

FOREST PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

"I feel a personal responsibility to advocate for forests"

The EU Ambassador to Uganda grew up surrounded by Swedish forests, but met his favourite tree in Africa. In his replies to 5 questions he explains the potential of the EU-Uganda Forest Partnership, from new financing tools to supporting the livelihoods of those involved in the forestry sector.



EU Ambassador Jan Sadek

1. Why do forests matter to you? And your favourite tree?



Having been born and grown up surrounded by vast expanses of forests, I have fond memories of family forest activities, in summer as well as in snow covered winters. In Sweden, forests are an integral part of the national identity, reflected in literature, art, and traditions, which contributes to my deep appreciation for ecosystems and biodiversity. We are raised with an understanding of responsible forestry and conservation management at home and in schools.

I feel a personal responsibility to advocate for forests and all natural resources conservation initiatives here in Uganda. My deep-rooted experiences from my home country fuel my passion to protect forests in general. It's in Africa that I met my favourite tree, the Baobab. I love their unique character. They're like nothing else in the natural world. These trees can live for a very long time. I used to have a small one in my office in Khartoum, and enjoyed watching it grow. I also got to climb a big one in Botswana. As I climbed higher, I could see for miles and miles.

2. The EU and Uganda signed a Forest Partnership in 2022. Is there a before and after in the approach to forests?

The EU–Uganda Forest Partnership was signed at the UNFCCC COP27 in November 2022 and this was followed by the development of a roadmap finalised in June 2023. Since then, there has been an increased political and technical engagement around forestry, with the participation of the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Water and Environment.

It is still early to make a concrete *before and after* comparison of the approach to forestry in Uganda. That said, the EU–Uganda Forest Partnership has already elevated forest conservation to a higher priority on the national agenda. Formal commitments to protect and restore forests have been incorporated into Uganda's national communications beyond what is normally presented in policies engagements and strategies.

Before the Forest Partnership, funding for forest conservation was mostly sporadic. The Forest Partnership has led to new financial commitments, for example, Uganda has secured additional funding from Denmark for the EU–Uganda Forestry Programme that responds to the Partnership's objectives. The Forest Partnership also presented an additional attraction for collaboration with the private sector and opened new avenues for potential investment in sustainable forestry.

Collaborative projects involving EU member states and international organizations have emerged to effectively tackle forest degradation, promote sustainable practices guided by the EU–Uganda Forest Partnership and the Forestry Programme. In a nutshell, before the Partnership, forest management was often viewed in isolation, with limited connection to broader ecosystem services, after the Partnership stakeholder engagement, including local populations, businesses, and civil society are targeted to become a central feature of forest management strategies and interventions.

The Forest Partnership broadened discussions in a wider and strategic approach beyond just forestry. This holistic dialogue enriches EU–Uganda relations, and clearly draws linkages to the EU's cooperation in other sectors, including energy, agriculture, and trade.

3. The greatest challenges for the Forest Partnership between Uganda and the EU?

The Forest Partnership between Uganda and the EU has the potential to bring significant benefits, but of course there are challenges. Securing consistent funding from both the EU and Uganda's government will be essential. Other key factors for success include effective management of forests, and facing Uganda's complex land tenure systems.

Ensuring local community involvement will be very important, if local populations do not see, feel and appreciate the direct benefits of conservation or if they are excluded from decision-making processes, there could be resistance or even opposition.

The success of the Partnership also requires robust monitoring systems to track progress and ensure that commitments are met, as well as the enforcement of regulations against illegal activities such as logging and land conversion for agriculture.

In other words, ensuring alignment between the Forest Partnership goals and Uganda's national policies on forests, agriculture, and climate change will be vital. This entails coordination between

various ministries and stakeholders, especially when addressing competing priorities like agriculture, urbanisation, and infrastructure development.

4. The greatest potential of the Forest Partnership between Uganda and the EU?

The Forest Partnership is promoting innovative forest financing tools such as carbon credits, biodiversity funds, and private equity funds to attract investment into the sector. Forestry investment is capital-intensive, high-risk, and long-term, particularly in the plantation sub-sector, making it challenging for private sector players to secure financing from traditional financial institutions.

By utilizing these innovative financing mechanisms, the Forest Partnership aims to make it easier for private sector players to access the necessary funds, ultimately boosting the growth and sustainability of the forestry sector in Uganda.

5. Which forest-related achievement do you consider the most urgent?

I believe there are two types of achievements that are most urgent and can bring great benefits. The first type are the initiatives helping to restore the environment, while providing a sustainable source of energy. Significant efforts, for example, have been made in Northern Uganda, where woodlot plantations have been established for charcoal production.

The second type are the initiatives focussing on adding value to woods from plantation forests, enhancing their quality for both local consumption and export markets. This not only boosts the economy but also supports the livelihoods of those involved in the forestry sector.

Photo: A baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) in Botswana - Windows Spotlight Images © 2025