



*Policy Brief N°002 July 2018*

# TRANSPARENCY EVALUATION IN THE REDD+ AND VPA-FLEGT PROCESSES IN CAMEROON

---

**Challenges to access  
Information**



**Photos credits** : ©FODER,

**Formatting** : Germain FOTIÉ

**Cover images**: FODER

672172222 / kingfotie@gmail.com

---

**To quote this document:**

**KENGOUM F.** 2018. Transparency Evaluation in the REDD+ and VPA-FLEGT Processes in Cameroon: Challenges to access information. FODER. Yaounde, Cameroon.

**with contributions from:**

Laurence **WETE SOH**, FODER

Angeline **MODJO KAMDEM**, FODER

Christiane **ZEBAZE HELLOW**, FODER

---

All opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of FODER, those of the donors, the technical and financial partners or the reviewers of the document.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of abbreviations .....	4
Summary .....	5
I. INTRODUCTION .....	6
II. METHODOLOGY .....	7
III. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	8
1. The Annex on Information made publicly available: a relevant approach to follow-up information release .....	8
2. Increasing the publication of information from Annex VII of the VPA-FLEGT over time .....	8
3. A discriminatory right to published information in VPA-FLEGT .....	9
4. Beyond the posting of information: Consecrating access to information as a right in REDD+ .....	9
5. Necessity for publishing information on the completed REDD+ preparation phase .....	9
6. Need for a list of information to be published for REDD+ future phases .....	10
IV. CONCLUSION .....	11
V. Further reading : .....	12

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>ER - PIN</b>	Emissions Reduction Project Idea Note
<b>FCPF</b>	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
<b>FODER</b>	Forêts et Développement Rural
<b>LAS</b>	Legality assurance system
<b>MINFOF</b>	Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife
<b>REDD+</b>	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks
<b>R - PIN</b>	Readiness Project Idea Note
<b>R-PP</b>	Readiness Preparation Proposal
<b>SMNR</b>	Sustainable Management of Natural Resources
<b>TAP</b>	Technical Advisory Panel
<b>VPA - FLEGT</b>	Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Cameroon on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade in timber and derived products to the European Union.

## SUMMARY

VPA-FLEGT and REDD+ are two key mechanisms used in Cameroon for the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR). The implementation of VPA-FLEGT and the preparation of Cameroon for REDD+ raised the issue of how to best address transparency in the management of natural resources. In this regard, the experience in accessing information in both mechanisms is very helpful and enables to draw two key lessons.

First of all, ensuring access to information through a predefined list of information available to everyone on a permanent platform can help provide an answer, at least partially, to the issue raised by the absence of rules regulating access to information and ratification by Cameroon of the Aarhus Convention of 1998 on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

Secondly, making information available to all on a permanent platform does not ensure the right to access information, which is based on other factors. Not only access to information should allow full participation, it should also help stakeholders make decisions on the sustainable management of natural resources. It should then be a right and there should be a regulatory framework in this wise. This framework should provide clear procedures and available remedies which enable stakeholders to access appropriate information in due time, so as to effectively contribute to decision-making on sustainable management of natural resources. In the event of low implementation of the framework, which is not yet profitable to the VPA-FLEGT, access to information in this mechanism or REDD+ will merely be unrealistic.



The next steps of the REDD+ mechanism should build on both experiences and all information at the end of the REDD+ preparation phase should immediately be published in the above-mentioned conditions. Moreover, the country should endeavour to draft, in a participatory manner, the list of information to be made publicly available during the REDD+ implementation and the results-based payment phases in order to fulfil the requirement on transparency found in the national strategy. It is of utmost importance to seriously consider and set up a regulatory framework to ensure the right to access information in environmental matters in general, and specifically, in the VPA-FLEGT and REDD+ processes.

Since 2010, Cameroon is committed in the implementation of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade in timber and derived products (VPA-FLEGT) signed with the European Union (EU). Since 2008, the country is also working on the mechanism to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in tropical countries (REDD+). Beyond their specific objectives, REDD+ and VPA-FLEGT are two policy processes, the implementation of which aims at improving forest governance.

