

Programme Evaluation Series

Evaluation of the FAO-EU forest law enforcement, governance and trade programme – Phase III

**GCP/GLO/600/MUL
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Annex 3. Cameroon case study

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ASD	Action for Sustainable Development
CERAD	Cercle d'Action et de Réflexion pour le Développement
CF	Community forest
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FECAPROBOIS	<i>Fédération Camerounaise des Associations et des Professionnels de la Seconde Transformation du Bois</i>
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade
FODER	<i>Forêts et Développement Rural</i>
GFBC	<i>Groupement de la Filière Bois au Cameroun</i>
KfW	<i>Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau</i> (German Financial Cooperation)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SAILD	<i>Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement</i>
SIGIF	<i>Système informatisé de gestion de l'information forestière</i>
SNOIE	Standardized External Independent Observation System
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and methodology

1. Background. This document presents the country case study on Cameroon, as part of the Final Evaluation of the third phase of the FAO-EU programme “Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade”, hereafter referred to as FLEGT-III, phase three or the programme. The programme is financed by the European Commission (EC), Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)¹ of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The programme is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The evaluation looked at the programme in its whole but has used case studies to have a closer look at six countries in particular to assess the evaluation questions at country level. Cameroon is one of these.
2. Methodology. The selection of countries case studies was based on the following criteria:
 - i. importance, age and size of the FLEGT portfolio in the country;
 - ii. balance between Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) and non-VPA countries;
 - iii. geographical balance across and within the regions;
 - iv. information-rich cases to illustrate both good practices and challenges we can learn from (partners/stakeholders; technical areas; gender, small and medium-sized enterprise [SMEs], etc.);
 - v. availability of previous assessments for comparison (either provided by the mid-term evaluation or case studies from CIFOR/ADE);
 - vi. inclusion of countries that were not yet assessed;
 - vii. good country-level support & coordination to set up interviews; and
 - viii. probability of significant development after the mid-term evaluation.
3. Cameroon was selected on the following criteria: Central Africa, VPA, large focus country, challenges in agreements with Government and European Union, project started ten years ago but not yet implemented.
4. The evaluation has adopted a participatory, consultative approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. The evaluation has sought to include marginalized voices and include a gender approach, thereby noting the differentiated impacts of the programme on men and women.
5. The evaluation was based on the review of documentation,² stakeholder interviews and the review of qualitative and quantitative evidence (data, publications, progress reports) to gather information. This information is as much as possible validated and triangulated by a combination of information sources. Based on this, findings were elaborated. The evaluation report presents the findings according to the six main evaluation questions included in the evaluation matrix (Appendix 3 in the overall evaluation report). In the

¹ Previously (until September 2020) called Department for International Development.

² See bibliography at the end of the document.

section on outcomes, it focussed on outcome 1, 3, 4 and 6. Outcome 2 targeted only non-VPA countries and outcome 5 targeted overall programme impact; therefore, these outcomes were not analysed in this case-study.

6. The case-study is not an evaluation of the FAO-EU FLEGT programme in Cameroon, but supports the overall evaluation. Therefore, the findings of the case study supported the findings in the overall report and no conclusions or recommendations were elaborated for the country.
7. At the core of the evaluation work was a series of bilateral and group interviews with different stakeholders, following a list prepared by the FAO management team,³ that was validated and complimented by the evaluator. Interviews did not follow a one-way question-answer pattern, but were carried out in such a way that the interviewees were free to provide any information they wanted about the programme and deemed important to be included in the report. A summary of the representation of persons consulted can be found below:

Stakeholder group	Number of Persons
Government officers	0
Civil society organizations/community organizations	3
Private sector/private sector associations	3
Bilateral/multilateral agencies	8
Total	14

1.2 Limitations

8. There was no time for the evaluation team to review all available documentation, assess all country projects in depth or contact every stakeholder (direct or indirect) of the programme. Therefore, careful sampling of documentation, data and stakeholders has been done in cooperation with the FAO programme management team.
9. There were international travel restrictions related to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, in-country missions by the evaluation team were impossible and all preparations, interviews, triangulation have been done by teleconferencing means. This resulted in less opportunity for important additional communication with key stakeholders such direct interaction, informal conversations, field and facilities observation and immediate follow up. Since the evaluation relied on teleconferencing means, less people in total were interviewed, particularly local stakeholders at community level that have no or little access to telecommunication tools.
10. In total 24 people were contacted for interviews, but only 14 replied. When the quality of communication via teleconferencing means was poor, the evaluator found other solutions to communicate. Despite these limitations, and the absence of government officers in the list of people consulted, the level of information collected through the interviews can be considered as satisfactory for this evaluation. Additional information was collected through review of documents.

³ See list of people contacted and interviewed in Appendix 1.

