

Critical Evaluation of challenges that contribute to the exclusion of Small Scale Timber Growers in South Africa

Paul Green*

Abstract: *The agriculture and forestry sectors are crucial to the socio-economic development of South Africa. The entire agricultural value-chain contributes approximately 12% to the Gross Domestic Product as well as represents 7% of the formal employment of South Africa. The contribution of this study is the critical evaluation of the challenges that contribute to the exclusion of Small Scale Timber Growers from the Forestry Stewardship Council certification in South Africa. The study adopts a qualitative paradigm whereby a purposive sample of 12 knowledgeable respondents were interviewed. The findings indicate that the challenges are mainly linked to uncoordinated support and lack of knowledge. In addition, the challenges can be attributed to the need for the establishment of a statutory body to represent the interest of small scale timber growers in South Africa.*

Keywords: *Small Scale Timber Growers, Forestry, Agriculture, Certification, South Africa*

INTRODUCTION

It has been twenty two years since the birth of a democratic government in South Africa. The country has undergone a wide range of policy reforms which are aimed at modernising the country. As much as the country has implemented a range of policies, socio-economic development has been hindered by two obstacles, namely, inequality and the lack of social capital (Landman, 2013). Through the National Industrial Policy Framework (NIPF) different programmes and initiatives were set to accelerate economic growth (DTI, 2013) and the South African government had set an objective to halve poverty and unemployment by 2014. It is against this background that the agriculture and forestry sectors were recognized as important catalysts in alleviating poverty, increasing food security and promoting economic growth (Matsane & Oyekale, 2014).

Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) (2013) states that the forestry industry, which consists of

timber, pulp and paper sector, was acknowledged as one of the sectors with a high growth prospect and as one that offers opportunities for the participation of black economic empowerment companies and economic development for the poor, mainly in rural areas of the country. Like the agricultural industry, the forestry sector comprises of the well-developed commercial farming and the small scale timber farming in deep rural areas operated mainly by black communities. The sharp division between commercial forestry farming and the small scale timber farming is the unequal distribution of inputs such as land, assets, market access, etc. (Matsane and Oyekale, 2014). Yet, the majority of people that are affected by poverty are among small growers in rural areas.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The small scale timber growers (SSTG's) lack adequate market facilities. The existing facilities are either underdeveloped or subject to certain requirements such as Forestry Stewardship Council

* Durban University of Technology, South Africa, Sizwe MondliMtengu, South Africa, E-mail: paulg@dut.ac.za

(FSC) which “is an independent international Non-profit organization that was established in 1993 to promote responsible forestry management in the world” (FSC, 2006, p.2). Preliminary investigations indicate a willingness to purchase timber from small scale timber growers provided they meet the minimum standards prescribed by the FSC certification. However, small scale timber growers experience challenges in terms of compliance with FSC. Ham (2006) suggests small scale timber growers are being excluded from the FSC certification because of difficulties. Based on the aforementioned information, the study critical evaluation of the challenges that contribute to the exclusion of Small Scale Timber Growers from the Forestry Stewardship Council certification in South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The forestry sector plays an important role in the economy of South Africa. DAFF (2011) mentions that forestry was identified by the National Industrial Policy Framework as the high potential growth sector for the economy. DAFF (2011) also mentions that forestry does not only contribute to the economic growth, it is now part of the sustainable livelihood for small growers. According to Statistics SA (2014), the agro industry (of which forestry is part of) contributes 12% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In terms of GDP, the forestry sector alone contributes 1,2%. Dlamini (2015) emphasizes that, regionally, forestry in KwaZulu-Natal contributes 4.5%, Mpumalanga 4.7%, Eastern Cape 0.9% and Limpopo contributes about 0.5%.

Market Structure

The majority of the timber products in South Africa is exported. Timber products consist mainly of raw material and semi-finished products. The transition of government of South Africa in 1994 opened major international markets. This was largely based on policies like “General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade” (GATT) which regulates international trade. Notable shift was the review of the South African trade policies in 1993, which recognised that South Africa was going through significant transformation and was going to make every effort to align itself

with multilateral trading system (GATT, 1993). This opened doors for international markets for South Africa. Today, South Africa is one of the major role players in the export and import of timber industry with exports alone accumulating to R13.8 billion in 2012, of which R5.9 billion was for pulpwood (Godsmark, 2013).

