# **Cert1 - Interview Certification body CMO-FSC, Otjiwarongo - 1-2-2023.MP3**

# Transcript

I1

**Could you please start with a short introduction of yourselves and also the organization?**

P1

I'm [name] I'm currently the country manager for CMO for Namibia. CMO was established a few years ago. We started in 2018 with the aim of providing certification to producers that were previously unable to give certification because of their technical details and the costs and things like that so that was our aim when we started in Namibia and to provide a structure, we even the smallest of producers would have access to certification and it would be affordable for them. So we built our structure in that manner. The more you produce, the more you pay, which sort of balances out the skills we can accommodate anyone having one person harvesting manually to someone, doing a fully mechanized operation, you know that is above the threshold for FSC so the structure is built in a way that we can accommodate anyone in the structure and they will obey according to their operation. So because we structured the certification in a group. It means that all the players contribute towards the costs and the structure and everything of this group scheme, and it also means that we as CMO we have developed sort of like a overall management plan for all our farms, for all the areas that we can certify. We've developed the management plan, which is then just adapted to the specific units when they get certified or when they join the CMO as a member.

I1

**And what is your relationship with FSC?**

P1

So we have a we have a FC certificate Group Scheme certificate. We also manage other group scheme certificates, but my the owner of CMO, the or the CEO currently of CMO, he has previously helped with writing FSC standards. He has done FSC audits worldwide, so he is very familiar with the FSC structures and how to implement this on the ground in different countries. So he when he moved out of the auditing of FSC. He started this company, too, because he realized there was a. Gap, where people did not have access to the certification. So he tried to close that gap on the ground. We have schemes in Namibia, in South Africa, in Zambia, in Thailand and we're working on Zimbabwe with Twana now. We're also working on Malaysia and a couple in Ghana to establish these certifications, I know which one is coming up now within the first six months of the year, they would be up and running. They've also been in Zimbabwe and I think that is also the structures are they're just doing the audit now. We're also moving into PFC Certification because you can have dual certification. So the countries where there is a PFC standard written, they can just add because our structure is. While developed, you can just add the PFC on top of it and it has no additional work and the only additional cost is the actual PFC audit that needs to be done.

I1

**What's the what is that a PFC?**

P1

So it's like FSC, but it's a private standard sort of. So it was it was written by a group of companies that did not agree with FSC's approach. So they wrote sort of an additional standard and the upholded peafs.

I2

**Could you say something about the main differences?**

P1

There's not a lot of differences. PFC is a bit there are some of the things that they do not cover that FSC covers, and it's mainly a certification of just timber products. FSC has gone a lot into certification of non-timber forest products, adding ecosystem services and carbon, these sort of things on top of that, yeah, so. If you see as a non-profit organization, obviously PFC is a company they do charge for the certifications and things like that.

I1

**And in this bush sector in what types of activities are you involved as certification?**

P1

So what we mainly look at with in terms of the certification itself. There's the three main things, the environmental aspects, the social aspects, and then if this whole operation can be economically done. Because the idea behind the economics is to balance the other two because you can't implement some Environmental Protection thing without it making economic sense. Otherwise you're going to be pulling funds out of something else. So when we go into our farms, currently most of our farms are doing wood and charcoal. We have some farms doing the paralignose acids. And we have farms during biochar, they're not yet stunning this FEC certified, but is there, it is in the scope. Also, in the scope and we have a number of the forest products on the scope as well. So we go and we've made an internal checklist of what needs to be on the form. And we exclude the things that we already covered in our own EMP that we've developed for the whole certificate. So we go and look at what are they chopping? How are they doing it? Are they protecting the necessary sensitive areas? Are they protecting the animals and we look at the social aspects? Do the workers get the necessary protective clothing? Do they have contracts. Do they get paid the fair wage. Do they have proper housing, you know the living conditions of the workers and these types of things. And so those are basically things that we go and look at on the farm and this is not a charcoal specific thing. This is for any biomass harvesting that is that we can do that. We can even certify a farm where there's no selling of products from the farm. They are just doing restoration projects. So that can also be included into our or that can also be certified. It isn't necessarily a thing of having the products that are sold.

I1

**And how does this group certification work? Like do you certify it in the whole Conservancy or communal land?**

P1

You know, never have we have not gone into communal areas. Yet there are some legal structures considered when you're going into a communal area.

P1

Because a part.

Of it is fully managed by the forest management body of that area. But a big part of it still falls and their ministry, the Ministry of Environment, forestry, tourism. And the two of them do not always see eye to eye on what they are expecting out of this thing. So it's very difficult because you need approval from both sides and we've been struggling to get that structure in place also with the communal areas because it is, you know millions of hectares belonging to hundreds of thousands of people equally, they all get the same benefit out of the land. Getting a structure in place where one guy is not does not have a bigger benefit than the other. Other than just the time that he's putting. In it's very difficult. As soon as someone makes some money out of something, the other one also wants to do it, and then it creates chaos. So we've been building a structure we if we go into a communal area, we can do this at a big scale. We can accommodate. Like 1000 members at a time. Going into this area otherwise. It's not going to work. You can't just accommodate 10 or 20 or 100 you need to be able to accommodate anyone that might be interested in getting involved and that's been a bit of a challenge. We did have a communal project. There was some big lessons learned from the projects and we've taken that information and thoughts, different structures which start communicating with other so-called is to see how we can do this in a manner we can for six months, but boots on the ground. Yeah, dedicated to getting the thing running. Otherwise it's not going to work.

