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# The UTGA: Strength in numbers



©Ugandan Timber Growers Association (UTGA)

*UTGA General Manager Dennis Kavuma with tree growers' products*

Uganda's forests are under pressure. Most natural forests have been depleted, and those remaining are under threat from agriculture and unsustainable logging. Uganda has a rapidly growing population, 48 percent of which is below the age of 15. There is growing demand for housing and land, and wood is needed for construction, furniture and energy.

Uganda is a resourceful nation, and its government and citizens realize they can meet their wood needs through tree planting. A few private companies have established plantations, and the number of small growers is increasing. This is beneficial for meeting wood needs, but it also poses challenges because of a lack of organization and collaboration.

## The UTGA

The Ugandan Timber Growers Association (UTGA) is a rapidly growing organization with more than 490 members. It is funded partly by membership fees and supported by the Government of Norway, Uganda's Sawlog Production Grant Scheme (SPGS), the European Union, FAO and various Ugandan government institutions.

The UTGA considers itself a lobby group for effective policy and action. It aims to provide an enabling environment to assist its members in establishing and managing tree plantations and obtaining high-quality inputs, tools and services on competitive terms. The UTGA also strives to obtain market share for wood produced by its members. The overall goal is to achieve a profitable, efficient and high-profile commercial forest industry in Uganda.

Commercial forestry contributes the following to Uganda's economy:

- Timber – UGX 57 billion
- Energy – UGX 324 billion
- Formal employment – 100 000 people
- Total employment – 1 million people
- Ecosystem services – UGX 222 billion
- 6 percent of the gross domestic product.

Any company, institution or individual involved in tree-growing for commercial purposes is eligible to join the UTGA. Plantation owners range from small-scale (with fewer than 5 hectares) to large-scale (with more than 1 000 hectares).



*Bandsaw*

## How the UTGA improves forestry

For sustained success, tree-growers should be able to harvest sustainably and to access good markets for their products. The UTGA works to ensure this by:

- bringing together those involved in tree-growing for collaboration and networking;
- lobbying to improve the investment and financial environments;



*A young plantation*

- providing members with benefits through collective sales and purchases;
- attracting private-sector funding to establish commercial timber plantations;
- conducting scientific research and development to improve plantations;
- guiding members on international plantation practices and standards;
- promoting continuous learning through training and the sharing of experiences; and
- engaging in partnerships that help achieve the UTGA's goals.

### **A model nursery**

The UTGA has established the UTGA model tree nursery on 8 hectares of land in the village of Kasiba close to the town of Kiwawu on the Kampala-Mityana road.

The nursery, which has been certified by the SPGS, will be used for nursery research and training and to demonstrate best practices. It will feature an arboretum, and it will produce high-grade seedlings and clonal planting material of pines, eucalypts, fruit trees, ornamentals and indigenous species.

### **The relationship with the SPGS**

The SPGS is an initiative of the Government of Uganda; it is implemented by FAO with funding from the European Union and counterpart financing from the Government of Uganda. The SPGS supports growers in finding markets and meeting demand for sawlogs over the medium to long term by encouraging the downstream processing of timber, poles and biomass. The UTGA and the SPGS have a strong relationship built on the mutual objective of increasing the incomes of rural people through tree-planting for commercial wood production and carbon sequestration.

## Challenges for the UTGA

The UTGA has achieved considerable success thanks to good leadership, a growing membership, government support and healthy relationships with the SPGS, the European Union, FAO, the Government of Norway and others. Nevertheless, much still needs to be done:

- **Meeting demand.** Growers need to increase cooperation to better meet market demand for consistent volumes and quality at reasonable prices.
- **State policies.** Government procurement and tender processes should prioritize wood as a preferred material in construction and other uses.
- **Certification.** Much wood in Uganda is still obtained from unsustainable sources. Wood-use and procurement policies and processes need to support wood from well-managed and sustainable sources, requiring the adoption of certification schemes and other standards such as those of the International Organization for Standardization.
- **Funding.** To continue its impressive work in the long term, the UTGA, which relies partly on external support, needs to become fully self-funded.
- **Infrastructure.** The location of wood-processing facilities is determined largely by the presence (or absence) of infrastructure such as roads, electricity and water. Many growers must transport their logs over long distances, at considerable expense. The Government of Uganda is focusing on expanding such infrastructure, a necessary step for a sustainable timber sector.
- **Fire.** Climate change is making dry seasons more extreme and rendering forests more susceptible to damage. Systems to manage the increased fire risk are needed urgently.

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