2. Background

2.1 Context of the programme

11. The FAO-EU FLEGT programme in Cameroon. While a Forest Law and its implementing Decree were adopted in 1994 and 1995 in Cameroon respectively, at the beginning of the 2000s a number of inconsistencies and conflicting regulations remained. According to the synthesis report on “collecting Evidence of FLEGT-VPA Impacts for Improved FLEGT Communication” (CIFOR, ADE, 2020), preparatory discussions about the FLEGT Action Plan and notably VPAs commenced in Cameroon around 2004. Official VPA negotiations with the EU started in 2007, before signing the VPA on 6 October 2010 and ratifying it on 9 August 2011.
12. The same report states that the first three-year preparatory phase was designed to lead the way to issuing the first FLEGT license, with the implementation of a Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS). The development of a functioning TLAS experienced a number of difficulties. In the meantime, an official step was taken by the Ministry of Forests and Fauna towards the future issuance of FLEGT-licences with the adoption of a Decree which, when fulfilled by logging companies, would grant them a ‘certificate of legality’, which would pave the way for them to obtain FLEGT-licences when available to be issued (Ministry of Forests and Fauna, 2013).
13. According to the position of European partners on the 2nd generation *Système informatisé de gestion de l'information forestière* (SIGIF2) in Cameroon (28.04.21) developed in Cameroon in 2015 as part of the TLAS, SIGIF2 should have been a crucial step in the implementation of the VPA FLEGT. However, its development has been the subject of differences between the Ministry of Forests and Fauna on the one hand and the European Union and Germany, via the German Financial Cooperation (KfW), on the other. The latter expressed their differences throughout the SIGIF2 development and evaluation process, while offering their material, financial and technical support to resolve these differences. The Ministry of Forests and Fauna contracted a service provider with funding from KfW for a 14-month contract. The contract was extended for 34 months due to complicated validation of intermediate deliverables by the reception commission. Finally, the version of SIGIF2 delivered in November 2018. While it was accepted by the Ministry of Forests and Fauna’s services, it was not accepted by the ad hoc Commission, because it did not comply with the specifications: The tests carried out by an independent consultant revealed malfunctions. This is why the EU and Germany were not able until recently to recognise the current version of SIGIF2 (this is further discussed in section 3.2 on Outcomes). The parties have reached an arrangement at the last joint committee of VPA, which states that SIGIF II will be used for the moment only for timber in circulation on Cameroonian territory and an evaluation of SIGIF II and potential improvement for export timber could be considered after a certain period.
14. According to the FAO-EU FLEGT programme webpage on Cameroon (2021), despite significant progress on other things, such as transparency (independent monitoring and information sharing), delays in the design of the Legality Assurance System have hampered the implementation of the VPA process. In this context, the Programme's aim during Phase III has been to maintain momentum around the implementation of the VPA, by addressing specific needs related to certain stages of implementation, but also by working more

generally towards the FLEGT objectives. The programme's strategy has been centred around several priorities: transparency, legalisation of the domestic market, and support to the implementation of the timber traceability system.

15. Projects funded by FLEGT III. According to the information found in the annual report 2020 Phase III FAO-EU FLEGT programme (FAO-EU FLEGT, 2021) and on the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme web site (2021), 29 projects were funded during Phase III of the programme for a total amount of USD 3 220 967.74 requested.
16. Table 1 below shows that service providers related to civil society organisations benefited from the largest number of projects (12) and the highest budget (53.4 percent of the total budget). Service providers related to the private sector followed closely behind, with 11 projects and 31 percent of the budget.

Table 1. Repartition of projects and budgets between the different categories of actors

	SP → CSO	SP → PS ⁴	GRP	GOV	TOTAL
GFBC		4			4
SAILD	3				3
FECAPROBOIS		3			3
FODER	2				2
ASD		2			2
WCS	2				2
CIDT			2		2
Ministry of Forests and Fauna				2	2
CIFOR			2		2
FLAG	1				1
CED	1				1
CERAD		1			1
APED	1				1
FFE-PCS		1			1
GDA	1				1
FASA	1				1
TOTAL	12	11	4	2	29
Budgets	1 718 220.74	1 004 694	340 570	157 483	3 220 967.74
%	53.4%	31%	10.6%	5%	100%

Notes: SP: service provider; CSO: civil society organization; PS: private sector; GRP: global and regional partners; GOV: government.

Source: 2020 annual report.

17. Looking at the themes of the projects through the keywords found in the titles of projects or in the specific objectives (Table 2), we see that legality, VPA and the domestic timber market are the most cited. The terms FLEGT and legality are very closely associated as the aim of the FLEGT Action Plan is to improve governance and reduce illegal logging by strengthening legal forest management, improving governance and promoting trade in legal timber. The measures in the Action Plan are designed to increase both the demand for and supply of legal timber. The priority is given to the domestic timber market since in

⁴ Two of the service providers in this category are respectively Federations of professional associations and groups in the timber sector, and as such directly represent the Private Sector, the others being NGOs that have submitted projects to support domestic market players (ASD, FFE-PCS) or forestry companies (CERAD)

Cameroon, as in some other countries (Congo, Côte d'Ivoire), this market has been integrated into the VPA, along with the export market.

Table 2. Repartition by key word

Themes	Number
Legality	18
VPA	12
Domestic timber market	10
Community forestry, local population, pop. locales	5
Governance	3
Traceability	2
Transparency	2

Source: Analysis by evaluation team.

18. Community forests (CF) have been the subject of various support projects, as they should constitute a legal source of supply for the domestic timber market, whereas on the contrary they largely feed the illegal domestic timber market. The study carried out by the *Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement* (SAILD) and FAO (FOMOU, VANDENHAUTE, FEUJIO, 2017) with funding from the FAO programme indicates that since the first convention of its kind was signed in 1997, the number of applications to establish CFs has continued to increase. The Eastern region had the highest number of CF applications (300), of which 119 were active. The results of the study carried out on 30 CFs targeted in the Haut Nyong department indicate that legality and traceability are not properly taken into account in the exploitation process of these CF. At the time, these CF could not obtain a certificate of legality and were therefore unable to supply the domestic market, let alone export their timber to European markets. Five main reasons were cited: i) the absence of specific legislation or at least legislation adapted to community forestry; ii) the lack of technical and financial support from the government as provided for in the texts; iii) the weak operationality of state governance structures; iv) the difficulty of making the logging activities carried out economically viable; and v) the weakness of the CF organisational structures; and the internal conflicts that undermine them. CFs are able to obtain FLEGT licenses, yet it all depends on their will and that of the State to set up a traceability system adapted to the context of CFs. This is what FAO has successfully tested in SAILD's SVCL project (*Mise en œuvre du Système de Vérification Communautaire de la légalité des bois des Forêts Communautaires au Cameroun*) in pilot CFs.