I2

**So what are major lessons that you took from that project?**

P1

Well, first of all was that this thing of everybody wants to be included in something where they can make some money out of it. And that was that was a major thing. We just did not have the resources to get 1000 or even 100 members on boarded at the same time. You know you need to then be able to put 50 resource managers on the ground to help them get established, but for a very short time. And have the right people with the right knowledge to help them. As very difficult also, knowledge in these areas, you know the education in these areas. A very big percentage of the people living in the communal areas do not have any education.

I2

Not any, and they can’t read?

P1

Nothing there’s a big portion that only has like grade 7 or standard 5 level education so they can read and they can add, but they're not business wise they don't understand law and these types of things. Getting them educated to a point where they can do this on their own. Because there is some paperwork, there are some legal things you need to do. There are few things you need to keep track of, and that was the other challenge. You know, the knowledge in these areas. And the other one was just structure. So Namibia, if you look at the map, you'll see there's a lot of the communal areas are spread over a of a big portion of Namibia, you have one communal area this side on that side, one on that side and one on that side. And there's a reason for it. It's a clash between the communities. You know it's a clash between the different ethnic groups. So you when you go to a communal area. Every group has these dreams. Someone are more educated than others. This, but they tend to move towards then to the bigger towns or cities or so to go and work there, and they just keep a few cattle in the communal area. Others are less educated, you know, and then getting these guys on the same structure where you have one person managing it and three or four harvesters working you know, getting that structure, right the one doesn't want to work for the other. Everyone wants to make their own money, but they can't do it alone, you know, and it's a it was a bit of a challenge getting a group of people to work for someone else. The other person is managing it they have the say they have control and yeah, so it was it was challenging.

I1

**And this was like a pilot project in three communities, right?**

P1

Yeah, It wasn't 3 communities. It was three areas spread over 2 communal areas belonging to 1 ethnic group. So it was two conservancies. But it was three points that we did, so we had three members on

I2

**Did you specifically choose for one ethnic group? Was that a conscious choice?**

P1

The reason was that is the only communal area where the majority of the area falls into this part of Namibia that has the bush encroachment problem. The other areas do not fall. Into that specifically. Some of the northern areas have a portion that is bush encroached, but they also have a portion along the river or along a pan or something that isn't naturally forested area. So you have this separation, it's difficult. You can't put it on this side, but not on that side. And managing the forest on this side is different from managing this restoration of a Bush encroached area. So that's why they chose that area specifically, because they have a big problem with bush encroachment. The other areas are less bush encroached and they also have a lot of forests, natural forest areas as well.

I3

**Which area was it?**

P1

It was in the Okinawa area, so it's like east of Namibia.

I1

**And well, yesterday we visited Ohnahi community and there they have like a community forest and community conservancy is that a structure that you can work with or build on?**

P1

So one of the one of those projects was online and. It was specifically there that we have the problem that ethnic group the natural cattle herders that is that's where they're comfortable moving into a forest type thing you know we can with this. They didn't have a lot of knowledge on that. And also they naturally tend to be more owners than workers, you know, their personalities, their culture and everything. So they normally have other groups working for them should they need workers and that creates a bit of a clash. Now you have someone from another communal area working there, getting paid, and the guy next door is not earning money. That's actually from that community so that was the basics of that area. Legally, a part of the two of the units were in an area that we could very easily certify with the legal structures and the management structures in place already. The other one was a bit difficult. That's why we did now a pilot thing. And for the pilot, we made some exceptions. But it was agreed with FSC. You know that there would be some exceptions to see if we can try and make this fit. Because they did not have the legal structures in place.

I1

**And so it was it too difficult to find the workers for that pilot in that community because we also understood that there's a lot of unemployment?**

P1

There is a lot of unemployment in the communal areas, but it was difficult to find workers because some of them do have some cattle they look after, they have to walk very far to get to that area. That area is not as heavily populated as some of the other communal areas, so they live very far apart and also the clash of 1 being the owner and one being the worker. You know in the same community where people should have the same rights was difficult. Not all of them wanted to do that, so they would work one or two or three days and so this is not for them and go. In the kind of charcoal sector, which is the majority now in the bush encroached areas. Most of our workers come from the northern communal areas. That's the rate is the highest rate of unemployment. Where education is more of a problem because it's sometimes in very remote areas. It's also if you look on the map of Namibia just show these waters. That one, you see this shape, right? And that one so those. Are imaginary borders one point is Namibia and Angola, but there's no actual border and it's one community living on both sides. So you have the Recombo people on that side living on both sides of the border, and you have the Oshiwambo people in the middle living on both sides of the border, it's one community. They moved back and forth and they work most in the charcoal industry because they cannot find any other employment because of the education levels there, and they also have no papers. So that was our other legal challenge. We can't get these guys to come and work in mainly the communal area, they will not be accepted because they don't have papers because the mother lives on this side the guy lives on this side with his wife and children, he was born on the Angolan side of that imaginary line there, but he lives on the Namibian side, but he doesn't have Namibia papers.

