



## Editorial

### Illegal Chainsaw Milling—a Canker in the Forestry Sector

Time and again, the issue of illegal chainsaw milling pops up its ugly head whenever think tanks in the forestry sector convene to discuss problems confronting forestry in Ghana.

That a bulk of timber products on the domestic market, 84 per cent to be precise—is sourced illegally indicates that Ghana has a herculean task ahead with regards to reducing chainsaw milling activities.

Of notable concern is the absence of a legal framework that would promote the supply of legal timber on the domestic market as well as apathy on the part of the public with regards to issues on forest governance.

The lack of a legal framework coupled with the dearth of knowledge on forest policy issues on the part of the public provides a fertile ground for illegal timber to thrive on the domestic market because illegal chainsaw operators cannot be taken to task for wrongdoing from people who themselves do not know better.

There is no doubt that public opinion constitutes a formidable force which can be tapped into to put pressure on wrongdoers as well as the powers that be to stem it out.

However, this is only possible in situations where the public is well informed about the issue at stake as well as the dangers it poses to the country.

In this regard, it may be necessary for the Forestry Commission and other stakeholders in the forestry sector to whip up public sentiment on the dangers of chainsaw milling in order to increase public support in the fight against this destructive activity.

In spite of the fact that chainsaw milling has been banned for 15 years now, the public is not aware that they have been buying illegal wood products on the domestic market. Neither do they know how to distinguish between what is legal and what is not legal. In such a situation, how can they be expected to boycott illegal wood products?

## REDD+ to Check Unauthorised Timber Harvesting

Harvesting timber at watersheds and other unauthorised locations inside Ghana's forests has undermined their production and protection functions, as well as their capacity to render environmental services leading to their degradation.

Consequently, putting a stop to the unauthorised harvesting of timber at prohibited locations (Logging Manual: Section 10 of Act 547) remains one of the top priorities of activities to be carried out by the Forestry Commission under REDD+ in its effort to halt forest degradation. This activity will further strengthen the synergy between FLEGT and REDD+ since FLEGT is also focussing on systems that promote the harvesting of legal timber.

Interestingly, while available logging manuals provide guidelines for timber companies on timber harvesting; which among other issues forbids them to cause damage to standing trees and saplings, these are seldom adhered to. Thus, the FC would under REDD+ promote the enforcement of such guidelines to ensure that the growing stock would compensate for whatever is taken out of the forest to enhance their conservation.

In a bid to avoid and reduce deforestation, activities would be implemented under REDD+ to reduce the wanton felling of trees to improve carbon sequestration. In this regard, adherence to the legal systems promoted by FLEGT would prove very fruitful because they will ensure that trees are not overharvested, that stocks that are cut would be replaced and thus maintain carbon stocks at an equilibrium. This means that the annual allowable cut would have to be adhered to but this is not happening now because of the illegalities.

However, in situations where the sustainable cut has already been exceeded, enrichment planting or a form of rehabilitation would be carried out under both FLEGT and REDD+.

## Activities To Strengthen Wood Tracking System Takes off

A series of activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Electronic Wood Tracking System (eWTS) in a bid to make it fool-proof are being implemented by the Forestry Commission (FC) starting with the practical and live testing of three modules at three locations.

These are the Check Survey Module, which was tested at the Suhuma Forest Reserve and the Logs Transfer Module which was also tested at the JCM Suhuma Mill in the Sefwi-Wiaso Forest District as well as the Post Harvest Checks Module which was tested at the Asankragwa Forest Reserve.

The rationale for including a Check Survey Module in the eWTS is because a Check Survey is always carried out after a stock survey on 10 percent of the compartment under survey. It serves as a quality check to determine whether the stock survey, which is basi-

cally an enumeration or counting of trees in a compartment, has been properly carried out.

The Log Transfer Module was also included in the eWTS because timber contractors have the right to transfer logs from their own sawmill to another sawmill. However, in order to assess the genuineness of the transfer, the TIDD is obliged to issue a Logs Transfer Certificate (LTC) to cover the logs.

The inclusion of the Post-Harvest Checks Module is to allow the FC to conduct post harvest checks and felling checks to ensure that timber contractors do not abuse the system by felling trees that have not been allocated to them. This module also allows the FC to ascertain whether the contractors followed laid down procedures in harvesting the timber.