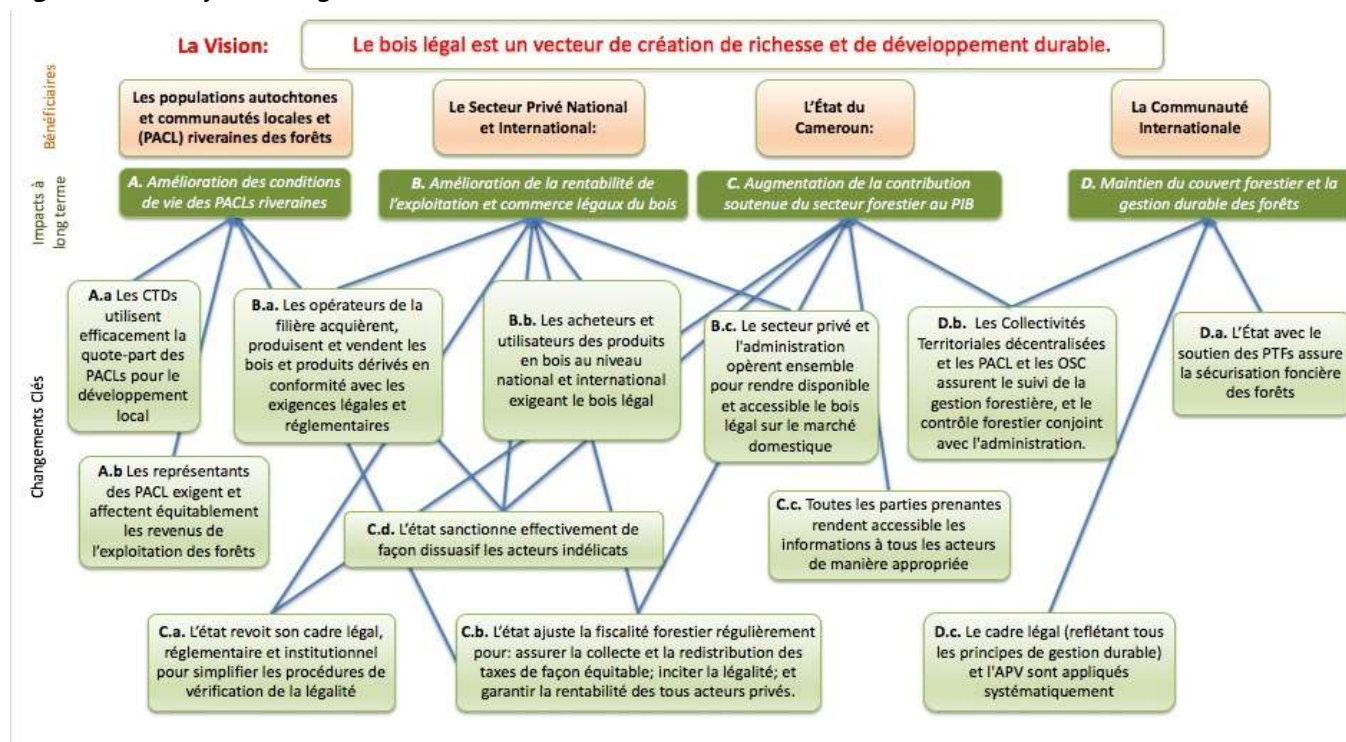
2.2 Theory of change

19. According to the ATIBT web page "*Les défis et les recommandations identifiées pour relancer l'APV FLEGT au Cameroun*" (03.05.2019), at the Joint Monitoring Committee meeting of 17 May 2018, the European Union and Cameroon agreed to conduct a joint review of the Agreement and its implementation.
20. Initiated in February 2019, this joint evaluation mission began with a first phase of surveys and consultations of the various stakeholders on the assessment of the FLEGT-VPA and the results were presented during a national exchange and synthesis workshop from 16 to 17 April 2019 in Mfou (Yaoundé). The objectives of this workshop were to validate these results, to agree on the progress and difficulties of the VPA and to identify the main challenges to be addressed as well as the main orientations for the continuation of the VPA-FLEGT process in Cameroon. This national multi-stakeholder workshop developed a

joint theory of change (TOC), roadmap and communication strategy to reinvigorate the VPA process over the next seven years.

21. As stated on the LOGGINGOFF webpage on the “Actualité-APV-janvier-2020” (last update January 2020), and on the document “pour garantir la réussite de FLEGT gardons le cap !” (LOGGINGOFF and FERN, 2020), the following impediments were highlighted: i) the monopoly of the Ministry of Forestry over forest management; ii) lack of inter-ministerial coordination; iii) insufficient incentives and sanctions to encourage key actors to change their behaviour; iv) cases of corruption; v) lack of political will; vi) ineffective enforcement of the European Union Timber Regulation; and vii) lack of dialogue with Asian countries. Solutions were formulated for each of these problems and integrated into the strategy, roadmap and work plans. A new website dedicated to the Cameroon-EU VPA was presented as an essential tool to improve access to information.
22. More than six months after the national VPA workshop, the action plan, strategy and roadmap have not yet been officially validated. According to some interviewees, a meeting of the National Monitoring Committee was supposed to be held to endorse the valuable collective work carried out in 2019, however this has not happened. Since it was not used to monitor the progress of the process, the evaluation will not comment on it. The evaluation did observe that the multiplication of monitoring tools (logical framework, indicators, theory of change, capacity works, etc.), if not well controlled, could lead to a certain confusion and a dispersion of energies, which could end up being counterproductive. In its session of March 2021, the National Committee concluded that the VPA roadmap must be simplified.

