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PROGRAMME FAO-UE FLEGT  
Organisation des Nations Unies  
pour l'alimentation  
et l'agriculture



## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARDIZED APPROACH TO EXTERNAL INDEPENDENT MONITORING IN CAMEROON : PERCEPTIBLE IMPACTS AND RESULTS**

**March 2017**



Forests and Rural Development (FODER) is a non-profit ecological association based in Cameroon. The organization was created in 2002 in the face of the imperative of linking environmental protection to development and improving the lives of people dependent on forests and their ancestral lands. FODER strives for a more just society without marginalization or discrimination, putting its natural resources at the service of sustainable development. The association has more than 10 years of experience on forest and environmental governance issues in Cameroon and the Central African Republic (CAR).

FODER's mission is to create an enabling environment for sustainable development through actions to ensure justice and equity, rights and democracy, transparent, participatory and sustainable management of natural resources, preservation of biological diversity and improving the quality of life of the environment. The actions of the association FODER are based on a participatory approach guaranteeing the involvement of stakeholders. The Association promotes and encourages the application of regulations and the rule of law, respect for the rights of local and indigenous communities, anti-corruption, effective participation (reforms, decision-making and development initiatives) and rural entrepreneurship

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>VPA</b>	Voluntary Partnership Agreement
<b>BNC</b>	National Brigade for Control
<b>BRC</b>	Regional Brigade for Control
<b>CAE</b>	Annual Certificate of Exploitation
<b>CeDLA</b>	Centre for Alternative Local Development
<b>CODEMA</b>	Mapoubi Development Community
<b>CPCFC</b>	Head of Forestry and Hunting Control Post
<b>CTE</b>	Technical and Ethics Evaluation Committee
<b>DD/FoF</b>	Divisional Delegation of Forestry and Wildlife
<b>FLEGT</b>	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
<b>FODER</b>	Forests and Rural Development
<b>FoE-Gh</b>	Friends of the Earth - Ghana
<b>FPP</b>	Forest Peoples Programme
<b>ISO</b>	International Standardisation for Organization
<b>MINFOF</b>	Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife
<b>OE-FLEGT 2</b>	Project to set up an independent external standardized observation system
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>EIO</b>	External Independent Observation
<b>PAPEL</b>	Support Program for Livestock Production and Conservation of Biodiversity in Protected Areas in Cameroon
<b>SNOIE</b>	Standardized External Independent Observation System
<b>SVL</b>	Legality Verification System
<b>TI- C</b>	Transparency International Cameroon
<b>EU</b>	European Union

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# 1-Introduction

The involvement of Cameroonian civil society in the fight against illegal logging dates back to 1996. That is, four (4) years after the Rio summit and two (2) years after the adoption and promulgation of the new forest law, which has innovated with the introduction of the participatory management approach to forest. It is this gap that allows civil society to become involved in the fight against the abusive exploitation of forests through denunciation. The reports of whistle-blowing produced by Greenpeace, FPP and FoE-Ghana marked the beginning of external independent monitoring (EIM) activities. In addition, National Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and forest communities have a passion for the EIM to collect evidence and to expose potentially illegal practices in the exploitation and management of natural resources.

Today, approaches to external independent monitoring (EIM) have evolved considerably to address the weaknesses that have hitherto struck a blow to its credibility and effectiveness. These weaknesses include inter alia: lack of standardized tools, lack of organization of actors and poor collaboration with administrations and the private sector. The methods used by civil society to collect, process and analyze data to report suspected illegal forest practices and to improve public awareness of the management of forest resources, have evolved. This has resulted in the need to standardize and institutionalize EIM activities by establishing a harmonized tool for independent forest monitoring. The signing of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between Cameroon and the EU provides an opportunity for civil society to inform the forestry administration and other stakeholders on how the laws applicable to the forestry sector are monitored on the field. This information is provided through the external independent monitoring (EIM) activity of forests and the provision to MINFOF of reliable information that is particularly important for the effectiveness of forestry control and hence the credibility of SVL.



