



Concept Note

Regional Workshop

Improving Forest Law Compliance and Governance in Tropical West Africa

Novotel Accra, Ghana, 15-17 July 2008

I. Background and rationale

Weak forest law compliance and enforcement contribute to severe forest degradation and deforestation. Resulting environmental damage is considerable, including loss of habitat and biodiversity, soil degradation and disturbance of forest ecosystem services. Forest degradation also adversely affects rural populations, particularly the poorest forest-dependent communities. Governments lose tax revenue through illegal forestry activities, estimated by the World Bank at US\$ 10 to 15 billion per year globally.

Illegal activities in the forest sector are a major problem in many countries of tropical West Africa², including, among others, illegal logging, wildlife poaching, timber smuggling and trade of illegally sourced timber. Recent armed conflicts in some of the countries have exacerbated the problems. Revenues from illegal logging have funded national and regional conflicts, thereby creating political instability (conflict timber). There is very little data available on the extent of illegal activities for these countries. A few years ago, it was estimated that 60 % of the total production of timber in Ghana was illegal (World Bank, 2006), but in this country, the situation has probably improved since then.

In order to address this problem, some of the West African countries have taken action. For example, Ghana is in the process of developing a voluntary partnership agreement with the European Union, which includes commitments and action from both parties to halt trade in illegal timber, notably with a license scheme to verify the legality of timber.

² Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo

The agreements will also promote better enforcement of forest law and promote an inclusive approach involving governments, civil society and the private sector. Liberia, which has recently emerged from civil war, is in the process of rebuilding its forestry sector, including the adoption of a new forest policy and law, rebuilding institutions and other measures to improve forest governance.

In 2006, West African countries embarked on a process called the “West Africa forest dialogue”, which was formally endorsed by the Environment Ministers of the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) in April 2007. This process, whose coordination was assigned to ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), is aimed at supporting cooperation on forestry matters within the sub-region bringing together the 15 countries and the sub-regional economic integration organizations through government structures, civil society and private operators.

This cooperation will, among others, facilitate the implementation of the ECOWAS forest policy, increase attention to sustainable management and good governance of forest resources and foster the development of networks based on a common vision, options and objectives.

Over the past two years, FAO and ITTO have assisted countries in the Amazon region, Central Africa, Central America and Southeast Asia in jointly addressing illegal logging and trade through a series of regional workshops. Based on the FAO/ITTO publication “Best Practices for Law Enforcement in the Forest Sector” and their own experiences, countries identified the main problems and impacts of illegal forestry activities in their regions; shared experiences on ongoing initiatives to improve forest law compliance and started a dialogue on possible ways to address illegality in the forest sector; identified the most promising elements of a strategy to improve forest law compliance; and strengthened regional networks on forest law enforcement.

The workshops were designed to foster more openness regarding the problems as well as showcasing possible approaches to improving forest law compliance at the country level based on current experiences. They encouraged countries that have been reluctant to make the improvement of forest law enforcement a priority issue to start taking actions. The current regional workshop intends to contribute in a similar way to improving forest law compliance and governance in the countries of tropical West Africa.

II. Objective and outcomes

The objective of the regional workshop is to promote a multi-sectorial dialogue between the countries of tropical West Africa and an exchange of ideas and experiences related to best practices for improving law compliance in the forest sector, and to agree on tangible and deliverable actions to enhance progress on the ground.

Expected outcomes of the workshop are:

- Participants will be aware of different alternatives existing in the countries of the region to address the problem of illegal activities in the forestry sector.

- Enhanced dialogue among different stakeholders, i.e. forestry authorities, civil society organizations and the private sector;
- Participants have identified strategies and key actions to improve forest law compliance in their respective countries.
- Regional networking and existing initiatives for improving forest law compliance, such as the AFLEG process, will be strengthened.

III. Participants

From each of the countries (Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo) representatives of the following stakeholder groups will be invited:

- national forestry authorities responsible for forestry regulation and control;
- representatives of programmes, projects and initiatives to improve forest law compliance and governance
- members of civil society organizations active in combating illegal activities in forestry
- representatives from the forest industry/and or wood products traders

In addition, relevant regional and international organizations and development partners will also attend.

IV. Workshop dates and venue

The workshop will take place on 15-17 July 2008 at the Novotel in Accra, Ghana

V. Organization

The workshop will be convened under the auspices of the Ghana Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Lands, Forests and Mines, with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), and in collaboration with other related initiatives in the region.

VI. Workshop methodology

- Presentations by countries on their experiences in improving law compliance in the forest sector and combating illegal logging and trade based on an outline provided by the organizers
- Panel discussion on regional initiatives in forestry and FLEGT in West Africa
- Presentation of the “Best practices” initiative by FAO and ITTO and the major themes of the publication:
 - sector policy and legal framework
 - institutional structures and mechanisms for participation of civil society
 - Technology and information.
- Discussion of the main themes in working groups

- Panel of representatives of different segments of the forestry sector to explore ways to strengthen regional cooperation

The joint FAO/ITTO publication “*Best Practices for Improving Law Compliance in the Forest Sector*” will serve as a reference for the discussions. The main outcomes of the workshop will be summarized in a final statement.

The workshop languages are English and French and interpretation will be provided.

References

FAO and ITTO. 2005. *Best practices for improving law compliance in the forest sector*. FAO Forestry Paper 145, Rome.

World Bank. 2006. *Strengthening forest law enforcement and governance*. Report No. 36638-GLB, The World Bank, Washington, D.C.