Figure 1. Theory of change for the FLEGT VPA in Cameroon



Source: Rapport de l'atelier national d'élaboration de la Théorie de Changement, la Feuille de Route et la Stratégie de communication pour l'APV-FLEGT au Cameroun, 17 – 20 juin 2019.

3. Evaluation findings

3.1 Relevance

Evaluation Question 1: To what extent has the programme design (and particularly, its revisions at mid-term) remained appropriate vis-à-vis its expected objectives and outcomes?

Finding 1. Despite the disagreement between the European Union and the Ministry of Forests and Fauna on SIGIF2, the programme remained relevant to national and local forest governance objectives, trade priorities and market demands. It contributed to maintain the dialogue between the different stakeholders and to reinforce their capacities. The programme is well aligned to the EU-FLEGT Action Plan.

23. In the final report of the evaluation of the EU FLEGT Action Plan (April 2016), its relevance is recognised: "The results of the private sector survey indicate that the majority of private sector respondents (78 percent) believe that the FLEGT Action Plan is still relevant. They appreciate that illegal logging is on the international political agenda and that efforts are being made to consult with all relevant stakeholders. In Cameroon for example, the VPA process can provide a framework for dialogue and negotiation among stakeholder groups about conversion. Civil society groups and the Joint Monitoring Committee have questioned the procedures issued by the Forest Commission for salvaging the timber (through so-called Ventes de Coupe and public auctions) that comes from land allocated to development projects, arguing that the adopted procedures are not in line with what was foreseen in the legality grid. In response, the Forest Commission has committed to clarifying the rules to be applied in such cases".
24. Despite the delays in the design of the Legality Assurance System, which hinder the implementation of the whole VPA process, the relevance of the FAO FLEGT programme was confirmed by many interviewees, as it maintains momentum and dynamics around the implementation of the VPA by addressing specific needs related to certain stages of implementation, but also by working more generally towards the objectives of FLEGT. Furthermore, interviewees recognize that the FAO-EU FLEGT programme was useful to monitor the VPA process and provide support where needed according to the needs (bottom-up approach). It was essential to have a mechanism to fund all partners (Civil Society, Private Sector and administrations) to ensure that activities progressed.
25. Even if the progress of the VPA process was blocked, it was necessary to continue to have a dialogue between stakeholders. National non-governmental organizations (NGOs) monitor the actions of the private sector or report to the government on what is observed in terms of illegality in the forests. There has been collaboration between the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the Ministry of Forests and Fauna to set up a system for the exchange of legal timber on the domestic market between small-scale operators and clients, and a lot of lobbying by CIFOR in the context of the FLEGT programme, which led finally to the signing of a decree bringing together three ministries and making it compulsory to use legal timber in public contracts. The virtual platform set up by CIFOR and the Ministry of Forests and Fauna is not used to supply small operators but to supply public procurement; the platform therefore provides information on the volumes of wood available from holders of legal forest titles.

26. Some partners are still questioning the relevance of the Programme. With the disagreement and non-development of SIGIF2, which is the ultimate point of Cameroon's non-engagement in the FLEGT VPA, they feel that things are looking differently. In the ten years that the FLEGT VPA has been in operation, they feel that the proportion of illegal timber has increased (including for export), mainly due to the poor governance that has been established in the system. However, some donors such as the European Union, the KfW and *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ), have reaffirmed recently their common and firm determination to make a success of their commitment to the FLEGT VPA, whose aim is to put an end to illegal logging and the associated trade (European Union Cameroon, KfW GIZ. 2021).

3.2 Outcomes

Evaluation Question 2: To what degree has the programme achieved its set outcomes?

Finding 2. The programme has targeted the VPA mainly through the legality and governance dimensions, the demand for and supply of legal timber on the domestic timber market and support to CF. The evaluation found that the programme has the most visible achievements for outcomes 1, 4, 5 and 6 and to a lesser extent to outcome 3.

27. The revised log frame of the FAO FLEGT programme as presented in the Annex 2 of the annual report 2020 of the FAO-EU FLEGT programme (Rome, 2021) identified six outcomes, i.e.: i) VPAs contribute to improved forest sector governance and timber legality on domestic and international markets; ii) initiatives that support legal production and consumption of timber and better forest sector governance in countries that are not engaged in the VPA process are strengthened;⁵ iii) the capacity of private sector (particularly micro, small & medium enterprises [MSMEs]) to participate in the trade of legal timber has increased; iv) stakeholders in both consumer and producer countries demonstrate an improved knowledge of benefits from legal logging, international trade requirements and of best practices for forest law enforcement, governance and trade; v) the progress, achievements and impacts of the FLEGT action plan are better understood and information is made available through updated, robust and user-friendly information system; and vi) increased technical and institutional capacities of Service Providers. The following points will analyse if these outcomes were achieved.
28. Given the complexity of the programme, it must be acknowledged that the project management team has made a remarkable effort to produce a well-structured logical framework with indicators for the different levels of outcomes and outputs. However, it should be noted that the table specifies that the impact indicators on more equitable forest management and the indicators for outcome 6 will be measured at the end of the Programme Phase III (in the Annex 2 of the annual report 2020 there are no figures presented). Furthermore, the indicators have not been quantified, which is understandable given the complexity and heterogeneity of the programme and because the focus was more on process and demand based. However, this makes it much more difficult to judge the degree of achievement of the objectives when analysing the outcomes, as they have not been quantified beforehand.