In 2015, Cameroonian civil society organizations active in EIM activities, under the leadership of two organizations, including Forests and Rural Development - FODER and the Local Development Initiatives Service - SAILD, set up a Standardized External Independent Monitoring System (SNOIE), which is a reliable system for structuring the EIM activities of civil society. SNOIE was set up with reference to ISO 9001: 2008 - Which is now in transition to conform to the ISO 9001: 2015 standard - through the implementation of an independent, standardized, independent national monitoring system - OE-FLEGT 2. It constitutes today a palliative device or even a relevant alternative in the absence of a classic inde-



ders, the CTE has played its decisive role in filtering and verifying the reliability and relevance of the information provided to the authorities with a view to eliciting a positive reaction. Also, of



<sup>8</sup>The administration is the direct beneficiary of the products of SNOIE, in particular through the reports sent to him to encourage him to take action against the offenders.

## 7. Conclusion

The year 2016 until the first quarter of 2017 can rightly be regarded as the year of positioning and confirmation SNOIE in the sphere of the verification of forest legality in Cameroon. Indeed, the Standardized External Independent Observation System (SNOIE) has made EIM a relevant and effective tool for combating illegal logging by making available to specific actors and the public<sup>6</sup>, information needed to improve practices, change behaviour, and promote legality and governance in the forest sector.

With the financial support of partners, the various projects implemented by FODER and thanks to which EIM missions were realised, were the backbone of the architecture of the system, which allowed the results to be achieved. Indeed, through the use of formal or informal meetings with different stakeholders, and based on processes and procedures based on ISO requirements, the system becomes a reliable tool for use in forest administration. The results obtained so far are eloquent enough. EIO's impact through

the system is increasingly perceptible with monitoring missions by BNC and BRCs in the field, caused by the forwarding of EIM reports.

The period from January 2016 to January 2017 was marked by increased loyalty and confidence among the various stakeholders directly or indirectly interested in its activities and results. Also, several denunciations and alerts, with some more relevant than others, from the communities have been identified in the system. While these denunciations bear witness to the recurrence and persistence of illegal activities in the forest sector, the ever-increasing number of these activities testifies to the relentlessness of the actors (communities, CSOs, authorities)



to put an end to them. The analysis of the cartography of these denunciations reveals local realities<sup>7</sup> which promote the illegal activity of the exploiters and dishonest individuals that the system wishes to address. The analysis of the results obtained especially the increasing number of relevant denunciations or alerts received, the number of reports produced and screened by the Technical and Ethical evaluation Committee, the number of reports sent to the competent authority and at different levels, and the reactions of the latter give a strong credit to the information produced.

Similarly, in an effort to improve the system and ensure better ownership by the various stakehol-



pendent monitoring since 2013. Although independent and external, SNOIE is designed to serve the Government, the private sector and citizens by providing them with information at different times to improve practices, change behaviour, the promotion of legality and good governance in the management of natural resources.

SNOIE has come as a response to the needs of CSOs involved in the EIM and requires methodological clarification in order to strengthen the reliability of EIM reports and increase the credibility of denunciations.

The change brought about by this system resides in the harmonization of the approach and tools, with particular emphasis on the fragmentation

of the EIM chain of activity into different processes, with the development of procedures and instructions to facilitate the implementation of activities related to external independent monitoring. The innovation of this system to ensure the credibility of EIM reports is at the level of a thorough review of mission reports by a Technical and Ethical Committee (CTE) to evaluate EIM reports.

In addition, SNOIE has an approach to listening to stakeholders, in particular through exchange meetings with key stakeholders and multi-stakeholder meetings; But also a process of continuous improvement, with a view to satisfying the needs of users of its products.

<sup>6</sup>Through on-line publications of reports and press conferences informing the media about the results obtained for dissemination

<sup>7</sup>It is difficult for the brigades and therefore for the competent administration to put an agent behind each farm or behind each logging truck for control due to the lack of resources, personnel and the attraction of agro-industries in the areas, the increased influence of the elite and the cases of tacit but proven complicity of the bureaucratic agents and many others.

## 2. Objectives of document

The objective of this document is to present the results and the impact of the application of the harmonized approach to independent monitoring in Cameroon. It will be about showing how SNOIE develops and then present its effectiveness in contributing to the fight against illegal logging and improving forest governance.

## 3. Materials and Methods used

Today, the activities of SNOIE have experienced a significant explosion materialized by (1) a succession of denunciations following field monitoring missions; (2) joint verification missions with the administration (3) press conferences and other lobbying actions. To achieve this, a number of materials and methods had to be reconciled.