Transparency is a key principle of good governance in the processes and mechanisms implemented for the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR). Access to information is a key element for transparency. It is at the centre of the FLEGT process and may be a challenge for the effectiveness of REDD+.

As part of the VPA-FLEGT, a section (Annex No. VII of the Agreement document) was specifically dedicated to information publicly available. It clearly specifies the categories and sub-categories of information which need to be published through various channels. Within the framework of REDD+, evaluated based on the preparation phase, a communication plan was developed to communicate with stakeholders through many channels on a non-specified set of information regarding the process.

The aim of this Policy Brief is to help understand the challenges encountered in implementing access to information in the two mechanisms of sustainable management of natural resources. When it comes to good governance, access to information is one of the most constant requirements from stakeholders in the various SMNR processes. VPA-FLEGT is in its implementation phase. REDD+, after the official completion of its preparation phase in June 2018 is now in its implementation phase. The Readiness Preparation Proposal document for REDD+ (R-PP) approved in 2013 clearly specified that the experience of VPA-FLEGT should help formulate the REDD+ options in various ways. Civil society organisations collaborated with the Government to ensure that this requirement of the R-PP is effective. To this effect, they regularly monitor and reports on the publication of information in accordance with Annex VII of VPA-FLEGT. Experience in publishing information during the REDD+ preparation phase was also assessed. Lessons were drawn from the experience. This Policy Brief addresses these so as to help ensure better transparency through access to information by stakeholders of SMNR processes in Cameroon.

## II.

## METHODOLOGY

The Evaluation methods for the access to information during the implementation of Annex VII of VPA-FLEGT and during the REDD+ preparation phase were based on data collection and analysis. Data collection was carried out from 08 May to 08 June 2018.

For the VPA-FLEGT, the approach was based on 4 steps.

1. Verifying the existence and accessibility of the page dedicated to VPA on the Website of the MINFOF who is in charge of its implementation;
2. Identifying information published under the categories of information to be made publicly available after FODER's evaluation in 2015;
3. Identifying information published under the sub-categories of information to be made publicly available after FODER's evaluation in 2015;
4. Comparing the trend of publications under the categories and sub-categories between 2015 and 08 June 2018.

For REDD+, the approach was based on three steps:

1. Verifying the existence and accessibility of the Website referred to in the communication plan;
2. Verifying the existence of a list of information to be made publicly available;
3. Verifying whether information is



published through the channels mentioned in the 2016 communication plan;

In both cases, the analysis was based on the criteria of availability of information. Availability means that the information does exist, that it is accessible by those who can demonstrate an interest for its use for REDD+ and VPA-FLEGT at the time of request, and that there are equal access requirements for all those requesting for it, irrespective of their status and origins. The existence of information implies that it is produced. The information is accessible once any stakeholder who wishes can freely access to it through the agreed channels. The methodology and the results of the evaluation were presented and amended during a two-day multi-stakeholders' workshop held in July 2018, which brought together the various categories of stakeholders for those two processes organis  au mois de juillet 2018.

### 1. The Annex on Information made publicly available: a relevant approach to follow-up information release

Following-up information release is possible thanks to Annex VII which establishes 10 categories of information to be made publicly available. The choice of the publication on a dedicated website has a double advantage. First, publications are permanently available as far as the Website is regularly maintained and that its access is permanently ensured. Second, there is room for regular and timely follow-up of the trend of publications on the Website.

However, the lack of a list of specific documents within the sub-categories makes it quite difficult to carry out the critical evaluation process of the publication of Annex VII information. Some information linked to specific sub-categories is not specific enough to be published. This is the case for the category on legal information where the titles of the sub-categories are vague and often unclear as they sometimes refer to documents at large and not specific information.