⁵ Outcomes 1 and 2 are the same except that 1 is for VPA countries and 2 is for countries that are not engaged in the VPA process.

29. Outcome 1: improved forest sector governance and timber legality in VPAs countries. According to the majority of interviewees, an important achievement is related to independent observation together with civil society organizations. Based on the principle that the civil society organization had a role to play in monitoring logging activities in the field, a third party was added in addition to the administration and the private sector by introducing organisations that specialise in and collect information directly in the field. The FAO programme helped to consolidate what already existed in Cameroon. According to information collected in Annex 2 of the annual report 2020 of the FAO EU FLEGT programme, indicator 1 (number and description of forest-governance related documents that have been made public as a result of Programme support) for this outcome has been fulfilled with the launch of the Open Timber Portal (OTP) in the country in 2019 and indicator 2 (number and description of infractions reported by independent monitors) has been achieved with 14 independent forest monitoring reports validated by the Ministry of Forests and Fauna which led to 11 interventions by local authorities and three follow-up missions jointly led by local authorities and civil society organizations.
30. All the activities for which *Forêts et Développement Rural* (FODER) received funding from the programme aimed to contribute to strengthening forest governance and legality in the forest sector, notably through capacity building of civil society organizations involved in independent observation on forest legality, the organisation of multi-stakeholder meetings bringing together all stakeholders (discussions on forest legality, control), and also on the implementation and monitoring of the application of sanctions for cases of infractions that were identified in the whistle blower reports and that nailed some forestry companies.

Box 1. Brief recap of FAO FLEGT and FODER collaboration

The FAO FLEGT programme has allowed FODER to develop external independent observation activities in the following projects:

- ✓ "The OE FLEGT 2 project" in 2015, with focus on the development and implementation of a Standardized External Independent Observation System (SNOIE)⁶ based on the requirements of the international standard ISO 9001 on quality management.
- ✓ "The Standardised Independent Observation System Implementation Project (SNOIE project)" from 2016 to 2017. This project aimed to contribute to the sustainable management of forest resources and the implementation of the VPA-FLEGT through the implementation of the Standardized Independent Observation System.
- ✓ "The Independent Monitoring of Timber Supply Chains and Amplification of Independent Forest Observation Information Project (Relai-OI Project)" from 2019 to 2020. The objective of this project was to develop and implement a methodology for independent monitoring of timber supply chains and to strengthen the monitoring of REM recommendations at the national level through the involvement of EUWR stakeholders (EUWR-PPP) and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Management Bodies (CITES-MB).

Source: FAO EU FLEGT Website (2021).

31. While the development of the national traceability system is considered an issue in FLEGT VPA (TEREA, 2016) and cited as an indicator of the ineffectiveness of the FLEGT Action Plan because it was not achieved (CIFOR and ADE, 2020 quoting FODER, 2017), the FAO

⁶ The Standardized System of Independent External Observation (SNOIE) is a grouping of civil society organizations that carry out independent observation of natural resource management following a quality policy, standardized procedures and tools, in accordance with the requirements of ISO 9001.

programme worked with better success on the traceability system for forest enterprises (two projects with “*Groupement de la Filière Bois au Cameroun*” [GFBC]), and for wood from community forests (two projects with SAILD). It also supported the participation of civil society and forest communities in the revision of the legality grids (projects with Green Development Advocates (GDA), GFBC and the Ministry of Forests and Fauna). Annex 2 of the annual report 2020 of FLEGT-III mentions that an indicator on legality/traceability has been achieved, i.e.: one community legality verification application compatible with national traceability system has been developed. However, the evaluation was not able to verify this.

32. The focus on the domestic market, has resulted in the obligation to give preference to legal timber for public procurement (decree issued by three Ministries – see box below). This was possible thanks to an effective collaboration between the FAO-FLEGT programme and CIFOR and the Research and Action Center for Sustainable Development (CERAD) which had the technical and scientific skills. In order to supply the domestic market, the programme also tried to interest industrial companies in the domestic market. But this attempt failed due to existing barriers at the fiscal level. For example, if the companies have to pay taxes, it is not deemed profitable to bring the wood to the big cities. This would require a revision of the regulatory framework, but this has not (yet) been done.

Box 2. Use of legal timber now mandatory in public procurement in Cameroon

In Cameroon, Government orders account for the largest share of sawn wood and furniture purchased in the country. As legal timber is scarce on the domestic market, these orders inadvertently support illegal timber production and trade. To address this issue, the Ministry of Forestry and Fauna, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Public Procurement have signed a joint decree on December 15, 2020 making the use of legal timber mandatory in public procurement in the country. All timber used in public works and supplies must now conform to a set of legal criteria and carry a legality certificate and a certificate of origin. Cameroon has become one of the first African countries to require the use of legal wood and timber in all its public procurement procedures.

This landmark policy is the result of sustained efforts led by CIFOR, the Ministry of Forests and Fauna and CERAD, a national non-governmental organization, started in 2016 thanks to support from the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme. In 2019, the Programme organized a regional workshop in Abidjan to discuss the challenges and opportunities of promoting legal timber through public procurement. The Cameroonian Delegation attended the workshop alongside stakeholders from Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Republic of the Congo and Gabon, where it shared knowledge and reiterated its commitment to the development of public procurement policies for the purchase of legally sourced timber. Today, the decree shows the engagement of national authorities towards timber legality objectives, sustainable forest management and commitments made under the Voluntary Partnership Agreement signed in 2010.