I2

**They have no papers, or they have no Namibian papers?**

P1

The some of them have no papers they were born in villages and things like that. They have no papers but by the language they speak, you realize they're either from that area or from that from that area. They do sometimes get from the churches, get like a piece of paper that says that this pasture supervised by this guy was born in this village or something like that. But again, it's a very difficult process they're not, not Namibian, but they're not Namibian. Yeah, and the communities like the community that we worked in. They don't accept those people at all. They will not let those people work in their areas and their own people don't want to do the hard labor. They are educated, they are all went to schools. There's a lot of schools in the area of communal areas. They're very structured, educated. They don't want to swing an axe or chop down a tree or something like that. So that was a challenge getting people to do the work in that area.

Speaker 5

**And do the FSC certified charcoal producers employ these people without papers, or are they not allowed to do that?**

P1

So we have an agreement with the Angolan Government saying that anyone from Angola may legally move back and forth a certain area of Namibia. And they do if they come over and they say they want to go work they do get a small card with his name and. Birth date and that says he can go and work in Namibia for two years so they come and work with that card in Namibia for two years, but they cannot register for tax or get a bank account or something like that, so it may. It's mainly a cash industry, but there is an agreement. It is an executive agreement. When we went through all of this with FSC, with the auditors and everything like that, ASI, all of them, they do accept their agreement, they do accept that this is the situation. It happens in a lot of African countries, so it's not new, different or anything like that, but then we need to just prove that this guy is actually from Angola, so he speaks Portuguese or he has some sort of document that says he was born somewhere in Angola. Those are the guys that we currently employ. We do have a few stragglers coming in with their papers and then work six weeks in the … . Please will you go back and come with your papers? Or don't come back because I cannot legally have you on my farm if you don't have papers so it's causing a bit of friction with the workers. But I mean for the legality and for the certification, if this is the route we need to go.

Speaker 5

**And for the living standards, what do you look at and what do they need to have?**

P1

So for the living standards we require them to have at least a cabin cooking facility. They could be their food. When you go into our northern regions, most of those workers sleep on the ground, living with wood or plastic hats and cook under the tree. But we try to be to have a higher standard, obviously we need to get to FSC standard, so we tell them they need that and a cooking facility. Where they are out of the sun, out of the rain and they're completely good. They need housing. The houses may not be overcrowded. It has to be made of like metal sheets or bricks, or the traditional clay way of doing it where they use wood poles and then cover it with clay and then the floor needs to be hardened. Or needs a sheet or something covering the ground so it's not. They're not just sleeping on the sand type thing. They have toilets, shower facilities, you know, things like that available both for them as well. We think you know, we check the water availability, they need water, you know, within 50 meters of walking distance from the housing. They need drinkable water. The water needs to come straight from a bore hole, so it's underground water. It's not something that comes out of a open reservoir or something like that. And then we take with that divided with things like their protective clothing and things like that.

Speaker 5

**And have had farmers had difficulties providing these like housing and stuff?**

P1

It is super expensive in Namibia to build these houses. I mean it's really expensive to construct these houses. So we do struggle to get them to provide enough space for the workers. They do construct the houses that they need to but sometimes spaces are a bit of an issue in terms of the living space for each worker that they need. They're not allowed to have more than eight workers in one room and every worker needs at least more than four square meters of personal space in that area. So getting these constructions up because, like I said, it's really expensive any concrete products are super expensive. Any metal products are super expensive in Namibia so, yeah, that's that is I think of all our challenges. The housing is probably the biggest because it's financially the one that cost the most.

I2

**What about the clay houses are they also expensive?**

P1

It doesn't work in every area. You know you don't have the right clay. In terms of durability in all the areas. In the areas where they have the clay. They do use those houses. You still need to put a waterproof roof on it. Yeah, and the construction time of those are very long. These workers, they come down for six weeks. They work, they get the money, they go home. For them to come and construct the house first, they don't want to do that so the farmer needs to put them the actual time. But we have a lot of them and some of them really nice houses it's really beautiful houses. If you look at it and they tend to have more space as well.

Speaker 5

**And to become, So that's one of the major expenses of becoming FSC certified. Do you, as a farmer, do you have to pay for the certification itself or just you need to pay for getting standards up?**

P1

You need to pay for the certification, obviously it costs us a lot of money to keep the certificate up and running we also need to visit our members regularly to make sure that they're staying on standard. And to support them with information and things like that to keep them on the FSC standard label. So that takes a lot of money travelling around, you know, visiting the farms, having the people to visit the farms and things like that, and then keeping the certificate as well. So they do pay for it. Currently we have a monthly fixed fee of $300 Namibian dollars. That's next to nothing. That's just the certificate that we're paying for we pay out of that money. Then we tell them to pay a per ton levy. So for the products they sell.

P1

When they're actually making money out of the product, the products they sell on, the certificate, they pay a levy on that. And that money is in put on to like a big fund which pays for the visits to the farm travelling.

Speaker 5

**Does CMO so do you audit the FSC or does FSC do that themselves?**

P1

The FSC appointed ASI Accreditation Services International to accredit a few certification bodies that can give out the certificates that can audit and then issuer a certificate. One of these certification bodies is SGS in South Africa all of our certificates were issued by SGS and they come and do annual audits on the certificate every year.

