

CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

# Promoting Environmental and Social Sustainability for Improved Livelihoods in Ghana and Beyond

**Stephen Doso Jnr**



**With a population estimated by the World Bank to be approximately 33 million in 2022, Ghana relies on its natural resource base as the main driver for sustainable development. Its economy depends predominantly on the agricultural sector with heavy reliance on primary commodities for its export earnings.**

The agricultural sector employs over half of Ghana's labour force and, together with fisheries and forestry, contribute about 19% of Ghana's Gross Domestic Product. Efforts to develop the economy over the years have led to the expansion of the agricultural sector resulting in more land being committed to crop production leading to loss of natural forests and the degradation of landscapes and forestlands. This requires improved governance to halt deforestation and reduce carbon emissions, and the empowerment of forest communities to uphold their human and land rights to improve their livelihoods.

Stephen Doso Jnr is a Commonwealth Alumnus who completed a Master's degree in Sustainable Environmental Management at University of Greenwich in 2013 and he is a firm advocate for environmental protection and human rights empowerment who is at the forefront of the 'environmental battle'. He has been instrumental in promoting environmental and social sustainability and protecting human rights for improved livelihoods. Stephen has supported farmers and land developers in Ghana and across Western, Central, and Eastern Africa to minimise and mitigate the impact of their activities to the environment

and society. He leads the implementation of the High Carbon Stock Approach, a tool used to support plantation companies and farmers, global suppliers, and consumer brands to eliminate deforestation from their operations, and to grow and trade commodity crops without destroying the Earth's essential rainforests or violating the rights of local communities. Additionally, Stephen leads on the responsible sourcing and production of agricultural and forest commodities to achieve positive social and environmental outcomes for local communities.



Final stakeholder consultation workshop as part of Integrated HCV-HCSA assessment for proposed smallholder oil palm plantation project in Ghana, 2022.



**Stephen Doso Jnr** was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship in 2012 to study for a Master's degree in Sustainable Environmental Management at University of Greenwich. Stephen is a Principal Project Manager at Proforest, and a strong advocate for environmental protection and human rights empowerment. He is an active member of the Human Rights Active Working group, and co-leads on responsible sourcing and production of agricultural and forest commodities for positive social and environmental outcomes for nature, climate, and people. Stephen is a licensed Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) Lead Auditor and Trainer, as well as a Licensed Assessor for High Conservation Value (HCV) and High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA) assessments. As an Environmental Consultant, Stephen has trained, audited, and supported organisations in several countries in West, Central, and East Africa to develop relevant environmental management plans to minimise and mitigate the impact of their activities to the environment and society.

## Becoming an Advocate for Environmental Protection and Human Rights

Prior to taking up his studies through a Commonwealth Scholarship, Stephen worked as a Field Manager for the Ghana Rubber Estates Limited in 2012, where his main role was to identify and address challenges with the company's labour transport system and improve efficiency of the system. Having identified a course of study that closely aligned with the development needs of his country offered at the University of Greenwich in the UK, Stephen applied for a Commonwealth Scholarship to improve his knowledge and skills in this field. In his Scholarship application letter, he wrote:

**'I find the course to be very much important to the developmental needs of my country. Like many developing countries, the natural resource base is the main resource upon which development relies. If given the chance to pursue this course — MSc in Sustainable Environmental Management — it will enable me to acquire the necessary skills to help manage the environment and its natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable. It will also enable me to contribute significantly to the workforce training in this field.'**

Moreover, Stephen looked forward to gaining hands-on experience in the environmental sector as well as socio-economic and intercultural insights which he felt were essential to meeting his career goals of becoming a facilitator of environmental conservation in his country.