## Absence of Land Use Policy Promotes Poor Governance

The absence of a land use policy has been identified as one of the major contributors to the haphazard and unsustainable way in which land is being utilised in Ghana, a situation which has resulted in the poor governance of the country's natural resources.

Presently, there is no policy that spells out what percentage of land should be used for infrastructural development, agriculture, mining, and the production of timber among several others.

Hence, in the face of competing demands, a scenario has been generated that can best be described as a "survival of the fittest", as far as land use is concerned; with rich and powerful companies such as some mining companies trespassing on the rights of other land users and over stretching their activities into areas previously demarcated as settlements and forest reserves.

Some individuals in a bid not to be left out of the race for the country's natural resources have also converted farmlands including cocoa plantations into 'galamsey' (illegal mining) hot spots.

A draft bill on land use is presently before parliament. In the face of the country's rate of deforestation which is being addressed through FLEGT and REDD+ activities, it would be prudent that they make an input into the bill to ensure that it takes into cognisance the activities being implemented to save the country's forests from extinction.

In this regard, the FC has appealed to government to accord it a major role in Ghana's bid to fashion out its land policy.





## Key Barriers to Domestic Market Reforms Identified.

Ghana's overconcentration on the timber export market to the neglect of local consumers coupled with a low public engagement in forest policy development are some of the barriers mitigating against domestic market reforms aimed at addressing forest degradation in the country.

In addition, the absence of incentives for farmers and land owners to conserve and replant trees as a result of the lack of benefit sharing arrangements as well as the non-existence of policies and legal structures for small scale and community-based resource management has created a situation where people harvest timber from illegal sources.

These shortcomings thus promote the dumping of illegal timber on the domestic market and call for a collaborative approach between VPA/FLEGT and REDD+ to redress the imbalance between supply and demand for timber on the domestic market.

These can be achieved by the implementation of activities under the two projects which are aimed at improving forest governance to foster a sustainable forest management.

The implementation of REDD+ and FLEGT/VPA activities will reduce and sequester the amount of carbon dioxide emissions from forest degradation to guarantee environmental and atmospheric integrity.

These activities include the restoration of degraded forests to enhance carbon stocks and improve biodiversity and the promotion REDD+ friendly or 'deforestation free' cocoa.

The promotion of 'deforestation free' cocoa through the adoption of improved agricultural practices is due to the encroachment of cocoa farms on admitted forest reserves.

## Project To Support National Wood Traceability, Verification and Control Systems Launched

Following the introduction of the electronic Wood Tracking System (eWTS), several challenges have been identified that mitigate against its smooth adoption.

These include variations in technical competence among the different categories of mills as well as different Chain of Custody (CoC) practices among the mills.

This therefore calls for the standardization of CoC procedures among the various mills to fit the design under development by the eWTS to ensure compliance with Ghana's Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS).

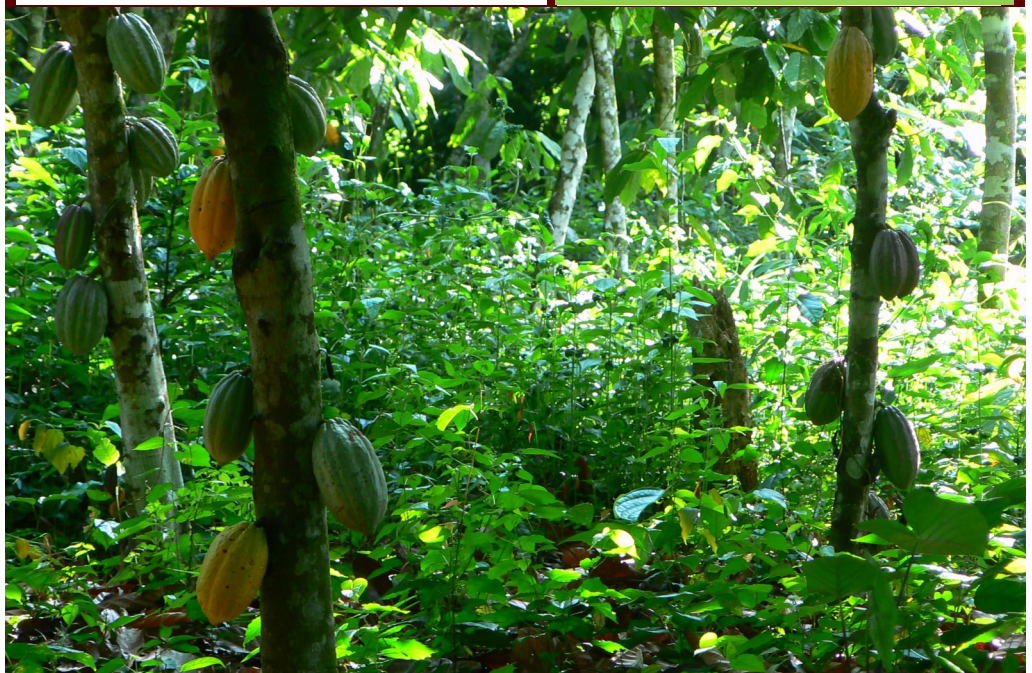
In response to this dilemma, a new joint programme between the European Union (EU), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) was inaugurated on November 25 this year.

