropriate institutions at the local level. In the Richards Bay area of KwaZulu-Natal, the obvious local institution is the tribal authority. Elsewhere in South Africa, elected councils could fulfil this role.

Small-scale timber growers need training and resources

Poverty is high in many rural small grower communities and a large proportion of small growers lack the capacity to implement certification standards. Outside support, such as training, is therefore essential. Such training could be delivered via the local tribal authority or timber growers' group.

Support is also required to help establish co-operatives and other collective organisations. The experience of timber growers' co-operatives in the Kwambonambi district and sugar co-operatives in KwaZulu Natal demonstrates that collective organisation at the local level can lead to the development of regional or even national associations. Such associations can give the small grower a more powerful voice in the formation of national forest policy.

Recommendations

- National government departments should design, through a collaborative process with stakeholders, a single forest certification standard that caters for all timber producers but is flexible enough to meet the needs of small as well as large commercial players.
- In formulating and refining national forest standards, policy makers should directly consult individual small-scale growers, including those with holdings smaller than 5 hectares, rather than relying on the views of timber growers associations to represent the small timber grower.
- Governments should provide funding to small grower communities for the creation of marketing co-operatives and local timber associations.
- National African governments should work with local government and tribal authorities to provide small timber growers with training courses in the requirements of forest certification standards. These requirements include:
 - Health and safety
 - Labour regulations
 - Management planning
 - Record keeping.
- National African governments should work with local government, tribal authorities and development agencies to provide small-scale timber growers with training programmes in:
 - Woodland biodiversity
 - Rehabilitating degraded forest
 - Managing river catchments
 - Growing commercial indigenous species (to avoid reliance on eucalyptus).

This policy brief was summarised by Becky Hayward from research by Anne Tallontire with Valerie Nelson and Chris Collinson at the Natural Resources and Ethical Trade Programme (NRET) of the Natural Resources Institute (NRI). It is based on a study carried out by Fonda Lewis and Steven Ngubane (Institute of Natural Resources, South Africa) as part of the project, "Ethical trade and forest-dependent people."

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