Speaker 5

**So you basically certify them on their behalf?**

P1

So we have a certificate, it belongs to CMO, it's in the form of a group scheme. Which means we can add members as part of this group certificate. So we can just add Members onto it normally the they would set out in the management plan the capacity of the group and that limits the amount of limits the amount of members that you can put on. But we've developed software where we keep critical information and we manage this certification of the members. You know we manage our Members on the software and the software creates means that we have very much bigger capacity than some than someone that's doing it manually. So we don't have like 200 excel sheets with the farm information. We have a global software that keeps track of everything. I can click a few buttons and have any information from any file available and it makes it a lot easier. I don't need 20 people. Updating these sheets. I just need 5 to go to the farm and say please just go and put the training on the system. And we have it in all the I don't need people to put the information together into one document for every audit. This system does that by itself.

Speaker 5

**And how many people do you have going around checking their farms?**

P1

I currently have 5 trained resource managers doing the audits. The CMO certificate has about 100 or 210 members on it. We have the King charcoal certificate that has about 20 members and we have the green charcoal certificate that started with two in October and they have five more that they want to add now, yeah, so the software makes it scalable and easily manageable. So the five trained resource managers is enough. Because the bulk of their work, they do one day a year per form and that is what they need to do to keep the system updated and all the records that we need for the audits?

Speaker 5

**And when a farmer wants to become FSC certified, how long does that typically take to go through the whole legal process?**

P1

On the farmer's side, each farm moves at its own pace, but from the date of the application with us, if everything is in order for the requirements that they need to have on the farm. If everything is in place, it can take from one to three weeks. Normally there are a few circumstances where something happens and the farmer can't get to something and it takes longer, or like now that I'm busy prepping for our next audit, which is next week. The certification body audits. It is next week. I'm prepping for that, so I'm putting a lot of resources into that at the moment. I don't have time for other audits and I have to have my other resource managers also helping. They also don't have time for other audits, so now my farmers are waiting an average of three weeks to get from the application to the actual audit is done part of it.

Speaker 5

**So quite quick if they have they got everything?**

P1

Yeah, it's normally on the farm side but it's stalled. I mean, a farmer can call me today filling the application form. Pay a deposit fee that we keep as sort of security for the farm, because it's a big process for me to give a new farm on the board. If he sends me the application form and the deposit fee I can do the audit tomorrow. I can finish all his software things and do the sign off the next day so it can be a very quick process. Normally it's the former that's stalling the process because they first need to get this they thought maybe they can convince me they don't need that and things like that. So it's usually stalled on their side.

I2

**So why do farmers want to become a member or have the certification?**

P1

So a lot of the European markets require some sort of in our forest certification and because the only forest certification we currently have in Namibia is the FSC. It doesn't mean we can't add anything else, which is this is what we have, and this is the most widely recognized one. So that is why we chose FSC. It's also the easier, cheaper option of the lot to get. Because we have a certification bodies in South Africa, you know we have auditors in South Africa that can do it and things like that. So it's not that we don't have to get auditors from zero. So that's why FSC was the one that prevailed.

I2

**And within Africa are there countries that require certification as well, or markets that are interested in this?**

P1

Some of our chain saws are very attend on certification like Woolworths and SPA so they require the any wood paper products to have some sort of certification for their own product lines. Not for other product lines that they buy in, but for their own product lines. I know Walgreens is 100% FSC everything has to be FSC certified.

I2

And it is a quite high end supermarket, right.

P1

They do mostly clothing but they do have a grocery section as well.

I1

And now there are quite some developments going on in this bush sector, like those Nampower things are you including those developments.

P1

We try to be as involved as possible. We do have a lot of expertise in the area. I am involved in several other projects, I mean not just we have the charcoal thing going on top of that our certificate allows us to move into charcoal biochar any type of fuel, wood chips and also into the non-timber forest products like the wood vinegar, honey, venison and oils derived from fruits and things like that. So we have a lot of products on our certificate already that we can go into aside from the other Nanpower and other piloting type plants, we are busy with projects helping projects develop in the wood vinegar sector because it's a very quick developing sector because the wood vinegar can be used as a pesticide, as a fertilizer, as a harboroside, anything like that, you know, depending on the grade of purity and how you mix it. With water, the concentration of it could be used in a lot of different areas, wood vinegar.

I3

**What’s that?**

P1

So it's basically when they're burning biochar charcoal, they put lids on it with the chimney they catch the smoke. The smoke is condensed and that provides you with two products. It's a tar that comes out of the wood and the wood vinegar. So yeah, that's very quickly developing because a lot of the farms in Namibia and South Africa are completely replacing their fertilizers and pesticides with wood vinegar now. And it's natural it causes no harm. It's not poisonous or anything like that, so yeah.

