



Editorial

Safeguards for FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ a Must!

A careful examination of development projects that have been implemented in Ghana over the years would show that, most often, well meaning projects designed for the benefit of the entire nation were carried out without a 'human face'.

Consequently, while such projects may have benefited the country as a whole, there were pockets of communities who suffered adversely and whose 'tears were never wiped' because government deemed it justified to sacrifice the comfort and happiness of a few communities for the benefit of the entire nation.

However, recent developments in Natural Resource and Environmental Governance (NREG) indicates that it is not justifiable for resource rich communities to continue to suffer such injustices; development projects that trample on the human rights of resource rich communities result from poor natural resource governance and can no longer be tolerated.

It is therefore laudable to know that both the FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ Initiatives have already adopted measures aimed at softening the impact of these initiatives on those who would otherwise be adversely affected, especially in terms of loss of livelihoods.

Under the FLEGT/VPA Initiative, the Chain-saw Milling Project (CSM) and the Timber Legality Compliance and Advocacy Project (TILCAP) being implemented by Tropenbos International (TBI) Ghana with Funding from the European Union (EU) were both designed for this purpose.

Both projects have aimed at resolving issues pertaining to the loss of livelihoods and building the capacity of beneficiary communities to partake in the on-going forest governance reform process.

By synergising safeguards under REDD+ with those already implemented by FLEGT/VPA, REDD+ could benefit from the experience of FLEGT/VPA in this area.

Safeguards for FLEGT/VPA and REDD+

Both the FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ Initiatives being implemented by the Forestry Commission (FC) are associated with certain risks that may have a negative socio-economic impact on local communities. These risks range from the loss of livelihoods and exclusion from participation in the two processes to the downright denial of access to benefits accruing from them by the powers that be in society.

This therefore calls for the inclusion of social safeguards within the two processes that would ensure that beneficiary communities do not bear the brunt of the social cost of their implementation. In executing these safeguards, the FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ Secretariats could also embark on joint exercises and thus synergise their activities to ensure the maximum impact of the safeguards.

The major risk associated with the FLEGT/VPA process is the loss of livelihoods as a result of the implementation of forest law reforms that would force people whose livelihoods depend on illegal timber out of work. The fact that 80 percent of timber on the domestic market is sourced illegally indicates that a large number of industry workers would be out of work if the forest reforms are implemented in a 'Business as Usual' (BAU) manner, and without a 'human face'.

Coupled with this is the unfamiliarity of most workers in the timber industry with forestry laws and the FLEGT/VPA process as a whole which has robbed them of the ability to influence or make inputs into the reform process.

With regards to REDD+, among other things, the major risk centres on political elites securing ownership of forests in a bid to take advantage of the financial incentives associated with the initiative which could also impact on livelihood activities of local communities as well as the inability of these communities to participate in the process due to their low level of knowledge and skills.

The commonalities between the risks associated with the two initiatives in terms of the loss of livelihoods and the low level of knowledge and skills of beneficiary communities indicate that a joint effort in designing programmes to address them is the best way forward.

FLEGT/VPA & REDD+ Can Collaborate to Improve Forest Governance and Build Capacity

Since the implementation of FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ Initiatives can only be successful under an improved forest governance regime, it would be prudent for both initiatives to collaborate with each other in their endeavour to enhance forest governance.

This therefore calls for synergy between the two in activities geared towards improving forest governance arrangements and clarifying land tenure rights.

This stems from strengthening national legal frameworks to clarify and respect rights of local communities to reinforcing institutional frameworks to enforce these rights.

In addition, since both initiatives necessitate the need for capacity building to enable both beneficiaries and implementers to fully participate, capacity building activities constitutes another area where the two initiatives can collaborate with each other.

Capacity building for the implementers is especially essential in the area of monitoring and reporting under Forest Governance for both initiatives.

Furthermore, since both regimes have either established or are in the process of establishing safeguards to manage the

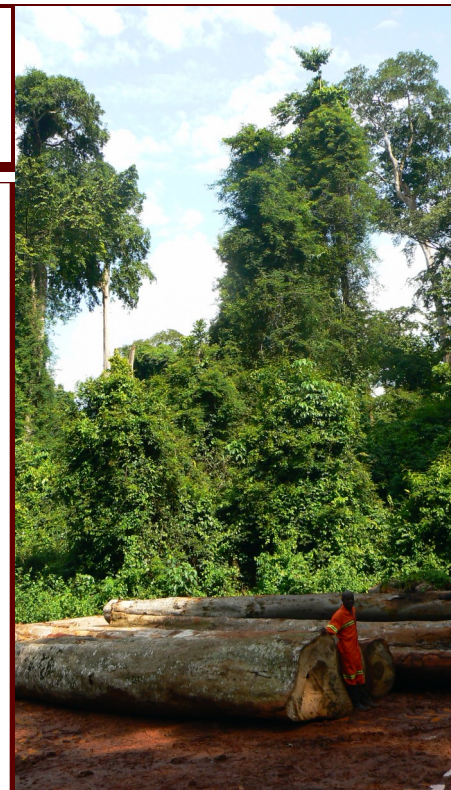
negative impacts or social cost of their implementation, there is the need to establish linkages for the implementation of these safeguards.

Both FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ Initiatives involve the participation of a wide range of stakeholders which calls for multiple stakeholder engagement processes. Thus, engaging stakeholders could provide a platform for both initiatives to synergise their activities since they would most often be dealing with the same category of stakeholders.