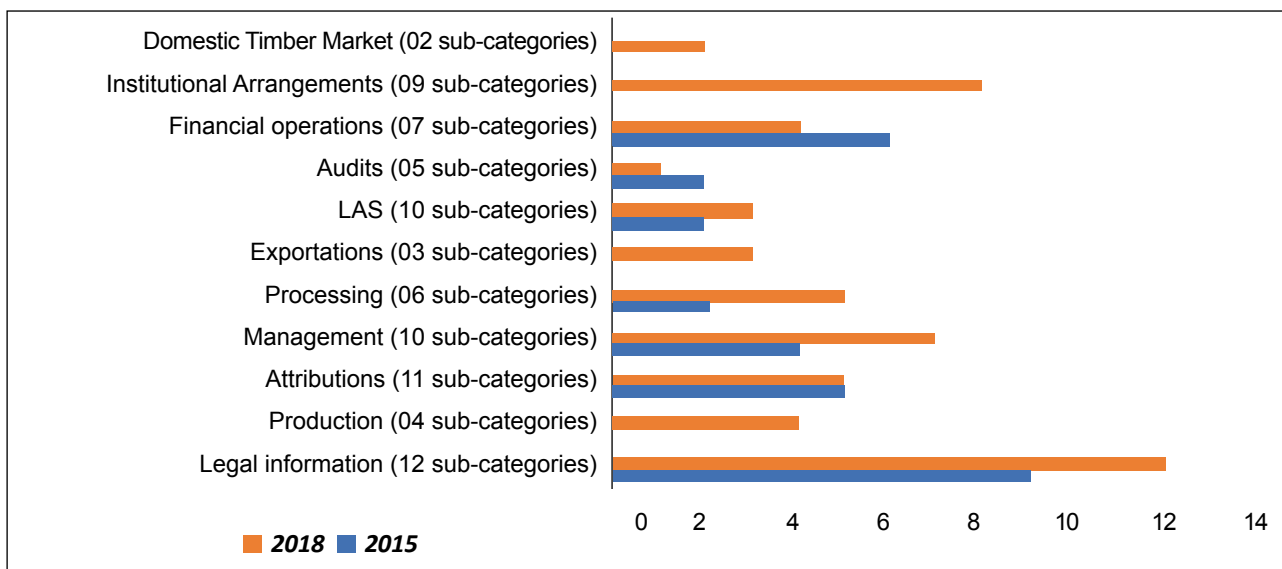
It should also be noted that the Ministry in charge of Forestry did not publish the process through which information can be published on the VPA Website. Such a manual was effectively developed and entered into force by MINFOF Decision N00017/MINFOF/

SG/DF of 20 January 2016. However, the lack of transparency about the publication procedure keeps the user in the opacity and gives way to criticize the Government's efforts; anything which could yet be mitigated if the procedures to identify, collect, scan, then publish information were also made publicly available.

### 2. Increasing the publication of information from Annex VII of the VPA-FLEGT over time

From 2012 to 2018, the publication of information on the Website referred to in Annex VII of the VPA-FLEGT fluctuated, yet with an increasing curve over time. Assessments carried out by Forêts et développement rural (FODER) in 2015 and in 2018 clearly show a progress in the number of information and documents release, from 33.90% of information published by categories in 2015 to 72.18% by 08 June 2018, as in Figure 1. However, the stability of the Website is still a concern to ensure permanent access to documents and information. It should be noted that the Website dedicated to the publication of information is sometimes unstable, which makes it difficult to access information published therein and raises a real issue on access to information, and the image of the VPA process in Cameroon.





**Figure:** Comparison of publications by category between 2015 and 2018

### 3. A discriminatory right to published information in VPA-FLEGT

The publication of information as referred to in Annex VII is part of the communication strategy implemented by the VPA-FLEGT. This generates the right to access published information only for the European Party which may plead failure to fulfil this commitment to question the application of the agreement by the Cameroonian Party. On the contrary, the REDD+ national stakeholders, including the civil society organisations (CSOs), the private sector and the various sector ministries, yet interested in the information, will find it very difficult to legally justify the requirement for the release of a specific information from Annex VII.

### 4. Beyond the posting of information: Consecrating access to information as a right in REDD+

Access to information is addressed in the REDD+ national strategy (REDD+NS) as a right. This orientation by SNREDD comes prior to the design of a related regulatory framework. The idea is to go beyond mere

release of information and give the REDD+ process stakeholders the right to require from any individual producing information from their participation in REDD+ activities, to make it available, under legal constraints or other proceedings, according to the rules and regulations.