The six-month programme which is under the theme "Support to Improve National Wood Traceability, Verification and control Systems" is aimed at promoting the implementation of the FLEGT Action Plan in the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) partner countries by building capacity through the funding of eligible projects and providing technical support in a bid to improve forest governance.

Against this background, the project will provide technical and financial support to strengthen the capacity of the Forestry Commission (FC) and timber industry staff on CoC systems in the different kinds of mills in Ghana in line with Ghana's TLAS/FLEGT/VPA .

The Standardization of CoC practices will facilitate easy adoption of the eWTS mill module by companies to meet the VPA/FLEGT licensing milestone (2015) set by Ghana.

Project partners include the FAO which is providing financial support, the Timber Validation Department (TVD) of the FC, service providers for the project, the Forest Services Division (FSD) and the Timber Industry Development Division (TIDD) collaborating FC divisions of the project, timber industry associations/timber companies; collaborating private sector organisations, and Atta Marie Ghana Ltd, eWTS consultants providing technical expertise and support for the CoC trainer of trainers programme.



# Government Should Institute Legislative Reforms-FC

The Forestry Commission (FC) has called on government to undertake legislative reforms that would help sustain a healthy small scale domestic market to guarantee a sustainable supply of legal timber on the domestic market.

This is in view of the fact that the bulk of timber on the domestic market— a whopping 84 percent with a volume of 500,000 m<sup>3</sup>—is supplied by illegal chainsaw operators.

This corresponds to a loss of 187,625 tonnes of carbon per annum resulting in 688,583 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions yearly.

The above facts were made known at a seminar facilitated by Tropenbos International (TBI) Ghana for Staff of the REDD+ Secretariat and VPA/FLEGT Office of the FC to iron out existing synergies between the two projects .

The seminar, dubbed “REDD and FLEGT Synergy—Regularization of the Timber Market in Ghana” discussed issues arising from the imbalance in the supply and demand for timber from legal and sustainably managed forests and its implications for the smooth implementation of FLEGT as well as its impact on REDD+.

This huge loss of carbon stocks and associated carbon dioxide emissions as a result of illegal activities is unsustainable and would further aggravate forest degradation and loss of biodiversity if not tackled promptly.

Consequently, it was recommended that resource access and user rights should be properly documented, monitored and verified to help keep proper records on timber harvesting.

This in turn would help ensure compliance with a sustainable level of timber harvesting in order to preserve the forests’ capacity to serve as carbon sinks.

It was also observed that the enforcement of the mandatory supply of 20 percent of lum-

ber by timber companies on the domestic market would ensure a sustainable amount of timber to meet domestic demand while the effective implementation of the tracking and verification of legal timber on the domestic market would eventually flush out illegal timber from the market.

Above all, it would be necessary to diversify wood products to include the utilisation of bamboo, rattan and rubber wood to reduce the country’s overdependence on wood from natural forests and their very valuable timber species.

This should be accompanied by a policy and incentives to promote the use of such alternatives.

In addition, Government should institute action plans to address and clarify natural resource access and use rights, tree and land tenure, as well as carbon rights and their implications for forest law and policy to enhance the governance of the country’s forest resources.



## Upcoming Events

- Training programme for graders and inspectors of the Timber Industry Development Division (TIDD) at Sefwi Waiwso on Nov. 30 to Dec. 7, 2014
- Ordinary Meeting of Timber validation Committee at FC boardroom, Accra on Dec 12
- Forest law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) to carry out trials at Tema on Jan 14-15, 2015

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