Source: FAO EU FLEGT Website (2021) and EU FLEGT Facility Webpage. News archive. 2021 and FAO web page on Forestry, Sustainable wood: Enhancing legality of the wood value chain – Cameroon. December 23, 2020.

33. Despite of all the efforts and support given to the domestic market in order to improve forest sector governance and timber legality, many interviewees, confirmed by the CIFOR report (CIFOR, ADE. 2020), find that the domestic market continues to concentrate most of the illegal trafficking. Furthermore, the regulations applied to its activities are still largely unsuitable and incentives are non-existent. This makes it difficult for actors in this sector to comply with the requirements of the VPA FLEGT.

34. Outcome 3: Enhanced capacity for private sector to participate in legal timber trade. In Annex 2 of the annual report 2020 of the programme, the first indicator for this outcome is formulated as follows: increased publicly available information on private sector (including formal/informal) in producer countries. A market study and legality gap analysis was planned for Cameroon. The evaluation found a report (CIFOR, 2017) on “National demand for sawnwood in Cameroon: A barrier to or an opportunity for promoting the use of timber resources of legal origin?”, which gives interesting figures and perspectives on the future situation of sawnwood of legal origin.
35. Furthermore, FLEGT III put an effort to favour applications from the private sector, in particular those involving wood craftsmen (forestry and artisanal wood processing), trade unions or professional organisations. Two professional organisations have benefited from programme support (*Fédération Camerounaise des Associations et des Professionnels de la Seconde Transformation du Bois* [FECAPROBOIS] and GFBC) in Cameroon.
36. Through the funding granted to these organisations, beneficiaries recognised that the programme has contributed to strengthening the involvement of the private sector in the implementation of the FLEGT VPA and also to building the capacity of the private sector for better law enforcement. As found in the GFBC report (2017), there has been support for industrial exporting companies to help them set up traceability systems. There were very effective traceability systems in some private companies and the FAO tried to disseminate them via the GFBC union so that as many companies as possible could benefit from them. At the same time, the evaluation couldn't find any evidence that it has been done.
37. Through the interviews, the evaluation learned that the programme also worked with smaller companies, particularly small-scale processors in cities such as Yaoundé, Douala, among others, who have had great difficulty in obtaining legal wood supply. The artisanal wood processors did not have access for a long time to social development mechanisms such as financing from existing banks, public markets, quality raw material (wood of legal origin) etc. This access was made possible through the FAO programme. However some barriers continue to exist. The law passed in 1998 in Cameroon created CF with the idea that they could supply the entire domestic market, but according to some programme partners this does not work because the CF imagined that they would be able to export their wood (the most lucrative sector). There are barriers (notably administrative) and important interests behind them that contribute to the blockage at this level.
38. Regarding indicator 2: number and description of cases where the Programme has created or improved the enabling conditions for MSMEs, the evaluation found on the FAO-EU FLEGT webpage “our projects” (2021) and through information collected during the interviews, that ESSOR for “Essor des demandes publiques et privées en sciages d'origine légale au Cameroun”, targeted artisanal sawyers to legalise their activity. CIFOR, together with CERAD, a local NGO and the Ministry of Forests and Fauna, proposed a complementary approach, which aimed at facilitating the legalisation of this sector by promoting the demand for legal timber. In the first project, an attempt was made to understand the national demand for timber (instead of supply). Without demand for legal timber, it would have been difficult to convince sawyers and intermediaries to go legal. ESSOR II supported the development of a virtual interface/platform (internal timber market) on which legal timber suppliers will be able to offer the products and volumes they have via a telephone application in order to meet the demands for legal timber.

39. Regarding indicator 3: number and description of private sector associations formed or made more sustainable following Programme support, the annual report mentions that 20 private sector associations were strengthened, of which 18 were formalized through Programme support. Support to the private sector was also made through trade unions that are involved in the implementation of the Standardized External Independent Observation System (SNOIE), notably at the level of the evaluation of the reports which is done by the Technical and Ethical Evaluation Committee (CTE).⁷ Furthermore, according to beneficiaries, the creation of a cooperative (COOP EXTRABOIS CAM) for the support to production and purchase of legal timber and the formalisation of partnerships with legal wood supply sources was possible thanks to FAO FLEGT programme.
40. Outcome 4: Improved knowledge about the benefits, best practices and requirements of legal timber and trade. The beneficiaries of various projects funded by the programme, including CIFOR, Action for Sustainable Development (ASD) and SAILD projects, recognised that these projects have contributed to improving stakeholders' awareness of legal timber, the knowledge of wood processors and their involvement in transparent trade. This was achieved by working with the media, to involve them in a training programme to improve their capacity to deal with forestry-related issues, and strengthening the participation of local communities living in logging areas through ongoing work to raise awareness of illegal logging.
41. According to information collected during the interviews, through the recently funded "Timber Supply Chain Monitoring Project" (FAO-EU FLEGT programme, 2021; FODER, 2019), customs officers have gained a better understanding of the VPA, the texts of the agreement, the implementing order and information provision.
42. Outcome 5: Better understanding of the progress, achievements and impact of the FLEGT process. Interviews confirmed that particularly through the last project which aimed to improve understanding of the EUBP and CITES management bodies in the context of the implementation of the FLEGT Action Plan, project managers have gained a better understanding of the FLEGT process.
43. Outcome 6: Increased technical and institutional capacities of Service Providers. In Cameroon capacity building of NGOs has received strong and concrete support from the programme and the increased capacity of service providers has been recognized by the majority of interviewees. This was strongly linked to the operational mode of the programme which enabled some national NGOs to increase their voice and competence. For example, a number of small NGOs are now able to apply for various funding (FODER, SAILD, etc.). Three indicators are formulated in the log frame for this outcome, i.e.: i) number of Local civil society organizations and private sector organizations securing further funding after project implementation; ii) percentage of projects resulting in outcomes actively sustained by their implementing grantees; iii) percentage of grantees with significant capacity improvement. However, in Annex 2 of the annual report 2020 it is

