



COMMUNITY  
&  
FOREST  
PLATFORM

POSITION PAPER OF THE COMMUNITY AND FOREST PLATFORM (CFP)

# ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VPA-FLEGT AND INVOLVE THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITIES IN THE PROCESS IN CAMEROON



## INTRODUCTION

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade of Timber and Timber Products (VPA-FLEGT) between Cameroon and the European Union (EU) came into force on the 16th of December 2011. The civil society is a key actor in the process since the VPA-FLEGT negotiation phase and during its implementation. The Community and Forest Platform (CFP) had already noted in its position paper of January 2017 the achievements of the FLEGT process after six years of implementation. These included improving forest transparency in Cameroon, promoting the participation of communities and civil society in the forest management process and better consideration of communities' rights in Cameroon.

In addition, this position paper was presenting the need to strengthen these achievements and made recommendations in this regard. The CFP also called on the Parties to renew their political commitment in the VPA process as well as the need of strengthening the momentum of the process to effectively address the challenges related to forest governance in Cameroon.

More than a year after, the CFP notices a slackening in the implementation, as well as a step backwards on some achievements. The CFP, while congratulating EU and Cameroon for maintaining EU VPA-FLEGT, would like to reiterate the emergency of taking necessary measures to strengthen the implementation of the Agreement.

### A. FINDINGS OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

The civil society notices significant step backwards both in the content and the form of the VPA implementation process in Cameroon.

#### 1. Regarding the content of the process

The CFP deploras:

- b. The exclusion of the civil society from the development of the second generation of the Computerised system for the management of forest Information known as SIGIF2 ;
- c. The lack of information on the progress in the development of SIGIF2 since the last meeting of the National Monitoring Committee (CNS) held in April 2017;
- d. The focus of bilateral discussions on the development of SIGIF2 instead of other elements of the implementation schedule of the VPA-FLEGT namely:

- i. Transparency: effective implementation of the Annex 7, that is the publication of the 10 categories of information (divided into 75 types of information), updating of information on the VPA-FLEGT web page, access to information at the local level which can significantly enhance civil society and communities' participation to the implementation of the VPA-FLEGT.
- ii. Legal reforms: the civil society lacks information on the progress of the forest law reform process as well as how the contributions made between 2012 and 2013 have been considered. Almost 10 years after the beginning of the revision of this law, it must be pointed out that some civil society's contributions can be obsolete and/or must be enhanced. It is also worth reminding the need to take into account some relevant provisions of international legal texts ratified by Cameroon concerning the protection of communities' rights.
- iii. The review of the legality grid: some verifiers of legality grids cannot be applied to some types of forest titles. Legal references do not take into account legal instruments related to gender and ratified by Cameroon. Conversion timbers are not taken into account.

#### 2. Regarding the form of the process

The CPF notices a step backwards in terms of participation, transparency and monitoring-evaluation namely :

- a. **Lack of meeting of the CNS for more than one year** (the last one was held in April 2017): the CNS is according to section 16 of the Agreement, the framework for the consultation of Cameroonian stakeholders in the implementation of the VPA-FLEGT. This provision was made effective at the national level by the order N°126 of September 10, 2012 concerning the establishment, organization and functioning of the CNS.

The Failure in holding this committee has an incidence on the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process, the review of problems or weakness identified in VPA-FLEGT implementation as well as the participation of stakeholders in the implementation phase.

- b. **The non-publication till now of the 2017** annual report of the implementation of the VPA-FLEGT as well as the weaknesses in the supply and update of information on the VPA FLEGT web page on MINFOF's website.
- c. **The exclusion of the civil society and communities from meetings of the Joint implementation monitoring Committee (CCS):** the last CCS attended by the civil society was that of May 26, 2016. This situation is likely to reduce the level of participation which is nonetheless one of the main achievements of the VPA-FLEGT in Cameroon.
- d. **The obsolescence of the implementation schedule of the VPA-FLEGT since 2017**

## B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VPA-FLEGT IN CAMEROON

Based on the above observations, the Community and Forest Platform recommends the following actions to both Parties in order to improve the implementation of the VPA FLEGT and increase the participation of civil society and communities:

- **To the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF)**

### *Concerning the regular holding of CNS*

- To regularly hold CNS meetings, one of which must be compulsory at least two weeks before the meeting of the CCS, and ensure to comply with the deadlines for other stakeholders, namely civil society, communities and indigenous people, information; (that is 7 days before according to the order N°126 of September 10, 2012), on the date and agenda of each CNS meeting .

### *Concerning transparency*

- Systematically publish the list of valid titles, areas opened for exploitation, Annual logging certificates, Annual volumes processed per titles, as well as the reports from the Forest control units / Summary of forest-related infractions ;
- Ensure the effective implementation of Annex 7 of the VPA and the regular supply and update the dedicated web page on MINFOF's website

### *Concerning legal reform*

- Resume the consultation process of civil society and communities for forest law reform;
- Update obsolete proposals and take into account new dynamics such as climate change and land use in forest Law amendment.
- Take into account in the new law, the relevant provisions of international legal texts ratified by Cameroon regarding the protection of communities and vulnerable groups' rights.

### *Concerning the development and testing of SIGIF2*

- Inform civil society and community forests about the level of development and testing of SIGIF 2;
- Involve civil society and communities in the development and testing of SIGIF 2 modules;
- Set up a multi-stakeholder group to monitor the development and deployment of SIGIF 2 including civil society and communities

- **To both Parties, Cameroon and European Union (EU)**

### *Concerning the regular holding of CCS*

- Include, in addition to the development of the SIGIF 2, the following points on the agenda of the next CCS discussions : legal reforms, governance namely transparency and participation which are all fundamental and critical elements for the effective implementation of VPA-FLEGT in Cameroon;
- Regularly share with members of the CNS in general and specifically with the civil society and representatives of local communities and indigenous people, the agenda of the CCS sessions so that they can, if necessary, communicate to the committee their concerns/ points of view ;
- Invite the civil society to the various sessions of the CCS

### *Concerning the review of the legality grids and implementation of the VPA-FLEGT*

- Formally launch the review process of the legality grids of the VPA FLEGT and make sure not to reduce the standards of legality during this review;
- Involve the civil society in the review process of the legality grids;
- Set up a working group on the review of legality grids that will bring together representatives of different sources of timber supply, civil society and administration;
- Consider the method of processing timber from forest conversion;
- Define a result-oriented and gendered new schedule for the implementation of the VPA-FLEGT;
- Publish the 2017 annual report on the implementation of the VPA-FLEGT.



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