Forestry Certification

Gullison (2003) states that the objective of forest certification is to advance management of forestry by offering methods by which producers that employ advanced technology, can recognize their products in the market place, which will then enable consumers to identify and exclusively procure forest products that come from the forests whose source generates superior environmental and social benefits than products arising from forests with traditional management. Nelson (2002) agrees with Gullison in that forestry certification form part of market-instrument designed to encourage sustainable management of the world’s forest.

Patosaaari (2004) argues the views of by Gullison and Nelson by stating that forest certification has different elements and many role players with various interests. Certification provides a mechanism for marketing and market access. Moreover, a certified product is well positioned in the market as opposed to a non-certified product. For buyers and consumers, forest certification provides data on the impacts of products they purchase. It can act as the blueprints for Sustainable Forestry Management (SFM) elements. For forest owners, forest certification is a tool for market access or market advantage. For governments it implies a soft policy mechanism to promote SFM, in line with government legislation. For Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), forest certification can be an instrument to influence management.

Development of Small Scale Timber Grower in South Africa

The concept of small scale timber growers started as early as 1893 in King Williams Town by the state. At that particular time, the main aim was to provide material for building and firewood for rural black

communities (Ngubane, 2009; Mahlangu, 2004). Ngubane further states that the extraordinary growth of small scale timber farming in South Africa happened around 1980's and 1990. The growth was driven by industry role players in rural communities of South Africa.

To make a clear distinction of small scale timber growers and other role players in the industry, it is very important that the small scale timber growers' concept is described. DWAF (2005) and Ngubane (2005) define a small scale timber grower as an owner and/or manager of the forestry plantation that ranges from 0 - 50 hectares (HA) in size with tree species mainly of short-term maturity. Ngubane (2005) also argues that a grower who owns up to 200 hectares in size predominately of short-term maturity, established on tribal land and uses low - scale forestry technical practices is also considered as a small scale timber grower. The important observation from this description of SSTG's is the shift from own consumption of timber products (firewood) to plantations which are marketed for income generation by SSTG's.

The acceleration of timber farming by small growers was promoted by industry role players around 1980's. This was done in the form of out grower scheme. Jele (2012) states that Sappi was the first company who introduced an out grower scheme called "Project Grow" in 1980, and later followed by Mondi scheme which was called Khulanathi. The modus operandi for these out grower schemes was to provide growers with soft loans, technical assistance, planting material and the market access once the timber has reached its rotation age (Ngubane, 2005; Jele, 2012). It is also important to acknowledge the role played by other organizations such as South African Wattle Growers Union (SAWGU) around 1994 and NCT Forestry Co-Operative (NCT) which also helped with the establishment and the market of timber for SSTG's (Ngubane, 2005; Jele, 2012).

In a study conducted by Cairns (2000), it was discovered that there are different reasons that motivated families to join company schemes or to be timber growers. The families or communities saw it as the opportunity to obtain annual payments

from company - led schemes. This is largely based on the fact that the families were paid an advance in the form of a loan once they had completed certain forestry activities such as planting, weeding, fire breaks, etc. They also regarded forestry as the means of obtaining fuel and sell wood to neighbours. Masuku (2005) states that, in some part of KwaZulu-Natal Province, the woodlots for families were established by the KwaZulu Government solely to provide communities with fire wood.

Another important reason that motivated families to be timber growers is the fact that they were securing their land rights over unutilised land. IndunaMpangela (2015), (personal communication) said that the reason for this was mainly two fold. On one hand, the communities were protecting their land against the Apartheid Government; on the other hand, the women were also protecting the land from being repossessed since their husbands were working in areas such as Durban and Johannesburg. He also stated that, for widows, it also helped to increase security of tenure since their land rights become insecure after the death of their husbands. The families or communities also choose to grow forestry because of ease management when compared with food crops; some of the land was not suitable for other crops and the reliability of yield from forestry plantations. After the introduction of company - led schemes in 1980, some of the families or communities were persuaded by an extension officer or neighbours to plant trees for pulpwood (Cairns, 2000).

The programmes or forestry schemes by industry role players in the 1980's played a huge role in the establishment of SSTG's plantation. To date there are 43 000 small growers with approximately 50 000 ha that are represented at Forestry South Africa (Dlamini, 2015). The Manguzi area, where KwaZibi is situated, has approximately 8 500 ha and forestry is the main source of income in the area.

Subsequently, the SSTG's are now independent in the sense that the majority is no longer under any company scheme. They grow trees on their own and sell the produce at an open market with the

best price and services. For farmers to realise the full benefits of timber farming, the whole concept of sustainable forestry management must be understood in order to contribute to sustainable development of the forestry industry.

