

# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

## A WORD FROM JEAN-PAUL, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Dear readers,

This past month marked a milestone for Better Globe Forestry (BGF) as we underwent the pre-assessment for Forest Stewardship Council certification. This certification is considered one of the most important, if not the most important, standards in the forestry industry. It ensures that a company is operating correctly and responsibly for all stakeholders, particularly in terms of social and environmental aspects. The next step will be the actual audit once we have addressed any gaps identified in the pre-assessment report. This standard will keep us vigilant and demonstrate our commitment to conducting business in a responsible manner.

We were also privileged to host a high-level delegation from the University of Ghent (Belgium). They have been incredibly supportive throughout the years. We discussed research areas of interest, particularly in relation to *Melia*, potentially in collaboration with other partners. As pioneers in large-scale afforestation in drylands, there are still many areas that need to be addressed, creating opportunities for student exchanges and knowledge sharing with local universities or research institutions. This is an exciting prospect, and BGF is proud to play a catalytic role in this process.

We wish you an enjoyable reading experience.

## BGF's JOURNEY TOWARDS CERTIFICATION BY THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

BGF recently had the privilege of leading its team through the FSC pre-assessment audit conducted by the Soil Association, an ASI-accredited certification body (CB). There are two distinct approaches to achieving FSC certification each with its own benefits and considerations.

1. **Group certification** - the approach where multiple forest owners or managers join to collectively obtain FSC certification
2. **FMU<sup>1</sup> Certification** - this approach focuses on certifying the management of an entire forest management unit rather than individual parcels or groups of forests.

BGF works with small-scale farmers and simultaneously has its own plantation in the Seven Forks area (at the shores of Lake Kiambere) hence the choice of a group certificate was appropriate.

Our journey started over four years ago when we had to learn, understand, and start implementation according to the best available knowledge and capacity. We first had a fruitful interaction with the FSC East Africa team, trained our staff, did internal gap analysis and then progressively implemented by closing the gaps up to the point we felt we were ready for the pre-assessment.

### Certification steps

The certification process has distinct steps up to pre-assessment and to be followed afterwards. They are:

1. Contact FSC certification accredited bodies.
2. Submit a certification application.
3. Submit a stakeholder list to the CB.
4. Stakeholder review/interviews by the CB
5. Pre-assessment Audit
6. Main assessment
7. Surveillance Audits
8. Recertification

Our journey with the Soil Association throughout the pre-assessment exercise was both enlightening and challenging. The audit process involved thorough examinations of our operations as a forestry company. This means that FSC certification is strictly not about forestry but how responsibly the company runs its operations with regard to Environmental considerations, Societal needs and Economic feasibility.



With the auditor in the field, addressing a farmer group working with BGF. Photo BGF

1. Forest Management Unit



While we encountered some obstacles along the way as was expected, BGF approached each challenge with determination and a commitment to improvement.

The auditor from Soil Association was professional and knowledgeable, providing constructive feedback that will guide us in enhancing our operations further. Through open communication and collaboration, we were able to address concerns and showcase our dedication to sustainable forestry practices.

## Importance of pre-assessment

It is crucial to understand the significance of a pre-assessment audit. It is an integral step in the certification process, providing companies like ours with insights into areas of improvement before undergoing the main certification audit. It serves as a valuable opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses in our operations, ensuring that we meet the rigorous standards set forth by FSC. After the pre-assessment report is issued, BGF will have up to a maximum of 24 months to close the gaps before the main certification audit. After the main audit, BGF will be issued with the certificate and later a yearly surveillance to ascertain continued compliance with the standards. The certificate will be valid for 5 years. After five years, a recertification audit will be done.

## Onwards

At BGF, we recognize the paramount importance of FSC certification. FSC sets the gold standard for responsible forest management, ensuring that forests are managed in an environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable manner.

Our experience with the pre-assessment audit has been instrumental in shaping our journey towards FSC certification. It has reaffirmed our commitment to sustainable forestry practices and highlighted areas where we can improve and innovate.



The auditor interacts with the representative of another Self-Help Group in the Seven Forks area (north Kitui county). Photo BGF

## BETTER GLOBE FORESTRY MET WITH A DELEGATION OF GHENT UNIVERSITY IN NAIROBI



From left to right: Jan Vandenabeele (BGF), Rik Van de Walle (Rector, Ghent University), Geert Haesaert (Prof, Ghent University), Jean-Paul Deprins (BGF), Lars Chatrou (Prof, Ghent University), Isabelle De Coen (Ghent University) and Samuel Kiboi (Prof, Nairobi University). Photo BGF

The University of Ghent is one of the most prestigious universities in Belgium, it is over 200 years old, offers more than 200 programmes and conducts research in many scientific disciplines. It is ranked #95 in US News Best Global Universities for 2022-23. BGF has been collaborating with it over many years, accepting students for doing master theses and participating in research programmes with an emphasis on *Melia volkensii*. Over the last 7 years, we benefited from research funding resulting in a complete protocol of in-vitro multiplication of *M. volkensii* as well as the use of melia components as bio-insecticide, another potential income for farmers. Several Kenyan students graduated with Master's and Doctoral degrees as a result. Of late, several Belgian students came to Kenya to concentrate on mycorrhiza, and tree counting by satellite imagery.

A high-level delegation of the university, led by its Rector (or Vice-Chancellor) visited Kenya at the beginning of the month and BGF was invited for a meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, hosted by Nairobi University.

Points of discussion were cooperation in several sectors, notably in-vitro, soil life particularly mycorrhiza, remote sensing for tree counting and regenerative agriculture (for our farmer program and the coastal intervention around Kaya Kauma under the umbrella of UNESCO).

As BGF, we are proud to be associated with Ghent University, and honored to be invited for a substantial meeting in the midst of their busy schedule.

Undoubtedly, the significance of research pertaining to our forestry activities cannot be overlooked. In the broader perspective, it is intricately connected to the generation of enhanced tree materials, ultimately leading to increased value during harvesting and consequently benefiting our investors. Additionally, certain research areas, such as biopesticides, have the potential to significantly enhance the well-being of our partner farmers.