



Cocoa And Shea Landscapes to Benefit From Emission Reduction Programme

A total of 5.9 million hectares of land within the high forest zone which form part of the cocoa landscape in Ghana is to benefit from an Emission Reduction Programme being developed by the Forestry Commission (FC) under its REDD+ Initiative in collaboration with the Ghana Cocoa Board.

The aim of the programme is to ensure a sustainable supply chain for cocoa by promoting the cultivation of deforestation-free cocoa in the wake of the country's high rate of deforestation, with agriculture being one of the major drivers.

This is because, over the years, cocoa farmers have encroached on forest reserves in their desire to seek more fertile soils for the cultivation of the cash crop, which is the country's second largest foreign exchange earner; employing an estimated 800,000 farmers and 3.2 million farmhands thus providing employment to 4 million people.

In addition, the Ghana Cocoa Board which is responsible for carrying out research on cocoa, providing extension services, chemical inputs, farm implements and access to marketing employs over 6,000 workers.

A similar emission reduction programme has also been envisaged for the shea landscape in the northern part of Ghana.

In the long term, the FC hopes to have learnt enough lessons after the implementation of these major programmes to replicate the programme nationwide so that the whole country would be implementing REDD+ activities.

Editorial

Moves to Sustain Cocoa Cultivation

The decision by the Forestry Commission to establish an Emission Reduction Programme for cocoa Landscapes under REDD+ is very laudable in view of the fact that while cocoa is a major foreign exchange earner for the country, earning 650 million dollars in 2011, it is also a major driver for deforestation.

If this situation goes on unchecked, it would lead to a vicious cycle; with lower cocoa yields as a result of unsustainable farming methods forcing farmers to cut down trees to establish new and fertile farms only for the farms to lose their fertility once again as a result of poor farming practices which in turn would force farmers to cut down more trees to establish new farms!

This age old practise of shifting cultivation is now unsustainable and the best remedy is to find ways under which farmers can cultivate the same piece of land continually without destroying its fertility through the adoption of cultural practices that help to conserve and promote soil fertility.

Such a remedy is essential given the fact that cocoa cultivation directly employs four million Ghanaians with several hundreds working in cocoa related jobs. Hence, anything undermining its production would have serious consequences for the Ghanaian economy.

Globally, the cocoa dependent confectionary industry is a major economic engine in the United States where 70,000 people are employed by about 650 companies while the European Union can boast of 2000 companies in this sector.

However, while cocoa is important both nationally and globally, even more so are the forests that render unequalled forest services to mankind and also create the very micro-climate essential for cocoa cultivation.

While it is impossible to "eat your cake and still have it," deforestation-free cocoa cultivation would allow Ghanaians to do just that - to continue to cultivate cocoa without destroying their forests and thus turn a vicious cycle into a virtuous cycle. It is now up to Ghanaian farmers to embrace the new practices that would make cocoa cultivation a sustainable venture.

Legality Anomalies Arising from Government Policy Slows Down Work on Legality Assurance System

Anomalies arising from policy issues surrounding the source of legal timber have stalled Ghana's progress towards developing a viable legality Assurance System (LAS) that would pave the way for the issuance of FLEGT licences.

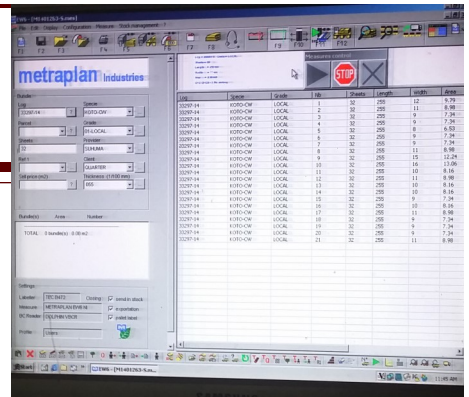
The anomalies include the inability of some timber merchants to convert their leases to Timber Utilisation Contracts (TUCs) and the associated payments of Timber Rights Fees (TRFs) and the use of special permits. These fall within the preserve of policy and can only be negotiated between the ministry and the timber industry or merchants concerned.

Since some timber companies are still operating from areas that are under these categories, that is, special permits and unconverted leases, they cannot meet the legality standards stipulated for obtaining FLEGT licences.

These policy issues are outside the domain of the Forestry Commission's (FC) operational areas and can only be addressed by the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR).

Thus, while all the technical and operational issues that are within the domain of the FC have been met and the commission is on track and has fixed a date for the issuance of FLEGT licences, the licences cannot be issued until all the anomalies have been ironed out by government.

Under the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA), Ghana is expected to meet five requirements for the issuance of FLEGT licences. These include the establishment of a wood tracking system, independent monitor to carry out independent checks to ascertain whether what is on the ground corresponds to what was agreed under the (continued on page 3)



Third Phase of Roll-Out for eWTS for March 2015

The third phase of the roll-out of the Electronic Wood Tracking System (eWTS) will begin in March 2015.