Small Scale Timber Growers and the Market

Timber grown by small growers is generally for short - rotations (5 to 7 years) and is used for pulpwood (Masuku, 2005). Provided they comply with legal requirements and lawfulness of timber to be supplied can be verified, there are no barriers to entry. The only challenge at the moment is the fact that they cannot get maximum benefit for their timber, which, in a way, affects the volumes to be supplied to them. They then face the uphill battle of reduced orders.

Based on the fact that small growers are now growing timber, not only for their own consumption but for commercial purposes, they find themselves faced with a number of challenges in this turbulent

environment which is characterized by a high level of uncertainties.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative approach, the study adopted a case study as the research design to critically evaluate the challenges contributing to the exclusion of small scale time growers from Forestry Stewardship Council certification. A non-probability sampling technique was selected whereby twelve purposive respondents were selected. Following the work of Leedy&Ormrod (2014) who advocate that purposive sampling technique is used where people are chosen for a particular purpose and represent diverse perspectives on an issue. The criteria used to select participants were based on the following: leadership role; requisite knowledge; and were directly involved in the timber farming industry.

The primary data schedule is indicated in table 1 below.

Table 1
Data Collection Schedule

<i>Respondent Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Position</i>
Respondent One	18 November 2015	Timber Market	Head: Forestry Development Service
Respondent Two	03 August 2015	Timber Market	Timber Procurement Manager
Respondent Three	03 August 2015	Timber Market	Timber Procurement Manager
Respondent Four	03 August 2015	Timber Market	Forestry Development Manager
Respondent Five	11 November 2015	Forestry Consultant	Head Consultant
Respondent Six	07 August 2015	Timber Market	District Manager
Respondent Seven	07 August 2015	Small Grower Association	Small Grower
Respondent Eight	07 August 2015	Small Grower Association	Small Grower
Respondent Nine	07 August 2015	Small Grower Association	Small Grower
Respondent Ten	07 August 2015	Small Grower Association	Small Grower
Respondent Eleven	18 November 2015	Small Grower Association	Small Grower
Respondent Twelve	18 November 2015	Small Grower Association	Small Grower

(Source: Author)

The data collected during interviews were recorded on a tape recorder and a cell phone was used as a backup. The interviews were conducted in the vernacular of the respondents which was IsiZulu. The recordings were later translated into English and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document.

The data analysis technique applied in this study was thematic analysis. Vaismoradi *et al* (2013) define thematic data analysis as the method which is used to identify, analyze and report the patterns (themes) within the data. Vaismoradi *et al* (2013) further state that thematic analysis is an independent and reliable qualitative approach to

analysis. Ibrahim (2012) mentions that thematic analysis is mainly used to identify, analyze and report those themes or “patterns” that emerge throughout the document or within data. The main reason for the selection for this study is based on its ability to break down data into small units of content, while capturing important aspects about the collected data in so far as the research questions are concerned.

To ensure trustworthiness of data, the researcher documented all the data generated, including field notes and other sources of data so that they can serve as evidence. Leedy and Ormrod (2014) mention that another issue that is very important in qualitative research is the potential of misleading people, using the contacts to gain confidential information and betraying confidence in ethics.

According to Flick (2006), the awareness of ethical issues and concerns has grown considerably over the last decade in qualitative research. This is largely because qualitative research involves other people that are sharing knowledge. Therefore, the researchers took all the necessary ethical steps in accordance to protocol procedures and ethical principles. The researchers also ensured that the rights of the participants were respected and they remained anonymous and data was kept confidential. The following paragraph discusses the findings of the research.

FINDINGS

DAFF (2009) states that approximately 82% of commercial plantations in South Africa have achieved FSC certification status and are managed under sustainable management practices. It is a highest percentage in the world to be achieved by a single country. Ham (2006) also stresses that South Africa didn't have forestry standards at the time and the whole audit was based on a generic checklist from two main certification bodies.

Unfortunately, small growers as the partners of the big corporate organization, find themselves exposed to certification. There is a concern that small growers and family participants (internationally known as smallholders) are left behind with regard to certification. Based on the literature review that was conducted for this study, Ham (2000) purports

that they are excluded from certification because many of them are uneducated and find it difficult to act in accordance with the high levels of administration mandatory by certification. Nelson (2002) agrees with Ham and highlighted the following reasons for the exclusion of small growers from the certification procedure:

1. Insufficient knowledge and training, in so far as environmental best practice or labour regulations are concerned;
2. Low literacy levels and other skills that are necessary to put together a work plan, to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and to conduct routine environmental screening;
3. Challenges when it comes to spending in the health and safety tools that are necessary to fulfil all the legal obligations and certification standards; and
4. Challenges in examining the increasing social and environmental effects.

