

Tracking Cameroon's FLEGT timber

Developing an appropriate timber-tracking system for community forests

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Legal?: Timber sawn in the Cameroon forest. *Photo: K.S. Bobo*

One of the major innovations of the January 20 1994 N° 94/01 law establishing the forest, wildlife and fisheries system in Cameroon is the involvement of local communities in the sustainable management of natural resources through the promotion and development of community forestry. Although eighteen years have passed since the introduction of community forestry in Cameroon, uncontrolled logging is still common, leading to further increases in deforestation and the impoverishment of local communities. Due to the illegal logging of community forests (CFs), Cameroon lost 1.25 billion CFA Francs in 2008 (Cuny, 2011). With the aim of controlling the entry of illegal timber into Europe, an action plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade, widely known as FLEGT, was developed by the European Union in 2003. As a timber producing country, where 60% of timber was exported to the European market between 2005 and 2008 (Bayol *et al.*, 2012), the State of Cameroon signed a FLEGT-Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) in October 2010. Through the agreement, Cameroon showed its determination to track timber logged under all forest permits, including timber from CFs, and to control the flow of illegal timber throughout its territory.

As part of its VPA, a tracking system based on plastic tags with barcodes to be attached to all timber at every step of the chain of custody, starting from the inventory phase, was developed by Cameroon (TECSULT, 2007a,b). The tracking system yielded positive results in forest concessions and CFs where barcodes were used for export logs (Aubé and Ngomin, 2012). However, the system proved inappropriate in CFs where sawing of logs takes place where the tree is felled in the forest. Deficiencies

also include issues regarding the technical, financial and human resources necessary to implement the system within CFs. Due to the abovementioned weaknesses, it has proven difficult to cross-check data, leading to delays in the processing and uploading of data collected across CFs in Cameroon's SIGIF 2 (Second Generation Forest Management and Information) system. This paper reports research undertaken to determine which tracking system would be most appropriate for Cameroon's CFs prior to the enforcement of its FLEGT-VPA.

Poor data leads to illegality

The logging system currently in place in Cameroon's CFs cannot ensure the reliable tracking of timber. Over 95% of logging occurs outside approved plots (Nkodo, 2011) since pre-logging inventories are generally not conducted in the CFs due to their high cost relative to the available incomes of the local people (Julve *et al.*, 2007). Even in the few CFs which benefit from financial and technical capacity building via support from NGOs and others, inventories are rare and may be unreliable since the Ministry of Forestry and Fauna (MINFOF) lacks the necessary resources for ensuring efficient monitoring. Therefore, most of the Annual Logging Permits (ALP) granted to CFs throughout Cameroon are obsolete (Beauquin, 2011). This lack of reliable inventory data leads to many problems such as forest managers logging trees below the authorized diameter to be able to satisfy client orders. At the time of felling, CF managers in general do not fill in the N°10 Forest Document (FD, the field document officially required by the Forestry Administration). In other words, the tree-felling date and the number of trees logged in a plot are usually unknown. Furthermore, forest managers are not usually provided with reliable documents for

... Tracking Cameroon's FLEGT timber

tracking lumber, some of which may be stolen or diverted at the time of skidding, which entails a decrease in revenue for the communities.

A timber-tracking system for Cameroon's CFs

The proposed system is based on paper documents, in compliance with SIGIF 2 specifications, and follows the usual steps involved in CF logging operations (Figure 1). The system is based on the assumption that SIGIF 2 is operationalized, which means that: Divisional Delegations of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) are provided with workstations for operators and a working Internet connection; and SIGIF 2 is able to deliver logging permits, to record lumber produced in the CFs, and to deliver waybills (transportation documents). The key elements of the proposed system follow.

Prior to logging

CFs are allocated upon the signature of a provisional or final management agreement, and divided into 25 plots, with a pre-established annual logging plan for each plot. When the officer in charge of the CF (FOR) receives a client order, tree trackers are dispatched to locate the required species. Trees to be logged are geo-referenced and marked, and a Tree Tracking Record is filled in and sent to the Divisional Officer (DO) in charge of local forests. The information recorded in the Tree Tracking Record is entered into SIGIF 2. The DO is then able to register the client order and to give his/her approval for validating the Logging Permit produced by SIGIF 2. The number of Logging Permits produced by SIGIF 2 varies according to the number of annual orders and the annual allowable cut for a given species.

Felling and cross-cutting

After the Logging Permit is validated by the DO, the felling and cross-cutting team is dispatched to the forest and targeted trees are felled. The N°10 FD, as well as the felling and cross-cutting records, are filled in by the assistant-feller, who is also responsible for marking stumps with universal chalk (see first photo).