Speaker 5

**Someone said before your aftercare here and you have one specific herbicide you allow which one is that or what do you after?**

P1

Is on the farm in the area you know, and every farmer's capacity. We don't describe the specific thing. But we do talk through the process with them. You do check is the alter cases and they chose working for that farm. Do we need to adapt to the thing? But that's an ongoing consultation. When we do the visits, most of our farmers actually use grazing rotation and got browsers to do their off ticking. If you have goats. The right cuts because they eat the regrowth. That's nice and close to the ground. It's fresher and softer and everything with that regrowth comes out and eventually if it keeps eating it down, the roots just lose too much energy and the stump dies. Though also, if they eat a new seedling for it has reached a certain size, it damages that seedling to a point where it will not grow any further. Most of our farmers use that. Some do use harborosides, but we have, so FSC has like a prohibited list of pesticides, chemicals, you're not allowed to use anything other than that we go through a process of approval. If we do want to put a new harboroside side on the list. There is a pre-approved list of 200 plus harborrowsides already that can be used and that is for Southern Africa mostly. And we do have the I have two new ones that I'm doing the ESRA form to have them approved.

I1

**Oh, we'd like to show you this image. It's a concept that we're working on. The ideas that in this area there are multiple farmers or communities that provides biomass Ii this case, the Bush to a factory where in this case we're investigating a technology where we produce four different streams. The main output is a bio oil that can be used and upgraded, for example, for the shipping biofuel, but it can also have other uses, a second stream is a biochar that can have multiple uses. Again, in this in the in the forms, and there is a wastewater stream and a gas stream that can be used in the facility and we would like to find out here in Namibia, how could this concept work in this context and. Yeah, what could be opportunities, but also challenges for that. So yeah. How do you look at that concept and do you think this could work here?**

P1

The biggest challenge with this would be the logistics of moving the biomass around, and I'm sure everybody is saying the same thing, and it is the biggest challenge. Transport is super expensive, fuel is super expensive. There's a limited radius where you can move biomass before it's just too expensive to use it. It's normally 75 to 100 kilometers based on the other projects that I've worked on. So getting biomass in that area. It's going to be a challenge. We've seen it now. You probably spoke to Colin as well? Not yet, So he has the same challenge getting biomass in a certain area for the retort plant he has near Bloemfontein. A lot of foreigners are still trying to chemically get rid of the Bush encroachment because they don't want a lot of workers on their farm these workers are super difficult to work with. I did charcoal for two years. It was stressful to say the least. No, because they're uneducated, they don't always understand. They see opportunity to make money, but they don't really know. It's really difficult to work with them. It's difficult to train them to do specific things we have the biggest challenge where up north you chopped the biggest tree because it gives the most wood you know. They use it for the fires and things like that. So it's difficult to work with these guys. So the farmers that have the money to go and an alternative route do go and alternative route. So they don't want to have harvesters. It's either biomass only because they don't want the harvesters on the farm and that's that. No other reason than just they don't want the harvesters on their farm. They don't want to sit with a lot of people to work with. So it's challenging get getting the biomass. It looks a lot. It's like the Nampower thing and like this thing of Collins. There's a lot of biomass in that area. Actually getting the biomass from the farmers. It's not as easy. You have millions of tons of biomass in that area. But feeding the plants. It's going to be a different challenge. Because you know, it's difficult to source the biomass from these farms.

I2

**Because it’s too complicated?**

P1

They don't want to supply the biomass. Yeah, they try to use chemicals, rollers or some other form of managing bush encroachment and there's also a lot of farms where these forms of inherited from generation to generation, so that families made money as many 100 years ago on that farm already, it's now just a subsistence thing. They don't need to make a lot of money out of it so they don't deal with the bush encroachment problem out there. They just use the area that they do need to use and continue on that itself. Sourcing it and then the logistics and getting it is a bit of a problem. The idea of the hubs they pop every where and because been doing this thing for years now for the 2018 and possibly before they were, they have idea. But with everything that pops up where there is this sort of centralized location of processing the biomass, they have the same challenges. Getting the right amount of biomass supplied. And then the logistics.

I1

Do you also see some possible negative impact or harms that this could have?

P1

No, I think Namibia is very open it is not densely populated, so putting up one or two or 10 or 20 hubs is not going to have like a major effect on the environment except for that area that it's sitting on specifically. Yeah, because our environment is not yet sensitive to these types of developments. You just don't choose a sensitive area, but mostly in Namibia you can put it up anywhere and the areas are not get so sensitive that that would disrupt the ecosystem around it.

I1

**And we would also like to understand the different stakeholders involved in a concept like this and their relationship between them and we plotted them on the power interest grid. So their position in terms of power. Decisions that they can make. Or if they want to do something that they can make it happen and their interests in a biohub like this? If they have high power, how high interest they are here, but if they have high interest, low power there, you put them here. How do you look at at these grids? Do you agree with this the positions would you change it a little bit? Are the stakeholders missing here?**

P1

So the transport would be a high power player with very little interest. We have a problem with transport, not just economically, you know. People don't want to travel to the farms with their trucks. Because they can just travel on their nice good roads for other things, because Walvis is a very big port and there's a big portion of southern Africa. So there's a lot of other things they could be doing with those trucks. Biomass is not one of their highest priorities. The commercial farmers can also be. They do have a lot of effect on your availability to the biomass itself. And it's usually with the commercial farms that you have a problem with the supply itself.