However, based on the primary data that were collected, the uncoordinated support emerged as the theme around the challenges that are facing small growers. Lack of knowledge and Training and Development emerged as sub-themes.

Uncoordinated support for small growers

It was observed in the literature review that as much as forestry is recognised even by DAFF as the contributor to poverty alleviation, the small growers find themselves faced with numerous challenges that have a negative impact in their growth and development. Unlike other commodities such as Agriculture, there is little support from various tiers of government when it comes to forestry. It is even worse for small growers who are not aligned to any pulpwood companies. Due to uncoordinated support for small growers, lack of knowledge was recorded as the main challenge that faces small growers around certification.

Lack of Knowledge

Small growers that are operating independently report a number of challenges and constraints that they are facing in producing and marketing with

regards to FSC. All these challenges evolved around the lack of knowledge. Contrary to the popular belief that language is the main source of these challenges, Respondent Number Two (03 August 2015) believed that *“It’s not the language per say. Actually, this whole notion of certification you have to look at it differently. You have to be in a certain level to understand it. Currently, it’s more on international level. For the guys that are trading locally, they don’t actual impact of certification. Language is not the problem. FSC language can always be interpreted to the level that small growers will understand. It’s basically lack of knowledge”*.

However, Respondent Number Five (11 November 2015) argued that language might be a challenge faced by small growers. He mentioned that the fact there is *“minimal information that is available in the vernacular and any direct translations will not be adequate in conveying principles”* suggest that language is the contributor to the FSC challenge when it comes to small growers. Respondent Number Six agreed with Respondent Number Five. However, he stated that the language barrier makes it difficult to disseminate information to small growers.

Respondent Number One (29 July 2015) stated that *“There is no link. Language is not an issue because you have a lot of white farmers that are English speaking that not FSC certified. Knowledge of the FSC or no knowledge of the FSC becomes irrelevant, as long as you have the principles wrong”*.

Apart from lack of knowledge, training is one the strong sub-themes that emerged in terms of uncoordinated support for small growers.

Training

The best way to pass knowledge in the society is through training and development. Training and development was recorded as one of the challenges that contributes to the exclusion of small growers from certification. As much as the issue of landholding in terms of size is considered as the main contributor to the non-existence of the FSC certification, the respondents felt strongly that small growers have never been trained on the FSC, let alone certification.

Respondent Number Six (11 November 2015) stated that small growers find themselves *“Not*

adhering to national laws regarding, water, health and safety, labour, road, tax etc. This is due to lack of knowledge and the lack of economies of scale that bring down costs”. Respondent Number Six (07 August 2015) felt that if the growers have been trained, they will take informed decisions before even growing trees. As an example, *“Geographic location of some of the plantation poses a challenge, in particular to infrastructure. Using KwaZibi as example, if you to conduct the audit you need to have certain type of vehicle to the conditions of the area. Therefore socio economic impact is the challenge. Should the growers know about some of the principles of the FSC, they will ensure that they adhere to them”*.

An interesting perspective from Respondent Number Eight (07 August 2015) was that *“The current certification principles for small growers will have to be changed. There should be a special way to accommodate small growers. I am saying this on purpose. However, I feel that if the small growers were trained accordingly, I might sing a different tune”*. Respondent Number One (29 July 2015) argued that as much training is the contributor to the so called challenges of small growers regarding certification, he still maintained that *“There are no challenges because small growers are not FSC certified. The principles are wrong, so we don’t have to talk FSC for small grower. Once you start addressing the principles, then you can talk FSC”*.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to critically evaluate the challenges that contribute to the exclusion of Small Scale Timber Growers from the Forestry Stewardship Council certification in South Africa. Small growers find themselves being excluded from the FSC certification. The initial assumption, based on the literature that was reviewed, was that small growers are excluded because of difficulties such as language, low education levels, cost and excessively complicated procedures. However, it was also discovered that as yet, there is no certification programme that exists for small scale timber growers in communal land. The study results indicated that small growers are in opposition to the FSC, because they don’t have knowledge, lack of support from relevant authorities, and the fact that there is no suitable framework for their

operations, contributes considerably to the exclusion of small growers from FSC certification. What emerged as interesting though was the fact that FSC is the blueprint of certification, which came into being after SFM elements were embraced by NFA in South Africa. Therefore, for small growers' plantations to be sustainable; and to ensure they have a fair market share in the future, it is imperative to acknowledge that they operate in a competitive environment, which is heterogeneous in nature and is characterised by high levels of uncertainties and competition.