Sawing and timber scaling

The sawing and timber scaling team is then dispatched to the forest, provided with sawing and timber scaling records, as well as a numbering device (see second photo) and paint for marking timber. Boards are numbered by the assistant-sawyer as they are produced.

Timber skidding or hauling

An assistant is responsible for ensuring that timber to be hauled from the forest has been duly marked by the assistant-sawyer and approved on the basis of the client order. Using the Lumber Hauling Record, the skidding team leader ensures that hauled lumber is actually transported to the roadside.

Transportation and loading

The FOR returns to the local Forestry Divisional Agency and enters the Lumber Hauling Record data into SIGIF 2, which will deliver the relevant waybill, provided everything is in order. The FOR and the DO or representative will return to the site to check whether the information entered in SIGIF 2 prior to logging matches the data included in the waybill. If everything is in order, the DO or representative will stamp and sign the waybill prior to the loading of the lumber package at the roadside.



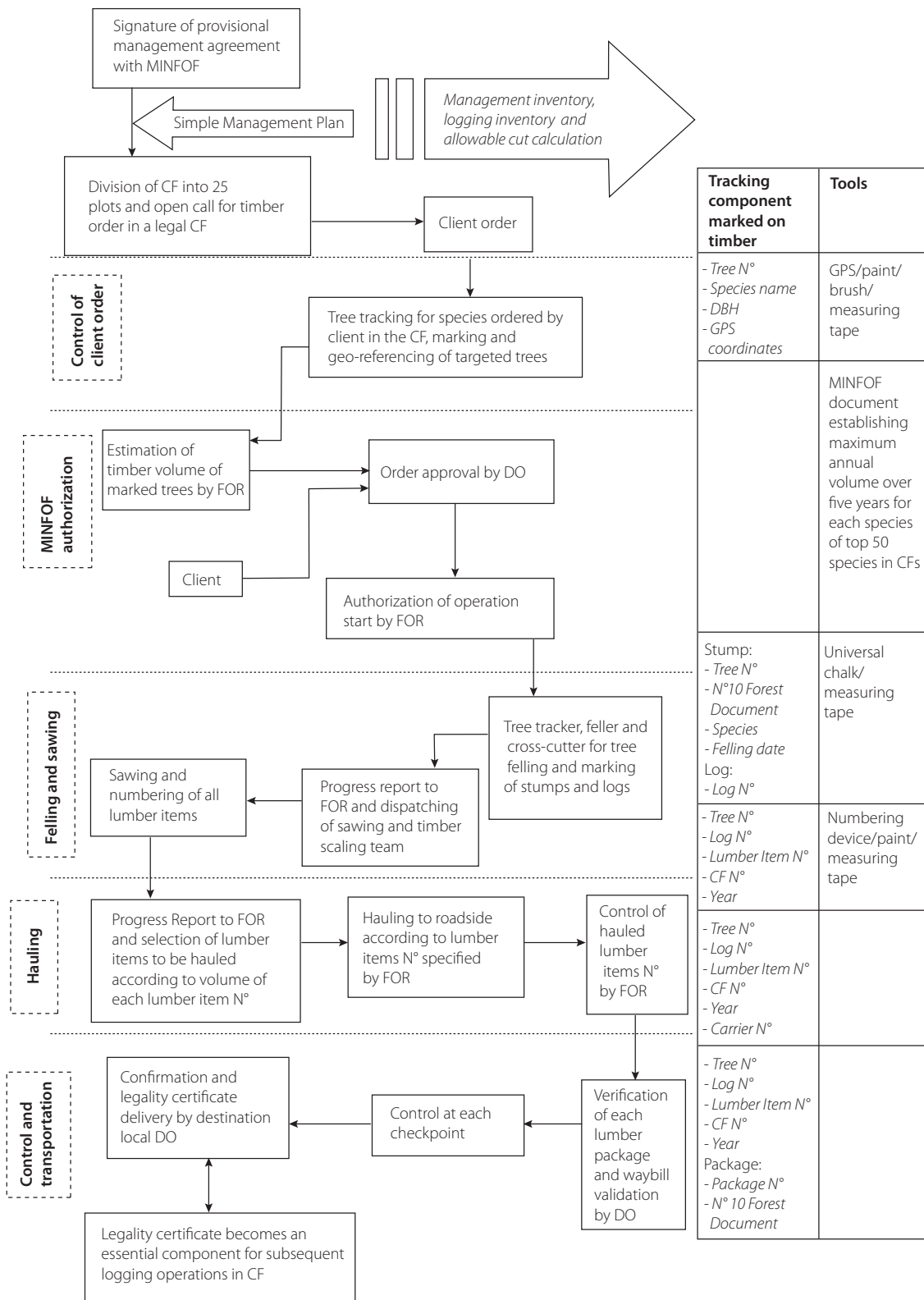
Marked: Identifying a stump using universal chalk.