### 3.1. Materials

In order to carry out the above activities, we turned to ISO 9001: 2015 (1) and the collection of SNOIE documents (2).

#### 3.1.1. ISO 9001 Standard: 2015 on quality management

Although SNOIE is designed according to the requirements of ISO 9001 version 2008, and the international standards organization in its approach of continuous improvement has changed the quality management standard from version 2008 to version 2015, SNOIE is adjusting to meet the new requirements of ISO 9001 version 2015. This International Standard specifies requirements for the Quality Management System when an organization must demonstrate its ability to consistently deliver a product<sup>1</sup> compliant with demands from clients<sup>2</sup> and applicable legal and regulatory requirements. On the other hand, it aims to increase customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system,

including processes for continuous improvement of the system and assurance of compliance with customer requirements and applicable legal and regulatory requirements. With the new standard, SNOIE stakeholders have begun to adapt to the risk approach, which is one of the key requirements of this document and an essential element in the planning of the activities of SNOIE.

#### 3.1.2. Use of the collection of SNOIE documents

After the conception of SNOIE and its validation by all the stakeholders (administrations, private sector, civil society and donors), a compilation was elaborated with all the necessary tools to allow the organizations involved in external independent monitoring activities to take ownership of it. Although this document is part of a process of continuous improvement advocated by SNOIE, it will be further updated following the evolutions of the context of the system. The main local partners involved in the External Independent monitoring have benefited from training on the control of the system's tools and with whom partnership contracts have been signed to enable them to be more active through the activities of SNOIE. In the process of denouncing the illegal activities around this system, these partners have been able to manipulate collection sheets, implement procedures for the preparation of EIM reports for cases from the South and East Regions.



## 6. Challenges and Prospects

While the results achieved to date by SNOIE are positive and encouraging, sustained efforts need to be maintained to meet the enormous challenges to the effective implementation of the system, namely:

- Free access to exploitation sites, in particular to address the issue of security measures for the use of community observers and community leaders in the RTM
- The difficult access to reliable information, particularly on forestry companies
- The evaluation of the impact of the system's activities on illegal exploitation, notably on the basis of the baseline study carried out at the start of the project «Implementation of SNOIE»
- The extension of SNOIE in other areas with high potential for illegality and not yet touched
- Membership of other CSOs in SNOIE;
- The training of new CSOs and community lea-

- ders and observers on SNOIE procedures, forest legislation and use of the tools of SNOIE
- The financing of joint missions with MINFOF
- Motivation and strengthening the protection of observers
- The strengthening of safety measures in relation to SNOIE, a safety manual incorporating a safety management plan is being finalized.

In addition, SNOIE intends to position itself as an indispensable tool for monitoring the management of natural resources for national purposes and to export its experience and expertise at the international level, which is why an audit with a view to certification is envisaged. The challenge to this end remains the financing of such a process for international recognition. In addition, extending the system to other natural resource management sectors (agribusiness, mining, etc.) appears as an opportunity which should make it possible to improve the governance of natural resources through IM.

<sup>1</sup>Product: EIM Report

<sup>2</sup>Clients in this case are the beneficiaries of the results of SNOIE. These include stakeholders such as Government, the private sector, national representation and citizens

These denunciation reports, as well as the follow-up letters from Transparency International-Cameroon (lobbyist CSO of SNOIE), thus contributed to this decision of the Minister. A senior official of MINFOF says precisely about this that: «Denunciations of the civil society push the administration to act». In addition, some of the companies reported in the framework of SNOIE are included in the forestry and wildlife record of the 4th quarter of 2016, made public on 28 February 2017. Their presence in this record directly leads to the suspension of the issuance and initialling by MINFOF of the secure documents used for the exploitation, processing, transport and export of forest products. This situation would contribute to bringing the offender to order, at the risk of being permanently removed from accreditation.

### 5.3. On civil society

- Effective participation of CSOs in denouncing allegedly illegal forestry activities using a harmonized approach and standardized tools. This makes it possible to increase the reliability of reports and the credibility of denunciations;
- Knowledge of EIM operational tools and

standardized procedures, by SNOIE CSOs and community leaders involved in the Community-based real-time monitoring system (STR), ensures the sustainability of the EIM;

- Enhanced collaboration between the administration and CSOs on the effectiveness of forest control and the credibility of the legality verification system.

