

Sharing Experiences on the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreement Process

Guyana International Conference Centre, Georgetown. 18 - 19th November 2014

Preamble

This seminar was convened to allow for discussion between actors in the Guyanese forest sector and the open exchange of ideas, experiences and research on the FLEGT VPA and regional forest governance. Hosting 100 contributors from Guyana, Surinam, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, Panama, the UK and the Netherlands, the event addressed a broad range of topics encompassing the FLEGT VPA, its relation to the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and the REDD+ mechanism, the international timber market and the role of domestic forest sector actors.

Opening Session

The opening session of the 'Sharing Experiences on the FLEGT VPA Process' seminar was introduced by Mr. Indarjit Ramdass of the Guyana Forestry Commission's (GFC) Board of Directors. A wide group of forestry stakeholders were welcomed by Mr. James Singh, Commissioner of Forests in Guyana, who invited all attendees to contribute constructively to the FLEGT process in Guyana. Mr Robert Kopecký, Head of the European Union Delegation to Guyana, commended the seminar as a unique opportunity to engage in the latest regional forest governance developments, by sharing experiences between several countries involved in VPAs with the EU. Finally, the Honourable Robert M. Persaud, Minister of Natural Resources, drew attention to the exceptional natural resource wealth of Guyana and underlined the potential of the LCDS, through which FLEGT is harnessed as a key tool to sustainably manage Guyana's forests.

Session 1: International VPA Update

Godfrey Marshall of the Guyana Forestry Training Centre chaired the seminar's first session, in which Benedict Madl of the EU Delegation provided an overview of the global FLEGT process before introducing the current global FLEGT Action Plan Review. Mr. Alhassan Attah, in his personal capacity, gave an overview of the effects of EU timber legislation in producer countries, drawing on his experience in the Ghanaian Forest Industry and trade. Mr. Attah is currently working with *theIDLgroup* to provide facilitation support to stakeholders involved in the FLEGT VPA negotiation process in Guyana, and can be visited at his office opposite the British High Commission on Main Street in Georgetown. Finally, a focussed update was delivered by Mr. Kenny David of the GFC on Guyana's VPA process.

Session 2: Guyana's VPA

The second session, chaired by Shyam Nokta, Head of the Climate Change Unit, continued to explore Guyana's involvement in the FLEGT process. This began with a presentation by Tasreef Khan of the GFC on the achievements and priorities of Guyana's Wood Tracking System to ensure timber legality in the market. Daphne Hewitt explained FAO support available to the FLEGT process in Guyana in the context of the institution's regional programme.

Session 3: Involvement of community and indigenous groups in the VPA

Mr. Ovid Williams chaired a panel discussion with representatives of Amerindian and community groups from Guyana and abroad. Derrick John of the National Tshao's Council outlined concerns surrounding the anticipated effects of the VPA process on communities living in the Guyanese interior.

Laura George of the Amerindian People's Association gave a statement on behalf of Amerindian NGOs on the challenges these groups are facing in participating in the VPA process. This was the first occasion that these groups had united to present a joint statement, a significant step in the creation of Guyana's VPA. Recent progress by small logging associations in conforming to legality requirements in Guyana was described by Anthea Harry of the UBFAPA, before Luis Gongora of the ACOFOP forest association presented the perspective of Guatemalan community involvement in forest governance within the Maya forest concession. Francisco Guzman discussed the *Asociación Balam* bilateral initiative between Guatemala and Belize to reduce illegal logging in protected borderland areas.

Session 4: FLEGT, REDD+ and the LCDS

Mr. David Singh of Conservation International chaired the fourth seminar session, of which the focus centred on cross-cutting themes shared by the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) and FLEGT initiatives. To begin, Luis Cortés, FLEGT Focal Point, provided an update on the FLEGT process in Honduras. Christophe Van Orshoven from the European Forest Institute (EFI) underlined the significance of FLEGT reforms as an enabling environment for wider anti-deforestation measures such as the global REDD+ mechanism. Pradeepa Bholanath of the GFC provided details on the roles of both the REDD+ and FLEGT processes in contributing to Guyana's LCDS, as well as the contributions of international observers in establishing national deforestation reporting systems.

Session 5: The role of the private sector and other domestic actors in the VPA

The fifth and final plenary session was chaired by Marieke Wit of Tropenbos international, who introduced a panel of Guyanese and international stakeholders affected by the FLEGT Action Plan. Mr. Wim Hup of Wijma described the particular assurances European timber businesses value from exporters in producing countries. Mr Khalawan of the Forest Products Association recounted the impact of the VPA on the Guyanese export market, emphasising needs for reciprocal information from EU importers, as well highlighting as the investments required to expand the Guyanese timber industry. Gavin Agard of the Guyanese Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment described the challenges of effectively communicating the VPA process to both small businesses and community groups in Guyana. The session ended with a video presentation from Emmanuel Marfo of the Forest Research Institute of Ghana (FORIG) on the importance of democratic representation in multi-stakeholder dialogue processes such as the VPA. He further highlighted the need for stakeholder representatives in consultative processes to hold discussions on issues prior to attending meetings and to communicate outcomes of meetings back to their groups after each meeting to enable meaningful participation and dialogue.

Session 6: Working groups and next steps

Five break-out working groups were held on the second day of the seminar to create a space for discussions on specific topics concerning the VPA process in Guyana. These conversations encompassed: the roles of various stakeholders in sharing key information and promoting VPA engagement; the benefits of the VPA on the Guyanese timber market; synergies between the FLEGT and REDD+ processes; a comparison of the achievements and priorities between a range of Wood Tracking Systems in the region and finally key approaches to strengthening VPA stakeholder access to donor support.

Closing remarks

The closing remarks of the seminar were provided by Tasreef Khan of the GFC and Marieke Wit (TBI).