...and numbered: Device for numbering sawn timber. Photos: K.S. Bobo

At checkpoints, MINFOF officers check compliance between the load and the relevant waybill. If no irregularities are identified, officers record their approval, sign and stamp the waybill with the official seal, and transportation may proceed. Upon reaching its destination, the local DO receives the load. If everything is in order,

Figure 1. Tracking system proposed for community forests in Cameroon



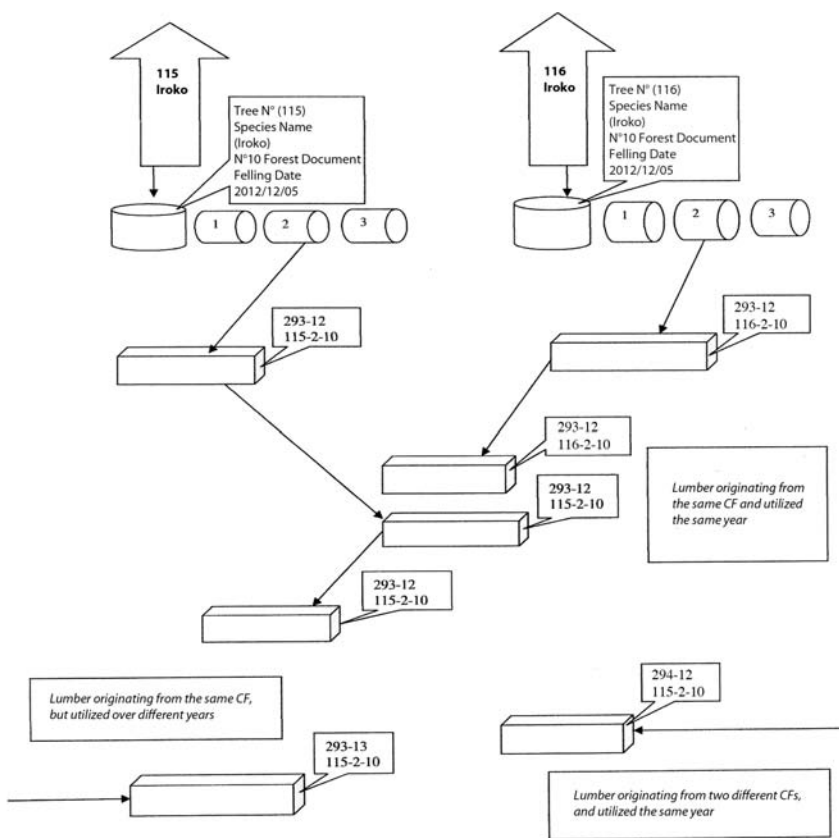
the DO signs the waybill and retains one copy for entering information in SIGIF 2 and crosschecking. If everything is in order, SIGIF 2 delivers a legality certificate to the owner of the lumber package.

Figure 2 shows the tracking methodology to be used for sawn timber by MINFOF's control officers. For instance,

lumber item N°10 from log N° 2 and tree N°115, logged in 2012 in n°293 CF will bear the code (293-12; 115-2-10). It will be easy to distinguish from another piece of timber bearing the code (293-12; 116-2-10), which refers to lumber item N° 10, log N° 2, tree N° 116, logged the same year and in the same plot.

... Tracking Cameroon's FLEGT timber

Figure 2. Tracking methodology used for sawn timber originating from community forests



Recommendations

While it is feasible for the CFs to implement the proposed tracking system, implementation would require a law amendment prior to the enforcement of the FLEGT-VPA. It is therefore recommended that the following be implemented by MINFOF, in collaboration with other partners:

1. revise and simplify the procedure for securing and logging CFs in Cameroon, as well as the method for developing Simple Management Plans (SMP) through a participatory process (as specified in the manual of allocation procedures and management standards for community forests);
2. ensure that CF managers can implement a simple and efficient tracking system;
3. simplify management inventory, logging inventory and other procedures which are often difficult to comply with for communities;
4. decentralize Logging Permit delivery at the level of the Divisional offices through SIGIF 2 for ensuring process decentralization and cost reduction; and
5. test the tracking system in Cameroon, and promote system ownership by the communities.

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