### 5.4. On private sector operators

- The penalties imposed on fraudulent operators exposed in SNOIE's areas of intervention - for example seizures and auctions of fraudulent timber, fines to be paid after transactions - contributed to deter bad practices and to promote responsible forest management practices in its implementation areas. For the time being, this includes the Ocean Division (South Region), the Upper Nyong Division (East Region) and the Sanaga Maritime Division (Littoral Region), with considerable overall influence of forest areas in general.
- SNOIE contributes to improving the brand image of forest companies by encouraging behaviour change and promoting good management practices.



## 3.2. Methods

The success of activities carried out within the framework of SNOIE, such as: denunciations, monitoring missions on the various denunciation sites, joint verification missions with the administration, press conferences and lobbying actions (formal or informal meetings) are dependent on a set of processes used in the implementation of EIM activities.

### 3.2.1. Partnership agreements with CSOs

Throughout the year 2016, the coordination of SNOIE has had to have partnership contracts with targeted local organizations in the South and East Regions, in particular CeDLA<sup>3</sup> and PAPEL<sup>4</sup>, to carry out independent observation missions and to report cases of suspected illegal logging in their area of operation. In addition, with a view to strengthening post-denunciation lobbying and guaranteeing the standardized EIM process approach, a partnership contract was signed with Transparency International Cameroon (TI-C) to take charge of communication and lobbying with competent authorities once the EIM reports are forwarded to the Ministry of Forestry. These CSO partners have been trained beforehand in the procedures of the Standardized System of External Independent monitoring through a training workshop organized for this purpose.

The monitoring missions were carried out in strict compliance with the procedures developed in the system to harmonize civil society denunciation activities. They were carried out respectively in the Ocean (South region) and Upper Nyong (East region) divisions. In the Littoral region, in particular the Sanaga Maritime Division, the coordination of SNOIE has had to work with a development committee called CODEMA which has become a Civil Society Organization called «SUHE». The denunciations of alleged illegal forestry activities forwarded to the coordination of SNOIE by SUHE resulted in observation and verification missions by personnel of this coordination.

The reports of EIM missions carried out by the Local Organizations are submitted to the Coordination of SNOIE which, after validation by the Technical and Ethical evaluation Committee (CTE), submits them to the forest administration, accompanied with letters of denunciation. These reports, submitted to the forestry administration, favour the initiation of the control missions of the National or Regional Forest Control Brigade and, in turn, sanctions against the illegal exploiters denounced in the reports



<sup>3</sup>Centre for Alternative Local Development

<sup>4</sup>Support Programme for Livestock Production and Conservation of Biodiversity in Protected Areas in Cameroon

### 3.2.2. Holding of the Technical and Ethical evaluation Committee sessions (CTE)



the Coordination of SNOIE  
CTE's mission is to review and analyze external independent monitoring reports and to provide comments and recommendations on the technicality, relevance, objectivity and morality of the reports submitted for its consideration. CTE is composed of six (6) members or experts respectively from a civil society organization, a public administration, a forestry company or a private sector organization, a research and development institute, and a law firm. These are designated according

