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**STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS AND COMMITMENT TO FOREST  
CERTIFICATION: THE CASE OF WESTERN GHANA**

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR  
THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE (M. Sc.) IN  
**AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES, FOOD SECURITY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
MANAGEMENT (RURAL DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS)**

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## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Concluding Statements**

The establishment of forest certification in Ghana is faced with different kinds of impediments; financial, policy-wise and legislative, as well as lack of knowledge. Specifically, some of the problems were the cost of certification, weak forest policy and legislation coupled with feeble enforcement structures. The lack of good forest governance, ambiguities in the existing forest land ownership and tenure rights further constrains the process. Although these problems are recognized to hinder the certification process, stakeholders show a lot of optimism and an acceptive attitude to forest certification. Stakeholders also expect a lot in terms of their roles and responsibilities from each other in the whole forest certification process. Although, stakeholders might not be able to confirm the extent to which their perceived benefits from forest certification is achievable, they show considerably positive attitude to forest certification which is recommendable.

Government is expected to play a lead role in the whole forest certification initiative. Some stakeholders perceive government as not doing much in terms of her roles in the process. Policy and legislation reforms were cited as key short-comings, while funding of the process was but scanty. Although government perceived to be passive towards forest certification in general, it is rather proactive with the VLTP under the VPA with the EU. Industry realises the benefits they stand to derive from forest certification, especially timber companies in the Western Region of Ghana whose export markets are certification-sensitive. Industry also recognises that there are gaps between their current management practises and what is required of them according to the standards. They perceive the standards to be extensive and high. Although price premiums still remains a controversial issue, industry expects to receive high premium if they are to produce certified forest products. Although industry is generally committed to forest certification, preparedness for certification remains dependent on individual producers.

Local communities in the western region are cautiously optimistic that forest certification could address equity in forest benefit sharing, as well as, provide for them a better platform to have their say on forestry issues. Majority of the local people do not understand the

concept, however, and steps are being taken to change this. They nonetheless, have problems with legality of land in terms of right to management. As a result they occasionally feel their rights are overlooked. Civil society demonstrates keenness to see forest certification through in Ghana. They call for governments' active involvement in creating a favourable environment for forest certification to thrive in Ghana. The impact and involvement of research and academia in the certification process are not significant, although they seem to be much involved in the work of the NWG and NGC. There is a paucity of research work on forest certification.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Once the nature of the barriers to forest certification has been identified, the study attempts at suggesting some synopsis of potential solutions to the problems identified.

### **5.2.1 A Phased or Stepwise Approach to Forest Certification**

Forest certification at least according to the FSC standards, sets rather high forest management standards that are usually not readily achievable by most tropical developing countries (Atyi et al. 2002). Nonetheless, the strict standards of the FSC, is what makes certification such a valuable tool in ensuring sustainable forest management. Thus, any laxity in the process would only limit its effect, destroy the confidence in the institution and weaken the support it has from ENGOs (Becker, 2004). In response to this Richard (2004) suggests a stepwise or phased approach to forest certification as appropriate in areas where management practises are much below what is required. This approach according Richard (2002) could be implemented in two main ways. The first is through the Modular Implementation and Verification (MIV) system; where the desired standard are divided into 20 modules or activities that can be tackled within a 3 year period (Proforest, 2002). The second approach is the staircase model, where there are clear sequence of steps and activities for raising forest management to the required level. Although the first approach seems to be more flexible, it confuses consumers in the market. The second approach though, it takes a longer time, is more local producer-tailored and offers transparency and credibility in the market.

The phased approach involves an initial independent audit of the of the FMU to identify the gaps between the current management and what its expect according to the standard, development of an action plan that identifies levels of achievement to tackle the weakness, and continual independent verification progress. The principle here is that forest managers will have an incentive to start on the path to SFM by making initial changes in their management practices. In comparison, practises and assessment that concentrate on at several management variables instead of all of them is easier for both producers and auditors (Becker, 2004). Once key stages of the process have been completed incentives can be provided to producers in the form of tax breaks and access to supplier who express interest in transition timber<sup>7</sup>.

### **5.2.2 Good Forest Governance**

Good forest governance is one that requires governmental and institutional structures which are free from corruption, transparent and accountable, and has an unbiased and effective justices system (Becker, 2004). To achieve such a governance system, there must be a focus on developing integrated financial management system, strengthening justice delivery, reducing government control over the economy and providing training and technical assistance to the forestry sector, audit and anti-corruption institutions. Government exertion of significant control over the forestry sector in Ghana is apparent in the presence of state owned enterprises, licences, tariffs, quotas, bans, subsidies, and provision of government services. Although The FC was restructured as a semi-autonomous corporate body in 1999 under Act 571 to improve its effectiveness (ITTO, 2005), this has not yet been fully realised. To assure good governance in the forestry sector as a prerequisite for forest certification, there is a need for full autonomy within the sector.

### **5.2.3 Corporate Involvement**

The role of corporate society and businesses in sustainable forest management is invaluable and as such, must not be overlooked but rather encouraged and facilitated wherever possible. Partnerships require not only the movement of capital and resources

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<sup>7</sup> Transition timber is timber that originates from sources that can adequately demonstrate active progress towards certification.

but also the understanding of the motivation and realities that parties involved face. The investment climate and opportunities that exist will serve as to either strengthen or diminish the incentive of corporations to commit to responsible forest management (Becker, 2004).

Strategic business partnerships can benefit both private businesses, as well as, local timber producers in Ghana. Sherr *et. al.* (2002) identifies some of the mutual benefits as; access of wood, fibre and non-wood products to industrial firms at competitive prices, local ecosystem expertise and social branding systems, local producers receive high quality planting materials, technical assistance, quality control, investment resources expand and marketing and business expertise. For such partnership to be realised, there is the need for both parties to understand the other and recognize the unique circumstances and limited resources facing tropical forest producers. This implies that they must have forward thinking management, offer flexible contracts, pay special attention to the reducing business risk and explore mechanisms to reduce transaction costs.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a globally expanding business development and investment strategy. Whereas, it was previously the situation that cooperate organisation were avoiding high risk, erratic and controversial sectors like forestry, in recent times there are new innovative financial strategies that regard environmental and social strategies. For example, commitment to forest certification is considered one of the criteria that are used when rating companies using the Dow Jones Sustainability Index<sup>8</sup> (DJSI) (Becker, 2004). This is can be a recommendable success pathway if such opportunities can be exploited through partnerships between local timber producers and cooperate businesses in Ghana.

#### **5.2.4 Policy and Legislation Reforms**

Government policy and legislation reforms in Ghana happens to one of the most difficult, yet, most essential prerequisites that supports forest certification in topical developing

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<sup>8</sup> Dow Jones Sustainability Index is the first global index, tracking the financial performance of the leading sustainability-driven companies worldwide.

countries (Becker, 2004). Policy and legislative reforms in Ghana and particularly the forestry sector in Ghana should target forest land ownership and land tenure rights, forest management, institutional structures and monitoring and enforcement of forest laws.

There is also a need for bridging the knowledge gaps that pertains to forest tenure and disputes. Becker (2004) suggests some mechanisms by which this can be achieved. These are mapping of tenure, delimiting property, reforming legal frameworks, revising regulations and establishing new enforcement mechanisms. This according to Becker (2004) requires significant investment financially and politically. According to Christy *et al.*, (2000), legislation promoting clear and just tenure should make explicit reference to fundamental conditions for decision making, provide for public review and comments , create oversight bodies drawn from all stakeholder groups and public right to information. These according Christy *et al.*, (2000) provide a means by which people can report government violation of forest laws.