**'I would like to learn how to use various methods, strategies, and approaches to observe sustainability in the field. These would help frame my thoughts and actions, contributing to my personal development. As a Field Manager, I expect to gain a firm theoretical foundation, practical and international experience, and the required competencies for working with environmental issues. I would like to be well equipped to deal with the growing challenges in the agricultural and environmental sectors and help address the conflict between development and sustainability.'**

While studying for his Master's course through a Commonwealth Scholarship, Stephen joined the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) in the UK at the suggestion of one of his lecturers at the University of Greenwich. CIEEM is a professional body whose mission is to support professionals in ecological and environmental management through training, networking opportunities, and the sharing of best practices. By becoming a member of CIEEM, Stephen has benefitted from guidance materials that have helped him to build on the knowledge and skills that he gained while on Scholarship.

Upon completing his studies, Stephen joined HS+E Consulting Ghana Limited, a leading consultancy company which supports and empowers businesses with health, safety, and environment solutions, as a Technical Operations Manager. Drawing from the skills he developed during his Master's, he conducted environmental and social impact assessment for clients' projects and offered technical support on developing relevant environmental management plans and resettlement action plans.



Field data collection for landscape scale HCV-HCS assessment at Asunafo-Asutifi Hotspot Intervention Area Ghana in 2020.

**'After I returned from the UK my first job was with a consultancy firm as the Technical Operations Manager. While in the UK, I studied environment impact assessments, and that led into my first job. I had to lead and provide quality assurance for environmental impact assessments, one of the key aspects of my work.'**

In 2015, Stephen joined SAL Consult Limited as an Environmental Consultant and undertook assignments for national and international organisations, including the government of Ghana and private organisations. In this role he successfully completed assignments that involved conducting Environmental and Social Impact Assessments, developing Environmental Management Plans, Environmental Auditing and Monitoring, and Environmental and Social Safeguards Implementation. Because of his excellent work, not only was he voted as the best worker in the environment department, but he was also voted the overall best worker at SAL Consult Limited in his first full year working for the company.



Currently, Stephen works for Proforest, where he started off as a Project Manager. Proforest is an international organisation whose mission is to promote responsible sourcing and production of agricultural and forest commodities for positive social and environmental outcomes in the places where commodities are produced. He was subsequently promoted to a Principal Project Manager, his current role. He leads on responsible production at the Africa Regional Office.

**'In my current job, I have risen from Project Manager to Senior Project Manager to Principal Project Manager. I have become a member of Senior Management within four years. My study in the UK under the Commonwealth Shared Scholarship Scheme offered me the necessary qualifications, skills, and exposure which have been key factors in the successes I have attained. In addition to obtaining an academic qualification, I passed my MSc in Sustainable Environmental Management with a distinction. My study in the UK helped frame my understanding and critical analysis on sustainability issues.'**

Apart from knowledge and skills acquired from the Master's study course, Stephen continues to network with his former UK lecturers with whom he exchanges knowledge on global environmental issues.

**'I'm still in touch with some of my lecturers from the UK, my project supervisor and one other lecturer who linked me up to the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and has been engaging with me after completing my studies, particularly with the professional body issues. We share ideas, and my international exposure has shaped me into having a good view of global issues and that is key to the work I do and has contributed greatly to my professional development and success.'**

Following the Commonwealth Scholarship, Stephen was determined to further build on the skills and knowledge acquired during the Scholarship. He undertook professional training that has granted him a license as a Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) Lead Auditor and Trainer. Stephen is also a Licensed Assessor for High Conservation Value (HCV) and High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA) assessments.

Through training and auditing of clients, Stephen has supported the transition to commodity production and sourcing that delivers positive social and environmental outcomes for people and the planet. He has worked in several countries in West, Central, and East Africa to address environmental and social issues. Some of his most recent projects are on integrated HCV-HCSA assessments for new oil palm projects in Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda, and the development of a No Deforestation and No Conversion policy, and road map for a major

commodity trading company. This policy prohibits the clearing or conversion of forest areas to ensure sustainable management of forest ecosystems.