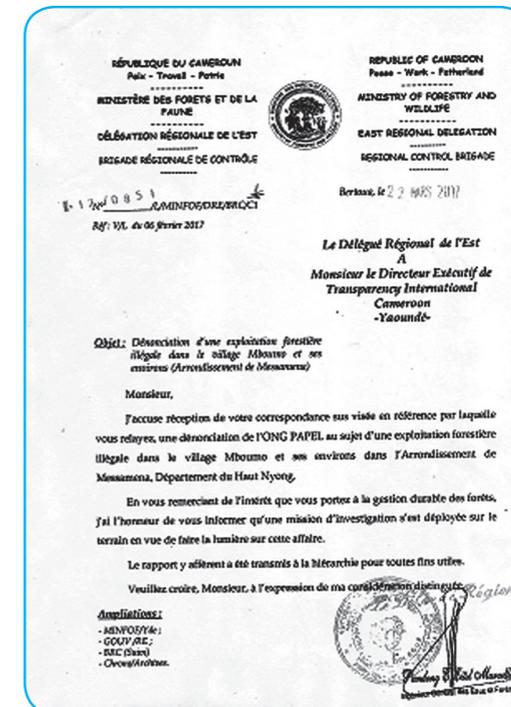
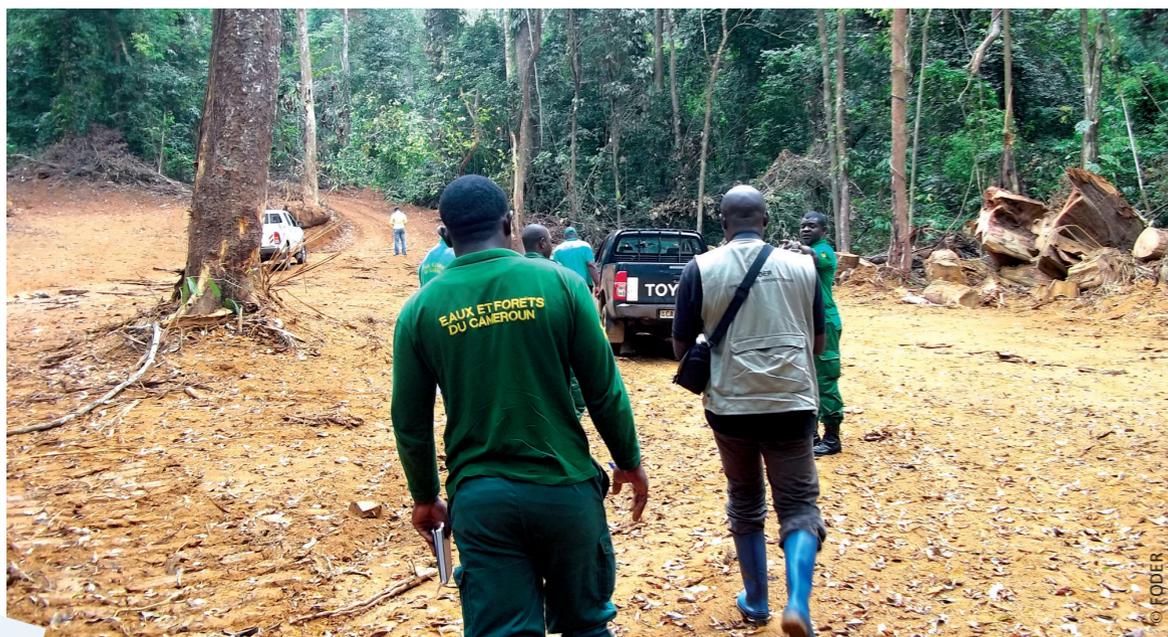
to the complementarity of profiles (foresters, lawyers, company managers, researchers ...).

This review of the reports by the CTE allows for the putting aside of unfounded information, reassurance of whistleblower protection and reassurance that the facts have been described as experienced on the ground.

SNOIE procedures, all reports produced by the actors of the system automatically pass to the Technical and Ethical evaluation Committee (CTE) before being transmitted to the competent authority. It should be noted that the CTE is a non-permanent body set up by the association Forests and Rural Development (FODER) with the aim of guaranteeing the technical and ethical quality of EIM reports before their publication by

### 3.2.3. Joint mission with the National Control Brigade (BNC)

Let us recall that the joint mission is that carried out by the SNOIE coordination team managed by FODER, with the competent authority following a denunciation. In this case, the coordination team is considered as a guide to administrative controllers on the monitoring site. Several BNC missions were carried out involving the coordination of SNOIE.



## 5. Perceptible impacts of SNOIE

Impacts of the implementation of the Standardized External Independent Monitoring System (SNOIE) are now palpable and can be seen in the forestry economy, administrative governance and sustainable forest management, civil society organizations active in EIM, and the private forest sector.