I1

**Because of those issues that they don't want the workers on their farm?**

P1

Yeah. I do agree that a lot of this up here because the government has the final say in it as they do change their minds overnight about a permit and things like that, so mostly we have a really good relationship with the Forestry department. In the areas that we're operating and we try to keep those relationships in place, Namibia, Africa. It is all about the relationships you have. It's not about. If whether you're doing it right or wrong, it's about the relationships you have. It is an African thing. So we do try to keep the relationships in place with forestry. But I mean that. It is so they can change their minds overnight and there's no one in the higher position that can change their minds back, you know. So it's a how you need to keep the channels up and keep them happy. You know, give them a lot of credit. I shouldn't be saying these things I shouldn't be saying these things, but it is what it is and I work with them every week somewhere. I need to talk to the forestry guys, please come on. Is there a reason to take this guys permit away or can you just go a bit faster with the permit issuing or something like that.

I1

And where do you see CMO or FSC?

P1

So in the context of this is Namibia, FSC does not have a lot of power in changing the process. In Namibia itself. It will certainly give you a lot of benefits in terms of the certification, you know. Being able to put out there that you have this certification, you know allowing you access to markets and things like that, they do not have a lot of sway in the government at the moment. Lower level forestry, yes. They do recognize FSC and they do try to force all the farms to go FSC because they know we're looking after the farmers, they don't have to. Yeah, but higher up a lot of them know about FSC, know what it is, but it doesn't change their minds. It doesn't have carried a lot of weight for them because it doesn't bring anything economical into the equation when you're moving out of selling the product itself.

I4

So I have some questions. So you first talked about you had difficulties with communal land conservancies, especially with the Osanai community. But I was just wondering. As an FSC, if you can certify a community right, even though if they are not producing any products, you can still do it.

P1

Yes, yes, but then you need the cooperation of the whole community to make sure they're not doing anything illegal in that community and at this stage. They're not allowed to do certain things, but they're going to do it anyway. Creates a clash and we cannot certify it. If you have that thing in the, so you need to get the whole community on board. It's millions of acres, hundreds of thousands of people giving them on boarders. Because everybody wants their piece of it, this one selling wood. That one has his cattle and he doesn't care what damage he causes. He's just making his two cents and going on with his life so it's difficult. It's not impossible. Don't understand me wrong. It's not impossible. And we're working on various communal projects at the moment, all over Namibia with different things. But it is very difficult. And certifying a whole community would be the easiest thing. Would also be very close to impossible, so having a certain portion certified would be the better option.

I4

Because if you are just worried about the exploitation and stuff because it's there when we're explaining about the.

P1

And also when you certify the whole community, the whole community has the rights to any profits coming out of any project. So then you need to make sure that there is a proper structure benefit sharing structure in place for the community.

I4

Yeah, because yesterday there was one thing you mentioned because it was also they were also having a community forest. It's just that they should get permit for they only have a certain limit of land they can harvest or they can make use of it, which means that is a mechanism in place to keep in check how much they are doing right is that. Something FSC can leverage about because that's already a.

P1

Yes, if the structure worked. If the structure actually worked. You have five people sitting on the forest management body. How will that five people make sure no one in this 5,000,000 hactare piece of land is doing illegal harvesting and illegal harvesting would lead to immediate suspension of the certification? It's high risk you understand that, that's. Why you need a proper structure in place. That's why if we go into it, we need to be able to put the boots on the ground. To do it right from the beginning, do the trade into training with everyone. Give everyone the same chance to be part of the thing, so it's going to be a big scale thing. You can't go in and one and two and that one, the next man you know and develop this thing. You need to go and put the whole structure in place. Have the amount of people to manage either one or 1000 people that's a part of this project. You're doing whatever it is so that is a big thing. You need to be able to make sure everybody's playing along everybody's happy because if one person goes and complains, the whole thing is shut down. Yeah, you understand this. It's a very sensitive thing. We're working on a lot of projects and we're putting on two areas up north in a forest where they just harvesting non timber forest products. But they have the proper borders set out. They have permission from the forest management body, from the local chief, from 100 community members in the immediate neighboring area, you know and government and it was a big thing. It took them two years to get everything. In place just for that 5000 hectares where they're actually harvesting the fruit.

I2

**But then it's managed by the community itself?**

P1

No, it's an outside party, but the funds go directly back into the community, into the village that that owns that piece of land, they don't own it, but they have the rights to it.

I2

**Which party is that can you tell us? The company that does this?**

P1

I don't have the name now I can't remember. It's a trust that was created. They're doing oil from marula fruit and they have a few people actually living up in the communal areas, managing this whole thing, helping the guys, doing the harvesting and whatnot. But it was created in a way that if we were if we want of the process that's done in the communal area. They just give their salaries and the rest goes to the community, as was added after the product to use the communal area where the company actually makes its money.

Speaker 5

**Would you see a way that we could do this biohub with like benefiting the local community without getting the biomass from the communal lands?**

P1

They're not going to do that. They're not gonna let you use their land if it's not 100% to their benefits. And that I've spoken, I've had personal meetings and I've seen meetings. There wasn't one it was like 10 with the councilors of the communal areas where we did the pilot projects and all of them said it's fine. We want this when can we do it? You know, let's get this thing up and running but it has to be 100% community owned, 100% benefiting them, 100% of the processing done there, you know and they want to export to the European market.

I2

100% huh?

