



Call for Expressions of Interest

Consultancy work in Low-Capex Processing Models in Uganda's Commercial Forestry Sector



INTRODUCTION

Gatsby Africa is a private foundation established by David Sainsbury to promote job creation, increase incomes, and drive inclusive economic growth in East Africa. We work to transform high-potential sectors, so they are competitive, inclusive, and resilient- including commercial forestry.

BACKGROUND

Uganda's commercial forestry sector is experiencing rapid growth. Wood production has risen sharply from under 1 million m³ in 2015 to over 8.5 million m³ in 2024, with projections exceeding 22 million m³ by 2026. The expansion has been largely driven by small- and medium-scale tree growers. In parallel, SME processors have increasingly adopted low-capex production models. Innovations in this segment of the value chain include basic sawmilling with locally fabricated machinery and the use of simple technologies for product value addition.

Majority of SME sawmillers operate informally or semi-formally, with varying business models, cost structures, and approaches to production and value addition. While many appear to operate on thin margins, there is limited data to understand whether these margins are proportionate to their low-capex models, or whether there is untapped potential for improvement and/or scaling.

Gatsby Africa is seeking to deepen its understanding of the landscape in which static, semi-industrial SME sawmillers operate - including the technologies they are using to serve specific markets, where value is being created or lost, and what technical or commercial pathways could enable the growth of scalable, efficient, and profitable low-capex processing models in Uganda. We aim to build a clearer understanding of the commercial dynamics shaping these businesses, and to explore what kinds of upgrades or innovations - if any - could support value creation, scalability, and access to higher-value markets. This learning process will also draw on relevant insights from the region, particularly from ongoing innovations in Tanzania and Kenya, where similar SME models are testing low-capex technologies to unlock greater value from roundwood.

Any potential follow-on phases will be informed by learnings generated from this initial assessment.



THIS ASSIGNMENT

This assignment is exploratory and aims to help Gatsby Africa deepen its understanding of Uganda's SME sawmilling landscape - particularly the static, semi-industrial operators investing in low-capex innovations.

We are seeking a technical expert who can help us unpack:

- The diversity of low-capex processing models currently in use, including technologies and innovations applied in drying, cutting, and handling.
- The technical and commercial performance of these models (e.g., recovery, product quality, margins).
- The implications of such models for growers and other value chain actors, especially in terms of returns and incentives.
- The commercial scalability of such models, including what tweaks or upgrades could improve efficiency, unlock greater value and/or enable scale.
- Market alignment, including how existing or potential buyers could serve as anchor markets for these models, and what product improvements would be needed to meet different market specifications.
- Insights from regional pilots and ongoing innovations (in both Kenya and Tanzania) that can inform what scalable strategies might look like for Uganda.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Are you a technical expert or consulting firm with experience supporting small- and medium-scale wood processors to scale technologies, enhance production and product quality, or improve market access through practical, low-capex approaches? Do you bring expertise in linking production innovations to market demand, and in navigating value chain dynamics to unlock commercial opportunities? If so, this is your opportunity!

Gatsby Africa invites Expressions of Interest from qualified individuals or firms to support our ongoing learning around Uganda's SME sawmilling segment. This assignment will focus on identifying practical innovations already in use, assessing how these businesses are operating to serve their target markets, and exploring the technical and market factors, including potential improvements or additions - that could strengthen or scale viable low-capex processing models.



WHO SHOULD APPLY?

Gatsby Africa is looking for a highly qualified technical expert or firm with a strong track record of working with SME-scale wood processors - particularly in static, semi-industrial, low-capex sawmilling systems, to generate commercial insights, test innovations, and inform scalable solutions. The ideal candidate will demonstrate:

- Proven experience advising SME-scale static wood processors, particularly on low-capex sawmilling technologies and systems.
- A strong track record working with informal or semi-formal forestry businesses to improve production efficiency, product quality, and commercial viability.
- Familiarity with timber value chains, including understanding buyer specifications, pricing dynamics, and product-market alignment across local and regional markets.
- Strong understanding of low-capex processing technologies suitable for static SME sawmills, for example low-capex kiln technologies, locally fabricated saws, basic recovery-enhancing tools etc., and how these can be applied or optimized to meet specific market requirements.
- An ability to combine technical and commercial perspectives, offering grounded recommendations that improve enterprise performance and fit evolving market opportunities.

Additional qualifications that will be considered an advantage include:

- Familiarity with health and safety considerations relevant to SME-scale wood processing operations and contexts, including the ability to provide practical guidance to improve safety and efficiency.
- Experience working in African forestry or wood products markets, especially in East Africa with in-depth knowledge of the sector, regional trade, and market dynamics.
- Understanding of harvesting and haulage systems, and how these upstream factors influence processing operations, cost structures, and market competitiveness.

WHAT TO SUBMIT

Interested individuals or firms should submit:

- A brief **technical profile**, outlining relevant experience, past assignments, and specific capabilities related to this work.
- **Examples of prior engagements** in SME forestry processing systems and impact achieved.
- A **note on availability** to support this work during the second half of 2025. While the exact start date will be agreed through mutual discussion, we are particularly interested in candidates who can commit time for intensive field engagement and synthesis between September and December 2025, including possible short visits and remote follow-up.

SUBMISSION & CONTACT

Please email your Expression of Interest to: rfq@gatsbyafrica.org.uk

All enquiries regarding this EOI should also be directed to the same email address.

The deadline for submissions is **Monday, 11th August 2025 at 17:00 EAT**





**Gatsby
Africa**