It is expected to cover the rest of the 40 percent of the districts not covered under the first and second phases which covered 60 percent. It would also cover the actual issuance of the FLEGT license after trials have been carried out.

Fifteen districts are expected to be brought on board the wood tracking system under the third phase.

They include Ho, Jasikan and Nkwanta districts in the Volta Region, Offinso, Kumawu, Mampong and Juaso districts in the Ashanti region, Beechem, Kintampo and Atebubu in the Brong-Ahafo Region, and Enchi and Bibiani in the Western Region.

It is only after the third phase has been completed that the electronic wood tracking system can be deemed successful.

TIDD is expected to issue the FLEGT licences at Takoradi and Tema harbours which will replace the export license.





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VPA, and verification manuals to check periodically on the field.

While these elements of the agreement have been almost fulfilled, where the timber is coming from, that is the source, has become problematic.

The VPA is a box of elements that have to be considered in totality. One of such elements is the legality definition; and by the legality definition, it is a pick and choose of the various forestry sector laws.

While selecting these elements, civil society pointed out that special permits are issued based on the sector minister's discretion; are very fluid in terms of how to draw the legal boundaries and thus subject to manipulation.

Consequently, civil society ensured that special permits are not recognised under the VPA and are thus not legal.

In addition leases that are still extant need to be converted into TUC's because the VPA recognises only TUC areas.

FC Runs Tests on New Mill Model At Three Saw Mills At Sefwi Wiawso

The Forestry Commission (FC) has conducted trial tests on a new mill model that has been developed as part of activities for the implementation of the FLEGT licensing scheme.

The trials were conducted at three pre-selected sawmills; namely, Suhuma Sawmills, Kobraso Sawmills and Tony Meres Sawmills, all in the Sefwi Wiawso District of the Western Region.

These were intentionally selected because they are representative of the various kinds of sawmills being used in Ghana.

One advantage of the new model over the old one is that it is electronic and thus saves time and energy spent in tracing documents. In addition, it supplies all the details for a particular log once the tree number is keyed in. Consequently, if the log is not coming from a legal source, it would be flagged.

The new mill model will also allow the TIDD to know the actual output of the log that was put in since there are mathematical formulas for working out all these details based on available data. Generally, the output from a log should be less than the input since part of it is lost during processing as saw dust.

The trials proved to be highly successful since they offered both the FC and the developer of the software, Atta Marie

Group of Companies, a chance to address shortfalls that were identified during the trials. It also offered the company a chance to test some of the assumptions that were held before the trials and come out with suggestions to fine-tune the system .

The trial period served as a platform for saw millers to find out more about the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) and by the end of the session, their fears about the VPA had been allayed. Thus, the saw millers who participated in the trials gained a better understanding of the VPA and no longer view it as a policy meant to deprive them of their daily bread.



REDD+ and FLEGT Activities to Favour Carbon Sequestration

The implementation of REDD+ and FLEGT / VPA activities by the Forestry Commission (FC) is expected to reduce and sequester the amount of carbon-dioxide emitted as a result of deforestation in Ghana and thus mitigate against climate change.

This is because the various strategies being implemented under the two projects would create the right environment to promote reforestation and reduce deforestation.

These include equitable benefit sharing arrangements under the two projects to reduce conflicts and ensure the protection of forests.

In addition, degraded forest lands would be restored to enhance forest carbon stock and promote biodiversity conservation.

Various Safeguards are also being implemented to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of chainsaw milling through the provision of alternative livelihoods.

In a bid to promote transparency, a proper documentation, monitoring and verification of resource access and user rights would be enforced.

Other activities include the effective implementation of a system for the tracking and verification of legal timber to curb illegal harvesting of timber, and steps to enforce compliance with the Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) to ensure a sustainable level of timber harvest so as to safeguard the forests' capacity to serve as a carbon sink.

Efforts are also underway to strengthen decentralised management of natural resources by supporting training at district level administrations.

Support would also be provided to pilot projects in decentralised environmental management and resource planning through national agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD).

Both REDD+ and FLEGT/VPA would also promote the enactment and implementation of policy measures to ensure a sustainable timber industry including the rehabilitation of on-reserve forests and forest plantation development

Furthermore, off-reserve reforms such as tree tenure reform and smart agriculture would also be undertaken.



Upcoming Events

- Training programme for graders and inspectors of the Timber Industry Development Division (TIDD) at Sefwi Waiwso on January, 2015
- Training programme on carbon accounting for forest managers scheduled for 13 to 20 April
- GIS laboratory to be established by REDD+ Secretariat on April 28 with computers donated by the Food and Agriculture Organisation.

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