P1

That's their vision I told them that we will need to pull this thing up it's not going to be day one a 100%. It's going to be. But that is that they want so going in with the mindset that you're going to do it any other way is not going to work.

I2

**They're not flexible on that is non-negotiable?**

P1

If you talk with them through the process and say, listen, we will have to process it somewhere else first you know we will need to back somewhere else first. We will use someone that has the structures to export it for now and build this. They're fine with that, but you're not going in with the vision of you're putting it there and they're going to work there but you're gonna get the biomass nowhere else, and it's going to be a fixed. It's not going to work like that. They will need first option on whatever you do.

I4

**So just to understand if you understood correctly, so they would like to produce that maximum at maximum value for the product in their own community and still get the maximum benefit out of that because yeah, they are. Am I understood correctly? But they do acknowledge the fact that if the end product cannot be produced in their community because of some lack of technical or infrastructural stuff, they do acknowledge that fact?**

P1

Yeah, they goal would be, Their number one priority would be getting rid of the bush encroachment problem. You won't be able to source your biomass outside 1st and then inside. That would be their first. They would rather ship the biomass out then have you put something there and bring the biomass in so that would be the first thing that you would need to do. You need to service them first in terms of taking their biomass first and then they want the option of having 100% ownership of this thing. 100% of the profit, everything like that back to the community, which is fine but challenging. But first of all you they will not allow you to put a plant there in their community. Create jobs but not use their biomass because their first priority is getting rid of biomass. This is just. This would be completely anonymous, but their first priority or they don't want to do the work for all the benefits first. So they would they would not appreciate just the job they would want the money. So first money then and than the jon.

I4

**And right now in Namibia how many hectares of land is being certified as FSC?**

P1

Currently, I think we have 1.7 million hectares. And then the CMO and the other two constituents that we manage, we have 1.4 million hectares.

I4

And all of I assume all of these are pretty much 95% of these are commercial farms?

P1

Yeah, we have a few resettlement farms. But as we when a private farm is up for sale, government has first option to buy it and resettle community members that could be more economical. And that this will overflow from the communal areas over here. So we have a lot of constituent farms on our certificate as well. The rest are currently commercial farms. All of them at the moment are slimf, meaning that harvest less than the 5000 tons of biomass annually. So these are smaller operations. But they are kind of deep. Just commercial and commercial like farms like very simple and fonts they are seen according to law the same as the commercial.

I4

**Fonts and this distribution of this 1.5 or 1.7 million hectares is it is it possible for us to access or can you show in the map where exactly? Is it clustered in one region or is it like diverse?**

P1

I can show you. …

I4

**And just as a CMO as certifying company do you also do I have measures to actually bring in more powers or make more farmers certified? Do you also do that or you just wait for the farmers to approach?**

P1

We have never needed to be proactive with the certification things the only thing we have to be proactive in is alternative products. Charcoal that's the only economic product. Charcoal is limited, there is a tree size limit a species limit and an area limits and there's also a market limit on volumes. So we're looking into diversifying and private stuff while we holding the projects that want to go into the wood chips. For it's going on, it's in the wood building and biochar and these things.

I4

**Other question is based on your cost structure, so the farmers need to pay first success for certification. Also they have to contribute certain percentage from their revenue, whatever they sell in terms of the product from the land for the monitoring you, if you want to go and those kind of things, right. But I also see that from most of the things they told was FSA means investment. That is one of the big I would say a block from them. So I was just wondering if you can alter or change the cost structure. Let's say for. Example, reduce the initial investment for certification and then if you increase the percentage of revenue which they you get if it's currently 10%. If you can increase to around 30% or something then you still get the money back but more like not in the first over a period of time. So is that something?**

P1

Yeah, the thing is we initially did that, that was our initial structure and we moved away from it because now everybody is getting certified, but they're not selling the product. We have to do one annual visit to the farm. We need to keep their records updated, you know. So it increases our cost of certification because we pay for the amount of Members that we have, it doesn't, it's not a straight line increase but it does get more the more the Members are. So it's more expensive for 10 members less for 200 per member but it's still growing, you know? So we did that previously and we had a lot of people that were just not contributing enough to cover the additional cost for that farm to being on the system and the other problem we had is now everybody is allowed to be FSC certifyied I spend the day filling in forms, doing all the necessary registrations and whatnot. I send someone out driving 300 kilometers to the farm spending a day there driving 300 kilometers back, they need to drive with the 4 by 4, you know, because of the farm roads and they get back and they go through, he goes through another day of just getting everything ready, sending it to me. I do another day's work. You know, we keep calling the guy and after two months, he says I'm not interested anymore and I wrote off more than $500,000 because of farms that did that in the beginning. I can't keep doing that. I can't keep doing that, so I need them to make a commitment right off the bat to stick to this thing, and if he decides to withdraw after two months, it's fine because I covered my initial cost already. So I need to do it like that. There's no other way for me to do it, but it's not a lot I mean, it's $6000. For the initial audit plus the kilometers traveled. So when you get certified anything you produce while you're in this process is being certified. You can sell as being certified. So two days after certification, you can sell whatever you produce to get it back for $5000 that you did selling a truck load of charcoal. You know he's making five times that that. It's putting it in his pocket so it's we need to just get them to make that bit of commitment, otherwise we're running around all over the place and. You get to the far places and they say oh no but this is too much and you have to drive back and then you wasted a lot of time sometimes they do this for two months. Keep going. Keep going. Send emails. Make a lot of calls and they said, Oh no. But I'm not interested anymore.