### 5. Necessity for publishing information on the completed REDD+ preparation phase

The preparation of Cameroon for REDD+ took place between 2008 and 2018. During these 10 years of the official preparation phase, a great set of information was generated. This information should be published to enable REDD+ stakeholders to have access to it at any time, when necessary or needed. The information and documents may be classified under the proposed categories and sub-categories below:

1. *Information on finance*
  - a. Public Finance
  - b. Private Finance

- c. Technical and financial partners
- d. Readiness Preparation grants
- e. R-PP formulation Grants

## 2. *Information on contracts as part of the REDD+*

- a. Conventions with the REDD+ technical and financial partners
- b. List of consultants in the process
- c. List of contracts awarded and executed

## 3. *Legal information*

- a. Sector policy reforms related to the implementation of the REDD+
- b. Instruments specifically drafted for the REDD+

## 4. *Information on the REDD+ institutional framework*

- a. Institutional arrangements
- b. Stakeholders
- c. Procedures

## 5. *Study reports*

- a. REDD+strategic study reports
- b. Sector study reports
- c. Study reports of technical partners

## 6. *Documents on the national REDD+ process*

- a. National strategy
  - i. Drafts
  - ii. Final version
  - iii. TAP comments
  - iv. Cameroon responses to TAP
- b. World Bank/FCPF reports on the process progress
- c. Letters of Intent

- d. R-PIN
  - i. Drafts
  - ii. Final version
  - iii. TAP comments
  - iv. Cameroon responses to TAP
- e. R-PP
  - i. Drafts
  - ii. VeFinal version
  - iii. TAP comments
  - iv. Cameroon responses to TAP
- f. ER-PIN
  - i. Drafts
  - ii. Final version
  - iii. TAP comments
  - iv. Cameroon responses to TAP

## 6. **Need for a list of information to be published for REDD+ future phases**

The experience from the REDD+ preparation clearly shows that lack of information made publicly available as part of this process has widely contributed to the low level of transparency during this phase. Considering the period, from June 2016 to June 2018, when the REDD+ Communication Plan was implemented, the Support Programme to the REDD+ Technical Secretariat (STREDD+) was not bound to make any information public. Yet, it clearly appeared that a set of information from various strategic studies, legal framework reforms, institutional arrangements and financings would be generated. The result is that the information is shared in some mailing lists, but are not published by the Cameroonian Party on a permanent platform accessible to the public.

The experiences from VPA-FLEGT and REDD+ in Cameroon show two main approaches for making access to information a core element of transparency in the processes involved in the sustainable management of natural resources. The first idea is to make an agreed list of information publicly available and freely accessible on a permanent platform. The second is to consecrate access to information as a right for all stakeholders of the SMNR processes, proposing necessary amendments to the rules and regulations.

REDD+, in its upcoming implementation phase, must anticipate on the weaknesses revealed during its preparation phase which occurred as a result of the lack of a list of information to be made publicly available. A lot of information will be generated from



the implementation of REDD+ projects. In order to ensure prior informed participation for stakeholders, the regulatory framework will provide for prior access to information to inform their decisions.

### Further reading:

- FODER, 2015. Rapport d'évaluation de la mise en œuvre de la transparence dans le secteur forestier au Cameroun. 30 pages.
- FODER, 2016. Transparence dans le secteur de l'environnement au Cameroun : Analyse du contexte de l'accès à l'information pour REDD+. Rapport d'étude. 117 pages.
- FODER, MINEPDED, 2016. Accès à l'information dans REDD+ au Cameroun : Guide pratique pour une politique. 43 pages.
- Kengoum F. et Wete Soh L. 2017 Le Droit d'Accès A l'Information Dans REDD+ Au Cameroun : Acteurs, Approches de suivi et Gestion des conflits. FODER-MINEPDED. Yaoundé, Cameroun.
- Kengoum F. 2018. Evaluation report on the implementation of VPA-FLEGT Annex VII in Cameroon. FODER. Yaoundé, Cameroun. 26 pages.
- Kengoum F. 2018 Evaluation Report on Transparency in REDD+ in Cameroon: Access to Information during the preparation phase. FODER. Yaounde, Cameroon. 14 pages



**Tél. :** 00 237 222 005 248

**P.O. Box:** 11417 Yaoundé, Cameroon

**E-mail:** forest4dev@gmail.com

**www.**forest4dev.org

**www.**oiecameroun.org