⁷ The CTE is a non-permanent body set up by FODER with the aim of guaranteeing the technical and ethical quality of the IOE reports before their publication by FODER. The mission of the CTE is to examine and analyse external observation reports and to give commented opinions and recommendations on the technicality, relevance, objectivity and morality of the reports submitted to its appreciation. The CTE is composed of six members or experts respectively from a civil society organisation, a public administration, a forestry company or a private sector organisation, a research institution and law firms. They are appointed on the basis of complementary profiles (foresters, lawyers, business managers, researchers and lawyers).

only mentioned that “these indicators will be measured at the end of the Programme Phase III”. Therefor the evaluation findings for this outcome is mostly based on the interviews and review of documents.

44. For example, representatives of FODER and SAILD recognised that they have been strengthened and have solid teams. Many of the people who worked in these NGOs are now in other organisations or intervening in forums, even international ones. Visible impacts in terms of mobilisation and volume of funding, in terms of human resources who have joined other international organisations, in terms of drafting capacity for offers, in terms of internal expertise. However, these structures can only survive if funding is available.
45. With regard to FODER, the FAO FLEGT programme has enabled the development of external independent observation activities. More specifically, the support of the programme has enabled the development of a tool that is now a reference in terms of independent observation: the development (2015) and implementation (2016) of the SNOIE was financially supported by FAO under the FAO-EU FLEGT programme through the project “Mise en œuvre du système normalisé d'observation indépendante externe” (8 August 2016 – 7 October 2017). This has helped to improve independent observation reporting and ensure the credibility of the denunciations that are made. Today this tool is deployed in Cameroon and in the sub-region (the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo). Between 2019 and 2020, new funding has been obtained to continue the implementation of the system, with additional support for monitoring timber supply chains. Today FODER is perceived by donors as a civil society organization that fights against corruption and advocates for transparency in the forest sector and contributes to the implementation of quality tools to ensure the credibility and reliability of the information that comes out of independent observation mechanisms.
46. Inspired by the positive results of a first project, some NGOs proposed another project (often in a different area) and were again selected by the programme. This occurred for example with the project, “appui à l'implication des artisans de la deuxième transformation du bois dans le processus FLEGT et l'organisation du marché intérieur du bois au Cameroun” (FAO-EU FLEGT webpage Cameroon, 2021), where FAO sought to strengthen the capacity of some artisans in a pilot project, their understanding of legality, etc. This then continued in a second project « renforcement du dispositif d'approvisionnement en bois légal des artisans de la seconde transformation du bois », in another area based on the achievements of the previous project (FAO-EU FLEGT webpage Cameroon, 2021).

Evaluation Question 3: What have been the most significant changes generated by the programme?

Finding 3. The most significant change of the programme is on training and strengthening the capacities of the civil society organization, especially in terms of independent observation. Impacts on improved skills of the private sector is less evident and experiences with CFs have been less conclusive. Even though some progress was made on legality and traceability aspects, de facto the regulations have not changed and have not been simplified and the percentage of illegal wood placed on the market remains high.

47. During an adapted, simplified outcome harvesting workshop at the outset of the evaluation, the evaluation team asked the FLEGT III project management team to identify the most significant changes, according their perception. The project management team perceived the following three most significant changes, brought about by the programme:

- i) increased capacities of service providers, ii) increased capabilities of the private sector; and iii) increased legality and traceability. These perceived most significant changes were validated and analysed during interviews with different programme partners and service providers and triangulated, where possible, with the desk review exercise. Some of the findings in this section overlap with the programme level outcomes already mentioned in the previous section.
48. The increased capacity of service providers has already been largely developed in the previous section (Evaluation Question 2) and most of the aspects are relevant to this section. The majority of people interviewed acknowledged that FAO focused on working with and trusting NGOs, including 'novice' NGOs. It trained and mentored them. Each time a new contractor was selected for a new project, they were trained (on procedures, organisational aspects, planning, etc.). Few organisations that fund projects do this before a project starts. As a result, young NGOs have found themselves able to manage large amounts of money and run projects. These same NGOs have now applied for and won projects with other forest-related TFPs. For example, ASD has now been shortlisted for a German cooperation project in Cameroon.
 49. Representatives of partners organisations and civil society organization conveyed that in Cameroon there was excellent capacity and momentum within the civil society, but it existed somewhat on the margins of the VPA process. Large NGOs such as TRAFIC, Transparency International and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) were on the scene at the beginning, but the FAO FLEGT programme has focused on supporting national partners with close support in terms of project management and financial management, and today there are many Cameroonian NGOs and private sector associations that are important interlocutors for the European Union and the administration in the forestry sector (FODER, Field Legal Advisory Group [FLAG], SAILD, FECAPROBOIS, ASD).
 50. Improved skills of the private sector. According to many interviewees, achievements at this level are less effective and less marked than with the civil society organization. In Cameroon, three or four companies have functioning traceability systems and have been able to obtain *Origine et Légalité des Bois* (OLB) certificates, for example, thanks to the FAO programme. According to some of the interviewed programme partners, on the informal market, there are still a lot of barriers, because the regulations have not changed, nor have the operators in the field, and in the end, it is the law of ease and the best profit which prevails. The context will only change when people start asking for legal timber on the local market. In Cameroon there is a large number of artisanal sawyers; some have been affected, but the permit that concerns them (EPBO or timber exploitation permit) is out of reach for them and moreover the Ministry of Forests and Fauna has stopped granting them. A working group is in place within the framework of the ESSOR 2 project to agree on the new allocation of EPBOs.
 51. Several people interviewed recognised that experience with CFs has been less conclusive. Ten CFs were supported in Eastern Cameroon, but there is no evidence that what was set up is still working today. On the other hand, the vast majority of community forests are involved in document fraud. They have papers, but they sell them to others to launder timber. ESSOR II found only eight CFs working legally. However, the local legality verification system set up and tested in the supported CFs within the frame of the SVCL project is still implemented by SAILD.