**'Through the Scholarship, I gained international exposure, the different cultural backgrounds that I interacted with, all that helped shape my thinking in analysis of issues and exposed me to international issues on sustainability. And that has been critical for the work I do because I must always be on top of issues and have that broad and critical thinking ability. And those are things that I acquired from my studies in the UK.'**

As a strong advocate for human rights, Stephen co-leads the labour rights working group and has been instrumental in developing guidelines for companies on how to develop robust human rights policies. The guidelines support companies to assess their existing human rights policies, improve them or develop new human rights policies.

## **Leading Responsible Consumption to Promote Environmental and Social Sustainability, and to Protect Human and Land Rights for Improved Livelihoods**

In his current role as a Principal Project Manager at Proforest, Stephen leads the assessment of developmental projects of clients in Africa to minimise their impact to the environment and ensure positive social and environmental outcomes for local communities. He works alongside a team of flora and fauna experts, social experts, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialists.

His overall responsibility is to ensure that all stages of the assessment of projects are successfully completed. This includes conducting an Integrated High Conservation Value and High Carbon Stock Assessment which involves identifying and assessing social values and facilitating meetings of clients with the affected communities to discuss and resolve issues such as community lands overlapping with the proposed development area.

**'Proforest is an international organisation focusing on addressing environmental and social sustainability issues, protecting human rights, environmental management, preventing deforestation, and promoting nature conservation, which are all directly linked to what I learnt during my Commonwealth Scholarship. So, without my Master's qualification, I wouldn't have had access to such a job in the first place.'**

Stephen and his team have been instrumental in conducting Integrated High Conservation Value and High Carbon Stock Assessments before proposed land-based developments take place. This involves the assessment of important environmental features and ensuring that they are protected from the proposed development.

These types of features include areas with rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species, and intact forest landscapes or other natural ecosystems such as wetlands, marshlands, swamp forests, and lakes. Other important features are buffer areas of rivers and steep slopes that need to be protected from erosion, and areas with high carbon stock, such as forests that also need to be protected.

As part of this work, Stephen and colleagues also identify and assess socially valuable spaces, such as community use areas that communities depend on for resources such as water, food, and medicinal plants. These areas are then protected from the proposed development to secure the communities' livelihoods and food security. Culturally valuable areas such as shrines, sacred sites, and burial grounds are also protected. This is followed by putting in place management and monitoring measures detailing how the identified areas will be managed and protected. By so doing, Stephen's work ensures that the rights of the concerned communities are identified and protected, be they access rights, use rights, food security, and livelihoods.



Participatory mapping as part of Integrated HCV-HCSA assessment for proposed oil palm plantation development in Edo State of Nigeria in 2022.

Stephen also co-leads on responsible sourcing and production where he has played a pivotal role in promoting effective collaborations between private companies, NGOs, governments, and civil society through supporting institutional strengthening and knowledge sharing activities on responsible sourcing and production practices, across a broad range of agricultural commodities and forest products.

While with Proforest, Stephen led several projects. However, he singled out a project that developed cultural heritage management plans for two rubber companies in Cameroon as one of his most successful projects.



Consultation with indigenous people (Baka) in South Region of Cameroon as part of cultural heritage identification and assessment in 2021.

**'One of my most fulfilling achievements was when I led the assessment of cultural heritage and development of cultural heritage management plans for two rubber companies in Cameroon. Although I had been involved in numerous assessments for Proforest, this was a novel project for Proforest and for myself. Language barrier posed a huge challenge. However, I took on the challenge because of the huge benefits it was going to bring to local communities and indigenous people in Cameroon.'**



Identifying cultural heritage with indigenous people in Cameroon in 2021.

Through this project, ancestral villages, sacred sites, festival grounds, and burial sites for indigenous people and local communities were identified, mapped, and have been protected from destruction. Indigenous people (Baka and Bagyeili) were granted unrestricted access to forest areas within the companies' concessions to hunt, fish, collect non-timber forest products, visit their ancestral sites, and perform their festivals and spiritual activities. According to Stephen, granting this unrestricted access was crucial to the survival of the indigenous people because forest areas outside the protected concessions were dwindling rapidly. Moreover, the project gave indigenous people an opportunity to transfer their cultural knowledge, hunting skills, and traditions to their younger generations, thereby preserving their intangible cultural heritage.