### 5.1. On forestry economy

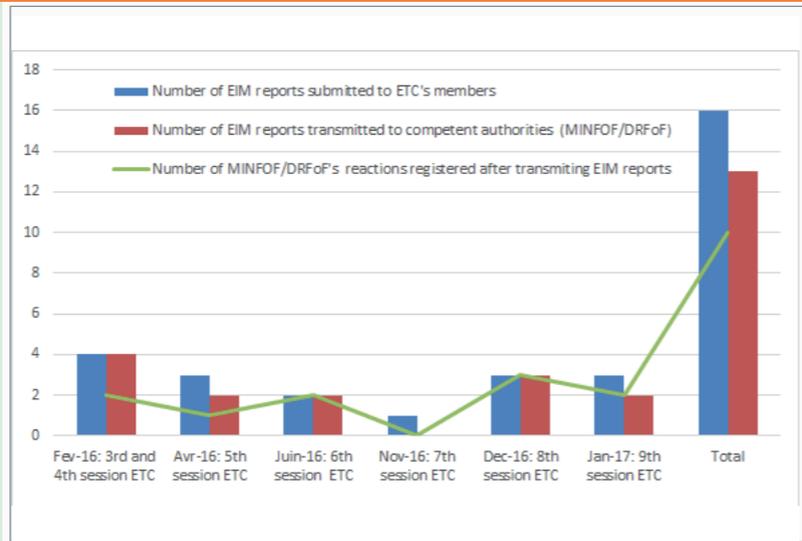
Auctions of seized timber, the case of Logbii in the Littoral region, of Bandevouri in the South region and fines to be paid for the case in Mboumo in the East region are just a few examples. There is a contribution by SNOIE to State revenue and consequently to the forestry economy. In the absence of SNOIE, this revenue of several millions of CFA Francs would escape national control and accounting.

### 5.2. On Administrative Govern-

### nance and Sustainable Forest Management

SNOIE actions would no doubt have contributed to Decision No. 0081/MINFOF of 21 March 2017 appointing the officials in the deconcentrated services of the State. Through this decision, Nine (09) heads of forestry and hunting posts were dismissed, including five (5) from the current areas of intervention of SNOIE. Although the decision of the forestry administration does not give the «official» reasons for the dismissal of these heads of forestry and hunting posts, it can be noted that these «disciplinary» sanctions against these local agents of the forestry administration intervene only a few weeks after allegedly illegal logging claims made under the Standardized External Independent monitoring System (SNOIE) integrating community alerts through the Community-based Real time forest Monitoring (RTM) were brought to the attention of MINFOF.

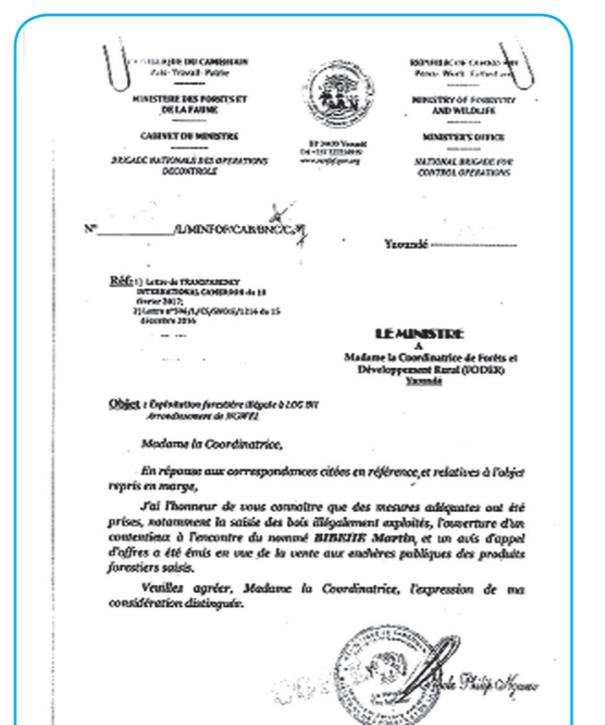
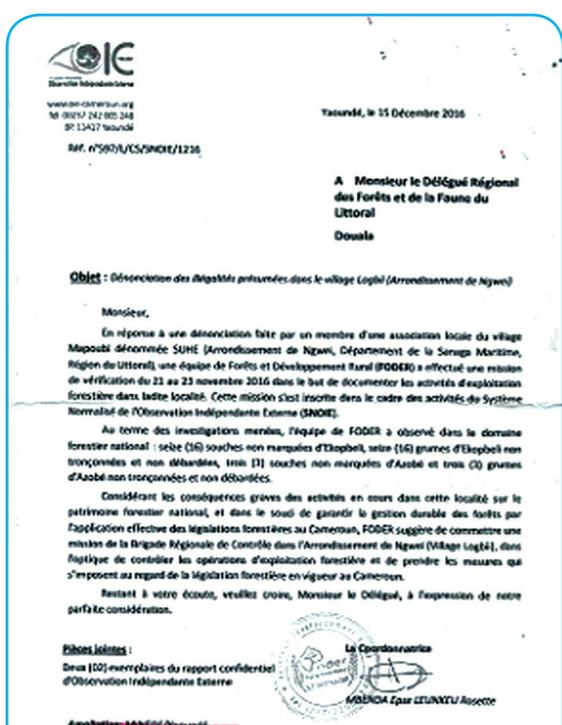
Variation of the number of EIM reports produced, transmitted to the ETC, and number of MINFOF's reactions