References

- Cairns, R. (2000), *Outgrower timber schemes in KwaZulu-Natal: do they build sustainable rural livelihoods and what interventions should be made? In: "Instruments for Sustainable Private Sector Forestry, South Africa"*. IIED, London.
- Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries. (2011), (DAFF). *2007 – 2009 State of the forests report*. Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries, Pretoria.
- Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries. (2011), (DAFF). *2007 – 2009 State of the forests report*. Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries, Pretoria.
- Department of Trade & Industry (2103) (DTI). *Strategic Framework for the Forestry, Timber, Pulp and Paper Industry*. Enterprise Industry Development Division, South Africa.
- Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. (2005), (DWAFF). *Forestry and Poverty in South Africa*. Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Pretoria.
- Dlamini, N. (2015), *Overview of the Forestry Sector in South Africa*. A presentation made to Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Pretoria.
- Flick, U. (2006), *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 3rd Edition. Sage Publications, London.
- FSC, (2006), *FSC Controlled Wood Standard for Forest Management Enterprise*. Forest Stewardship Council A.C., Germany.
- GATT. (1993), *Trade Policy Review of South Africa: GATT Council's Evaluation*. Unpublished Report.
- Godsmark, R. (2013), *The South African Forestry and Forest Products Industry 2011*. Forestry South Africa.
- Gullison, R.E. (2003), Does forest certification conserve biodiversity? United Kingdom. *Oryx*. Volume 37, 153 – 165.
- Ham, C. (2000), *The importance of woodlots to local communities, small scale entrepreneurs and indigenous forest conservation – A case study*. Instruments for sustainable private sector forestry, South Africa series. International Institute for Environment and Development and CSIR- Environment, London and Pretoria.
- Ham, C. (2006), *Forest Certification in South Africa*. Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Cape Town. Volume 8, 477-506.
- Ibrahim, A.M. (2012), *Thematic Analysis: A critical review of its process and evaluation*. The West East Institute. Volume 1, 39 – 47.
- IndunaMpangela. (15 October 2015), Induna of KwaMbonambi Tribal Area, Richards Bay. KwaZulu-Natal.
- Jele, Z. (2012), *The contribution of small scale timber farming in enhancing sustainable livelihood at Sokhulu*. Master in Human Ecology Thesis. University of South Africa.
- Landman, J.P. (2013), *The Long View: Getting beyond the drama of South Africa's headlines*. Stonebridge. Auckland Park.
- Leedy, P.D. and Ormrod, J.E. (2014), *Practical Research Planning and Design*. 10th Edition. Pearson Education Limited. England.
- Mahlangu, I.M., (2004), *The Sustainability and viability of small-scale timber as community economic development -the perceptions of the Entembeni community in Melmoth*. Masters in Social Science Thesis. University of KwaZulu-Natal. Durban.
- Masuku, S.S. (2005), *Socio – economic, cultural and policy issues impacting on community forestry development: A case study of Hlabisa District in KwaZulu-Natal*. Magister Technologiae Thesis. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth.
- Matsane, S.H. and Oyekale, A.S. (2014), *Factors Affecting Marketing of Vegetables among Small-Scale Farming in Mahikeng Local Municipality, North West Province, South Africa*. MCSER Publishing. Rome-Italy. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* Volume 5, 390 - 397.
- FSC. (2006a). *FSC Principles and Criteria for forest stewardship*. Forest Stewardship Council, A.C. Germany.
- Nelson, V. (2002), *Sustainable Forest Standards in relation to small growers: Lessons from KwaZulu-Natal*. Natural Resources Institute. United Kingdom.
- Ngubane, S.Z. (2005), *Small-scale timber growers' participation in the development of natural principles, criteria, indicators and standards for sustainable forest management in South Africa*. MSc Thesis. KwaZulu-Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Ngubane, S.Z. (2009), *Small-scale timber growers in South Africa*. CFA Newsletter. Commonwealth Forestry Association, 47.
- Patosaari, P. (2004), *Sustainable Forest Management, Forest Certification and MDG's*. Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.
- Statistics SA, (2014), *Gross domestic product Statistical release P0441*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Vaismoradi, M., Hannele, T. and Bondas, T. (2013), *Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study*. *Nursing & health sciences*. Volume 15, 398-405.