

FAO FLEGT PROGRAMME



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SWEDEN



TIMBER PRODUCERS BUILD CAPACITY TO MEET VPA STANDARDS.

The depth of knowledge, among Small and Medium Scale Forest Enterprise (SMFEs), on how to harvest and process timber products for trading on the international market, without any impediment is phenomenal.

The SMFEs now have a deeper understanding of the forest governance system, and are building the skills, the knowledge and the technical know-how on the rules and procedures governing the exploitation of our natural resources, specifically, timber

This can in part be credited to a 15 – months capacity building project entitled *“Empowering Small-Medium Forest Enterprise through training and supervision for their effective compliance and active participation in VPA/FLEGT implementation in Ghana,”* undertaken by the Kumasi Wood Cluster Association, KWC, under the FAO EU FLEGT Programme.

Ghana ratified a bilateral Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union in 2009 to develop systems needed to control, verify and license legal timber. The agreement requires the government to issue Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) license for timber products meant for export to the European Union.

Out of the VPA, Ghana has developed a Legality Assurance System (GhLAS) and Wood Tracking System (WTS) that require that timber products are sourced from the right place and are tracked through the supply chain to ensure conformity with the rules, as well as ensuring that communities benefit from the harvesting of the timber.

To be legally compliant the forest operator must obtain relevant timber allocation rights through approved processes and comply with all the rights conditions; must meet fiscal obligations arising from forest operations which cover timber fees, ground concession rent, social responsibility agreements, compensation payments for crops damaged during harvest; must record accurately trees that were harvested; and during and after processing account for material balance between timber used and products obtained.

This is to affirm that the timber was legally sourced and thus to ensure that Ghana's timber products are eligible for the European market and the domestic market is supplied with legal timber as well.

The issuance of FLEGT license and the Domestic Timber Inspection Certificate (DOTIC) are central in the fight against illegal logging that results in the lost of essential timber species, deprivation of communities, loss of revenue to the state and deforestation, to mention but a few.

Ghana has estimated 1.6 million hectares of forest reserve and 500,000 hectares of unreserved forest from which timber can be logged. The forest sector is the fourth largest contributor to GDP with SMFESs playing a significant role.

Europe is Ghana's second major destination of its timber products. The European market imports of Ghana's wood product accounted for Euro 1.26 million from volume of 2,278.480 m³ during the month of Jan 2017, according to Ghana export of timber and wood product, January 2017 issued by the Timber Industry Development Division (TIDD) of the Forestry Commission.

The dearth of knowledge among SMFESs on documentation and legality standards presented considerable challenge to implementing the WTS. This could largely be attributed to the communication and knowledge gap between regulators and the private sector players.

Indeed, studies had shown a low level of knowledge and preparedness among SMEFs in the FLEGT licensing processes, coupled with lack of Information Technology Skills in the use of electronic devices in critical record keeping as the WTS requires some acquaintance with the use of computers.

Fifty-four (54) SMEs benefited from the capacity-building project of the KWC. They were selected through broad consultation with timber industry association, TIDD of the Forestry Commission, and other companies who source, process and distribute most of their timber and lumber products for export and domestic market. Further guided training on GhLAS and WTS processes was given to 35 companies, out of which 10 were “audited” or assessed for their FLEGT or DOTIC licensing readiness.

The project’s success can be measured from the statement, “Our operations have not been the same since our company was introduced to the project”- Millicent Woyo, Secretary to the MD, Logs Court Limited,” a beneficiary SMFE.

Besides, project information and support materials in the form of 120 pieces pen drives, 200 pieces helmets, 200 pieces of reflector jackets and 300 pieces of information leaflets; all branded in the EU FAO FLEGT program logo, have been distributed to key field staff of the 10 beneficiary SMFEs to support the campaign on health and safety observation in the companies.

Another beneficiary, Nana Addai of Lethnas Company Limited on one of the training methods used by the project has this to say “This workshop through the use of mixture of local language and English has brought the VPA process to our basic understanding unlike the other workshops where the use of technical language was common, we now understand what the importance of VPA is and we now know it is not shrouded in any myth as we thought.”

A Timber Industry Development Division Inspector, had this to say when she joined the project team to assess Boison Construction Limited, “This company qualifies to take part in the FLEGT Licensing trial shipment. I will recommend them to my superiors for future trial shipments.” (Alberta Asi Eeheakey-TIDD inspector at Sefwi Wiawso). This was as a result of the company adopting the data capturing and other management systems the project had introduced to them.

“Before the project , most of the company’s documents were kept in haphazard manner, but the project has taught us to arrange and file all documents appropriately and copies of all communications with the FC should be documented,” notes Ms Millicent Woyo, Logs Court company Limited.

Following the implementation of the project, the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are now visible in 80 per cent of beneficiary companies, a testimony of high sense of safety standards in the management, logging and marketing of forest products.

The final ten companies which were taken through the end-to-end assessment using the legality check list to assess their eligibility for their parcels being issued with FLEGT license were further exposed to the need for keeping their forest and factory environments clean and adhering to environmental considerations in their logging planning and harvesting.

They were also checked against the use of yield maps in locating the allocated trees on the field and TUC Area Maps to locate water bodies so as not to fell trees within their buffer zones.

Another significant success of the project is the gender dimension: out of the 54 SMFEs reached out to, six representing 11 per cent of them were owned by females; five, representing 9.26 per cent had females as their contact persons and another 9.26 per cent had at least a female being involved in the production process at the mill.

Additionally, systems have been installed to effectively track forest activities and collect revenues for the state and forest communities; at the same time to secure alternative livelihoods for those whose economic activities may be disrupted by implementing the legality processes.

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