### 4.3. Some exchanges of letters between the administration and the coordination of SNOIE

The quality of information on suspected illegal forest activities generated by SNOIE and their relevance and reliability, played a central role in the increasing collaboration between SNOIE and the forest administration from the summit to the base (Minister, Head of MINFOF National Control Brigade, heads of MINFOF Regional Control Brigades, MINFOF Divisional Delegation and Head of Forestry and Hunting Post.

Below are some letters between SNOIE and the forest administration. These are the reply letters from MINFOF to inform the coordination of SNOIE and/or the CSO Lobbyist (TI-C), on measures taken by the administration following the denunciations of the allegedly illegal forestry activities carried out within the framework of SNOIE.



### 3.2.4. Press conference

Press conferences were included in SNOIE as a communication approach used not only to stimulate the response of the competent authority to the EIM reports it has forwarded, but also to inform the public about the good actions taken by the Ministry of Forestry following the denunciations made within the framework of SNOIE. The press conference involves all journalists in the print media, the cyber press, radio and television journalists, who have the huge challenge of relaying the information contained in various channels of communication. Two press conferences were held, among others, on the one hand and the cases of Ngwei, Bandevouri, Etchu on the one hand and the cases of Mboum, Mabenanga Bissiang, Logbii



and Batchenga denounced by CeDLA, PAPEL and FODER.



### 3.2.5. Formal and informal meetings

Monitoring of EIM reports once submitted to the competent authority may sometimes lead to the use of several strategies, including formal or informal meetings with targeted officials of the relevant administration to know the position of the administration in such various cases. The strategy of formal or informal meetings is perceived as a genuine pillar that can be used to

easily obtain the reaction of the administration on the cases denounced. More than a dozen formal and informal meetings have been held so far with both the organizations in charge of lobbying and the administration. We also note the effective action of the CSO in charge of lobbying in the process of communication after denunciation.

## 4. Results obtained

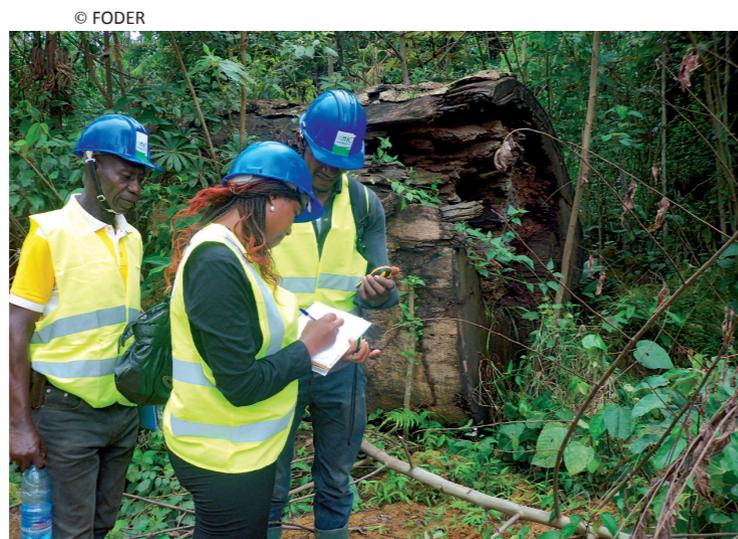
### 4.1. Qualitatively

From January 2016 to date, SNOIE in its deployment process had several activities that resulted in several denunciations of allegedly illegal forestry activities. These denunciations include unauthorized exploitation of forests in the national domain, exploitation without an Annual Certificate of Exploitation (CAE)<sup>5</sup> in a communal forest, unauthorized exploitation in community forests, exploitation outside the boundary, failure to comply with technical standards of exploitation, failure to observe standards of intervention in forestry and non-compliance with the social clauses of the specifications.