I4

**And one more last question from my side is if you want to do another pilot in one of these communities where you. It was difficult for you, like, how would you approach it differently, let's say engaging other community. What would be the different approach because?**

P1

So we started with a new one us personally because the communities approached as us and asked please help us.

I4

That's a good that's a good sign.

P1

Get this thing off the ground, I've spoken to the councillors and the forest management bodies and even forestry guys. I mean, they're digital director of forestry. He was the one that came and said these guys are driving me nuts please help. So we are busy trying to get this structure in place. My biggest challenge now is getting the funding so that when we go in we can put down the infrastructure to accommodate them because infrastructure is also a problem being. That is the biggest challenge now that we're working on. We're working with several different people that we're talking to, trying to see where we can get some funding for this just for the infrastructure development side, we have a lot of volunteers that said they will. They would start this thing for us. We're targeting one community because they they're much more structured than any other community in Namibia and they will be, we're going to target that Conservancy. The councilor is also a commercial farmer. He also does charcoal. So he has a bit of background of how this works as well. He's been in the job industry for a while for years now. And he comes out of that communal area, so he also has the connection there. So he's working very hard to get everything in order for this thing. What we need to do now is see where we're going to get the funding. If we go ahead with the project. If we put down the infrastructure for it and then we said two of the other councillors said that when we have this one up and running and they can see how it works and what structures they need to put in place, they will start doing that on their side so they can get the same thing going.

I4

Because when all the time I heard it, I sensed a vicious cycle. Let's say, for example, farmers needs first to pay to get certification for them. Probably it's too much, but then they can't sell their products or through charcoal if they are communal land, then prohibit it. If they are commercial land, they don't want workers to be there, so they can't earn money, and if they want to sell charcoal to Europe then they need FSC certification, which they can't get. It's a vicious, vicious cycle, right? It has to be broken somewhere and it can only be done by revenue or from the government. But then the government need revenue to build those things and Nambia is not really a big population. Yeah, the population is not very high and if you want to have a very organised, well structured, you know structure in ensuring order in every single community, you need more people to do that and if you want to do that you need well educated people. Educating them takes time, but then they want the revenue now. So that's again once again a vicious cycle. We have to break the vicious cycle and then two is the time. They have to be patient as well.

P1

Yeah, it's difficult to be patient. It is a cycle and it is difficult, but we do get a lot of funding into Namibia. So there are a lot of people bringing in funding, it's just the area where the funding is going is not accomplishing what it's supposed to be accomplishing. I'm working now with Namibia Youth Services on a training project they're doing on their farms. To train harvesters to bring them back to the farms so that we don't have people coming to the farms that have no idea how to swing an axe. And then you have a lot of accidents, things happening, and it's weird. There's a lot of fights. There was time that this was a big thing, especially in the COVID times when we had a lot of people lost their jobs. Suddenly, they needed to earn somewhere else and they wanted to go into the charcoal industry because there was a big boom in the charcoal industry. But getting them to do a training project, it helps fund them for their training as well for other training and develop skills. Hopefully more mechanized skills in Namibians. So we have our northern populations, they come in, they're really good at swinging an axe. But you can't train them to use a chainsaw. They don't have the capacity, so you have 60 people on farm swinging axes instead of 20 using chainsaws. It's only the population that's right at that border or not only, but mostly 95% of them come from that area right on those borders. And people get angry and say, yeah, this and go, that's coming into our country taking our work you know. But they don't want to swing an axe so It's also creating and then problems, so we're working with the namibian Youth Services on the track of farms where they do training normally. It used to be just the agricultural based training. They're moving into the biomass sector as well to train these gusy we can get a was more skilled labour force into the industry. So that we can get Namibian workers to do the same job. Just more efficiently. So that we have less friction with these workers, we create a solution for the farmer that doesn't want a lot of workers on their farm, you know. And the hope is that this will create the signaling mechanism environment more skilled, better wages, more Namibian workers. Namibian Identification document owning Namibians and it will bring a lot more farms on board and have a lot more products on boardso.

I2

**So when you talk about the wrong kind of funding. Do you, do you think of the green hydrogen?**

P1

Yeah, there's a and we had this with Namibia Youth Services. They started this project in collaboration with the ministry. They took the two projects later on. With the other project, it was well funded and the funds were going into classrooms where these guys were sitting in a classroom for two weeks getting a lecture by someone with some agricultural biomass knowledge and then they would go out there and they still don't know how to harvest a tree. So that's the wrong type of thing that's happening. And then the Funding's gone and after two weeks of paying a lecturer to come and do this. They can't accommodate the trainees for another two weeks to do anything else since you know.

I2

**And where does that funding come from is that the GIZ?**

P1

Yeah there is some GIZ funding and the government also giving other funding as well so I think. All of this money is going into youth development project again, yeah. It's not really developing any skills. A lot ot theoretical work.

I2

**And the green hydrogen projects?**

P1

I have not worked with that you know.

I1

Thank you so much for this interview making the time for us.