**'The assessments I conduct and the support I provide for companies result in the protection of the environment, including forests and other natural ecosystems, and respect for human rights including local communities, indigenous people, and workers' rights. Through these projects, I have supported many communities and indigenous people in West, Central, and East Africa to protect their livelihoods and community lands, ensure their food security and ensure that their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) is respected by companies in decisions that affect them.'**



As part of promoting environmental sustainability in the agriculture industry, the Commonwealth Alumnus conducted Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) and developed management plans for large, medium, and small-scale farms, warehouses, and large-scale irrigation projects across Ghana under the Ghana Commercial Agricultural Project. Stephen also supported several enterprises under the Skills Development Fund of Ghana through training and development of environmental and social management and action plans. The supported farms and irrigation projects are contributing to agricultural development of Ghana through post-harvest management, the provision of food and jobs, and livelihood enhancement.

**‘As part of my studies in the UK, I studied courses on tools for sustainability, corporate social responsibility, conservation ecology, and environmental impact assessment. And all the jobs I have done since I completed have been directly linked to what I studied.’**

Stephen has also been instrumental in the drafting of regulations for Ghana’s Tree Crop Development Authority, particularly for the natural rubber sub-sector. If adopted, the regulations will lead to sustainable development of the six commodity value chains covered under the Authority, including shea, mango, rubber, oil palm, coconut, and cashew. He also supported several companies across West and Central Africa to revise or develop No Deforestation, No Peat, and No Exploitation (NDPE) policies and to practically implement the requirements of these policies.

This has contributed to forest protection, environmental management, respect for labour rights and human rights, respect for local community and indigenous people’s rights, and the protection of the environment.

**‘Through these assessments and processes, we become the voice of the vulnerable groups or the affected communities. And then we get to see the change that they expect, or things are done in a way that benefits the local community. So, for me, that is what becomes an achievement, not only what I’m able to achieve as an individual.’**



Community consultation as part of Integrated HCV-HCSA assessment for proposed oil palm plantation project in Edo State of Nigeria in 2022.

As an RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil) approved trainer, Stephen has been involved in training of RSPO Lead Auditors and conducting bespoke training on RSPO standards for companies in Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria to support them with developing their sustainability policies, human rights policies, and the practical implementation of these policies. As part of this work, Stephen and his colleagues interface with smallholder farmers and local communities who also receive informal training aimed at ensuring that they understand their rights and what the developers are accountable for in their local communities.

Reflecting on the impact of the Commonwealth Scholarship, Stephen identified the **most significant change to himself as a result of the Commonwealth Scholarship.**

**‘All the jobs that I’ve done after the Commonwealth Scholarship have been directly linked to what I studied in school. And, of course, I wouldn’t have been able to fund myself to attend those courses without the Commonwealth Scholarship. My MSc study in the UK has framed my professional career and development. This has been through the opportunities it has provided including jobs and international networks. So, without a Master’s degree I wouldn’t even have had the qualification to do these jobs or to get selected for these roles. Also, it has strongly influenced my life goal which is to continue providing innovative solutions to address global problems and challenges. I am driven by my passion to make the world a better place for people, which is also achieved through delivering benefits for nature and the climate. I believe all the successes I have achieved mean nothing, if they cannot transform the lives of others.’**

## Spearheading a Campaign Against Plastic Waste in Ghana

Ghana’s rapidly growing population generates about 12,710 tonnes of solid waste (including plastic waste) everyday, yet only 10% is collected and disposed of in appropriate dumping areas. The waste generated is expected to reach 3.88 billion tonnes by 2050, a 73% increase from 2020. The scale and speed of urbanisation in Ghana is challenging the capability of local authorities to create a well-planned environment and related waste management system. This requires effective and sustainable solid waste management systems that have the capacity to respond to the complex demands of cities.