All of these denunciations coming from three forest regions, including the East, South and Littoral regions were brought to the attention of the competent authorities, in particular the Regional Delegations of the zones where the observation missions were carried out with a copy to the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF). They resulted in control missions by the BRCs and BNC, and sanctions were imposed on offenders. Collaboration with stakeholders such as the forestry administration and the private sector has significantly improved and materialized not only through the presence of the latter at all multi-stakeholder exchange and reflection meetings on the effectiveness of SNOIE but also through exchanges of correspondence with the administration following the denunciations of the alleged illegal forestry activities carried out within the framework of SNOIE.

### 4.2. Quantitatively

During the year 2016 through January 2017, sixteen (16) EIM reports were submitted for evaluation by the members of the CTE. After evaluation,



thirteen (13) reports were forwarded to the competent authority, that is, to the Regional Delegates of the monitoring zones concerned with a copy to the Ministry in charge of forest management. Ten (10) of these reports were responded to by MINFOF through monitoring and verification missions of the regional brigades concerned and the National Control Brigade of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife. Subsequently, MINFOF reacted with a formal notification to the coordination of SNOIE, the names of the sanctioned companies appearing on the summary of offenses, and three (3) formal mails announcing other sanctions imposed by MINFOF against fraudulent operators and even other officials of the administration who are involved in illegal exploitation in the zones of intervention of SNOIE.

The table below provides detailed information on the number of EIM reports produced and reviewed by the CTE between January 2016 and January 2017, those submitted to the competent authority and the number of monitoring missions carried out by MINFOF following these reports.

	February 2016 3rd and 4th CTE session	April 2016 5th CTE	June 2016 6th CTE	November 2016 7th CTE	December 2016 8th CTE	January 2017 9th CTE	Total
Number of EIM reports submitted to CTE members	4	3	2	1	3	3	16
Number of EIM reports forwarded to the competent authority (MINFOF/DRFoF)	4	2	2	0	3	2	13
Number of MINFOF/DRFoF reactions recorded following EIM reports submitted	2	1	2	0	3	2	10

With regard to this table, it is noted that:

- The number of reports submitted to CTE members varies from session to session and the average is 3 reports to be reviewed per session;
- After the 3rd, 4th, 6th and 8th CTE sessions, all reports submitted to members received the mention **“to be published pending corrections”** and were forwarded to the competent authority;
- Some reports presenting little or not relevant information did not receive the favourable opinion of the CTE to forward them to the competent authority. These reports were rejected at the 5th and 9th CTE sessions; and only the report of the 7th CTE which was specifically on social obligations.
- Technical and Ethical evaluation Committee has a major influence on the quality and the number of EIM reports that the coordination of SNOIE forwards to the competent authority.
- The outcome of the evaluation of EIM reports by CTE members has a causal relationship to the reaction of MINFOF as the prior clean-up of EIM reports by CTE ensures not only quality and the reliability of the EIM report, but also the credibility of the denunciations forwarded to it.
- The reactions of the competent authority do not necessarily depend on the number of EIO reports received but depend on the relevance of the factual elements contained in the reports

In its approach to producing high-quality information, through the CSOs involved in its implementation (PAPEL, CeDLA, FODER, TI-C), SNOIE produced an average of two reports per month over the period.

To date,  
77% of MINFOF reaction is recorded following the reports of EIM produced within the framework of SNOIE which are forwarded to it. These reactions are materialized by control missions of the National Control Brigade (BNC) and the Regional Control Brigades of MINFOF (BRC).

<sup>5</sup>The CTE is a non-permanent body composed of six (06) members, whose mission is to examine and analyze the external observation reports and to give opinions and recommendations on technicality, relevance and objectivity of the reports submitted for its consideration.