In addition, both initiatives are charged with the responsibility of building and promoting an inclusive and transparent multi-stakeholder participation and could share experiences and lessons learnt in this regard.

There also exists the possibility of aligning national Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) systems under REDD+ with the FLEGT/VPA Legality Assurance System (LAS).

Opportunities also exist to build on participatory platforms built under each initiative and to ensure that conflict resolution and complaint mechanisms established under each initiative are consistent and mutually supportive.



Effective Communication Key to Unearthing Synergies Between FLEGT/VPA and REDD+

While hitherto unforeseen commonalities between the FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ initiatives in Ghana are beginning to emerge; indicating that there is a great potential for synergies between them, poor communication could still be a hindrance to formulating further synergies between the two.

This is because poor communication stifles awareness of activities and programmes being initiated under the two initiatives and thus is a major hindrance to identifying opportunities for synergy.

Promoting effective communication between the two initiatives is therefore a crucial step to identifying areas for synergy and promoting collaboration.

There is therefore the need to ensure effective communication between the actors of the two initiatives to discover and implement the existing synergies between them.





Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources Institutes Steps to Resolve Policy issues

The Ministry of lands and Natural Resources (MLNR) has initiated moves aimed at resolving the long standing issue on 'Leases' and 'Special Permits' that have stalled the rapid implementation of Ghana's Legality Assurance System (LAS).

This follows instructions given by the ministry to the Forestry Commission (FC) to put in place modalities guiding the conversion of Leases to Timber Utilisation Contracts (TUCs).

In addition, the FC is working in conjunction with a team drawn from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to prepare draft guidelines that would address the issue of Special Permits.

The steps being taken to tackle the issue of Leases and Special Permits constitute a major milestone in the efforts being made by the FC to implement Ghana's LAS since they have been major stumbling blocks to its implementation.

Governance Focus for FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ Interlink

An examination of the governance focus of FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ indicate that there is a lot of correlation between them as far as the issues being tackled by the two initiatives are concerned.

While FLEGT/VPA seeks to tackle issues bordering on 'Deforestation and illegal logging', REDD+ seeks to address 'Illegal logging and other illegalities through improved law enforcement'.

FLEGT/VPA also seeks to promote good forest governance through improved law enforcement brought about by legislative reforms that are designed with the participation of a broad range of stakeholders and by so doing make the timber industry more viable, sustainable and responsible.

Similarly, REDD+ focuses on 'Forest legislation and policy reforms to reduce deforestation and forest degradation while also ensuring that a wide range of stakeholders are involved in the reform process.

Furthermore, REDD+ hopes to strengthen institutional capacity, promote accountability and ensure transparency at all levels of forest governance in addition to instituting conflict resolution mechanisms to handle the many conflicts associated with natural resources amicably.

FLEGT/VPA aims at putting in place mechanisms that would ensure that local communities have an improved access to re-

sources to ensure their participation in the sustainable management of Ghana's forest resources.

Thus, it can be deduced that both FLEGT/VPA and REDD+ Initiatives contribute to forest governance by promoting legal and institutional reforms to that effect. While FLEGT/VPA focuses on timber and timber products, REDD+ concentrates on forest services.

FLEGT/VPA strives to implement these reforms by monitoring and verifying the legality of timber supply chains while REDD+ concentrates on monitoring carbon benefits and co-benefits.



FC Moves to Address Critical Issues on Ghana's Legality Assurance System

The Forestry Commission (FC) is addressing all issues identified as critical during the independent assessment of Ghana's Legality Assurance System (LAS) in a bid to speed up its implementation.

The issues identified as critical during the independent assessment include technical issues that border on systems readiness as well as policy issues covering the conversion of Leases into Timber Utilisation Contracts (TUCs) and Ghana's way forward with regards to Special Permits.

The FC intends to tackle the technical issues by implementing the third and final phase of the roll out of the Electronic Wood Tracking System (eWTS) in August this year and finish with the implementation by the end of the year.

The third phase of the eWTS would cover selected forest districts in all the ten regions where the first and second phases did not cover.

While efforts are being made to resolve the policy issues, it is not possible at this point in time to state when exactly they would be resolved.

However, it is anticipated that following the progress that has already been made in handling the issues, they would be completely resolved by the end of the year.

After this, concluding activities to bring into action the issuance of FLEGT licences would rest with processes within the Joint Monitoring and Review Mechanism (JMRR) as well as their counterparts on the side of the European Union (EU).

Consequently, all required activities on the Ghana and EU side necessary for the issuance of FLEGT licences would have been completed shortly after the close of this year.

Meanwhile, additional steps are being taken by the FC to address all other issues that might mitigate against the smooth implementation of the FLEGT/VPA processes necessary for the realisation of Ghana's LAS.

Prominent among them is the need for continuous good quality internet access at the Headquarters in Accra for accessing and processing data being relayed from the field.

While there exists Third Generation (3G) internet connectivity along most of the highways and the FC district offices to service the handheld devices that would be used by field workers for the collection and forwarding of data, internet accessibility at the headquarters has proved to be problematic.

To resolve the issue, the FC has embarked on a reconfiguration of the Information Technology (IT) set-up being utilised at the headquarters in addition to investing in a more efficient Internet Service Provider (ISP) to enhance and improve upon its internet access.



Upcoming Events

- Training workshop on Google software for forest monitoring and sampling to be held at Miklin Hotel from 20th to 24th April
- Two day workshop on eWTS for Timber Industry Operators to be held at Sefwi-Wiawso from April 20th to 21st

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