Outside of his formal work, Stephen and a friend of his who share similar interests in environmental protection work to create awareness on preventing plastic pollution. Together they co-organised a one-week event, 'Plastic Bag Action Day', in 2018 at Elisha Preparatory School in Navrongo in the Upper East Region of Ghana, and in a local community in Northern Ghana. The event sought to create awareness about preventing plastic pollution by using recyclable bags instead of single use plastic bags for shopping, thereby promoting environment protection. The event involved a clean-up exercise around the school and community, a workshop where pupils were trained on how to reuse and recycle plastics, distribution of leaflets on preventing plastic pollution to community members, and a presentation of a proposal on plastic management by Elisha Preparatory School to the Kassena Nankana Municipal Assembly.

As part of the plastic pollution awareness event, Stephen challenged school children to be agents of change within their communities and to positively influence their families to reduce plastic use. Moreover, he supported school children with the creation of a petition that was submitted to the Kassena Nankana Municipal Assembly appealing for the adoption of a new model for preventing plastic pollution by charging customers a minimum fee when they used new plastic bags for their shopping.

While Stephen's work through his formal employment has brought about a positive socio-economic and environment change, he felt that creating awareness about plastic pollution was one of the activities he implemented in a local community that he is most proud of.

Stephen identified the Plastic Bag Action Day campaign as the **most significant change that he brought to his local community as a result of the Commonwealth Scholarship.**

'I picked voluntary plastic awareness campaign as the most significant change I brought to my community because all the other developmental work that I have done is linked to my formal job, but this was voluntary work. The community area around the school was cleaned up of plastics, and parents and community members accepted the use of recyclable bags instead of single use plastic bags for shopping. What we inculcated into the children at the awareness event, their understanding of plastic pollution, and what they took out from the event was important for us. The Municipal Assembly promised to consider the proposal of the pupils and take actions to improve plastic management in the municipality.'

## Future Plans: Looking Ahead

As a Commonwealth Alumnus, Stephen is determined to continue making a meaningful contribution to protecting the environment, human rights, and improving livelihoods of his local community and beyond. One of his top priorities is to continue working collaboratively with his colleagues and friends to create more awareness about environmental sustainability through their voluntary work. This will involve supporting afforestation of degraded forest areas, starting with a pilot project for which crowdfunding will be sought to finance the project. Stephen has also observed that open spaces in Accra, particularly between the boundaries of residential walls and the roads, lack adequate maintenance, and some have turned into dump sites. He plans to work on adding value to these open spaces by greening them through tree planting, and ultimately turning some of the open spaces into eco-parks.

### More about Stephen Doso Jnr's work

<https://www.modernghana.com/news/836483/campaign-against-plastic-waste-gets-support.html>

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stephen-Doso-Jnr>

<https://www.nri.org/latest/news-in-brief/2020/my-future-in-five-stephen-doso-jnr>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325343569/Effects\\_of\\_Loss\\_of\\_Agricultural\\_Land\\_Due\\_to\\_Large-Scale\\_Gold\\_Mining\\_on\\_Agriculture\\_in\\_Ghana\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_the\\_Western\\_Region](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325343569/Effects_of_Loss_of_Agricultural_Land_Due_to_Large-Scale_Gold_Mining_on_Agriculture_in_Ghana_The_Case_of_the_Western_Region)

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325343986/Impact\\_of\\_climate\\_change\\_on\\_maize\\_production\\_in\\_Ghana\\_A\\_review](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325343986/Impact_of_climate_change_on_maize_production_in_Ghana_A_review)

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284364313/Land\\_degradation\\_and\\_agriculture\\_in\\_the\\_Sahel\\_of\\_Africa\\_causes\\_impacts\\_and\\_recommendations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284364313/Land_degradation_and_agriculture_in_the_Sahel_of_Africa_causes_impacts_and_recommendations)

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