52. Representatives of the private sector say that support was given for attempts to federate small and medium-sized enterprises so that they are more competitive and can work better together (Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon). But the programme had to go through the unions (GFBC and FECAPROBOIS in Cameroon). If a problem arises at the union level, as was the case with GFBC, it becomes difficult to work with the private sector. Unions also have a way of working that does not necessarily fit well with that of the FAO.
53. According to information collected during the interviews, from 2016 to date, five sensitization and training workshops on legal and regulatory requirements in wood supply channels have been organized for the benefit of about 150 artisans and SME wood processors in the cities of Yaoundé, Douala, Ebolowa and Ngaoundéré. Approximately 350m³ of legal and high-quality wood was acquired and made available to the artisans through the cooperative created as a regulatory instrument for a transparent wood trade on the national market. The contribution of the programme has been to provide financial and technical support.
54. Legality and traceability. Thanks to the funding of the programme, it has been possible to develop, test and review legality grids. These are aspects that the programme was very successful in controlling and monitoring. On the other hand, the application of laws is outside the programme's area of influence and without strong political will, it is difficult to make things change. De facto, the regulations have not changed and have not been simplified. According to information collected during the interviews, the FLEGT legality grids on which the programme worked in Cameroon have not been validated by the Ministry, and not by the European Union. FLEGT is being bogged down in the forestry law for more than ten years and until the law is revised, everything else remains blocked (the revision of the forestry law has been underway since 2008). The last information received is that legality grids have been simplified and validated by the National Committee VPA FLEGT in March 2021. The European Union has received the legality grids and the analysis is currently ongoing.
55. As found in an UNEP-WCMC report (2020), and confirmed by many interviewees, the situation remains problematic because the percentage of illegal wood placed on the market remains high. The FAO programme alone will not be able to solve this problem. As far as traceability is concerned, FAO has contributed to set up systems at local level, but only on an experimental basis. There is still a blockage with SIGIF. While the government of Cameroon finds that the system is complete, reliable and works, the European Union does not agree. The two parties have now agreed that the system should run on a trial basis for three years and then be audited to see if any adaptations are necessary to make the system work for both parties.

3.3 Social inclusion, equity and gender

Evaluation Question 4: To what extent have the programme interventions contributed to gender equality, equity, empowerment, and social inclusion, and reached the intended users and uses?

Finding 4. The programme has made efforts to integrate the gender dimension in its approach and projects, and the evaluation founds evidence that it was applied by several Service Providers.

56. The programme's calls for projects explicitly targeted the beneficiaries of the funding as well as the themes covered by the programme. For example, FECAPROBOIS indicated that in the recruitment of project staff (permanent and consultants), female applications were

highly encouraged and, for equal skills, female applications were selected. At the Constitutive General Assembly of the cooperative Coop-CA Extraboicam which was created with the financial and technical support of the FAO EU FLEGT programme, the position of Chairman of the Supervisory Board was dedicated to women without preventing them from applying for other positions.

57. A gender policy was deployed within FODER in the framework of the implementation of all projects (including those of the FAO-FLEGT programme) carried out by this organisation. This is already reflected in the composition of the project teams, but also within FODER or SNOIE, the implementation tool of the independent observation. During the forums and workshops held in the framework of FODER projects, it was ensured that women, but also representatives of the local population, were present. Interviews confirmed that the views expressed by these groups are usually taken into account in the final decisions or outputs.
58. The programme has contributed to strengthening gender equality and women's empowerment within SAILD. In its projects, SAILD has promoted a 50/50 ratio for project positions. Because SAILD worked on issues that are not very open to women, it has applied a percentage of 30 percent for all the trainings organised in its projects.
59. In each call for proposals submitted by SAILD, it was mentioned to describe the gender and social inclusion approach. And in the definition of indicators, it was recommended to set specific gender indicators.

3.4 Partnerships

Evaluation Question 5: To what extent has the programme managed to engage with relevant, strategic and capable partners and multi-stakeholder processes at global, regional and national level?

Finding 5. The evaluation found that complementarity and synergies between projects has been achieved and that partnerships between national, regional and international actors were successful.

60. In the calls for proposals, the programme tried to ensure that projects complemented each other. The programme also insisted on the complementarity aspects and the weight of this with existing initiatives was very important. It was helpful to justify a link with another large programme (the *Agence française de développement* or KfW for example).
61. The evaluation found an example of positive synergy between FAO, CIFOR and CERAD - durable (which had the technical and scientific skills) on the domestic market in the BC and which led in Cameroon to the decree on the purchase of legal wood for public contracts.
62. Where FAO initiatives have worked, the programme has tried to replicate them elsewhere. In Cameroon, the project "*Renforcement des capacités des professionnels et des apprenants des institutions de l'enseignement supérieur dans la mise en œuvre du Plan d'Action FLEGT-APV au Cameroun*" with the *Faculté d'Agronomie et des Sciences Agricoles* (FASA), which developed training programmes in forest governance worked well and then the FAO replicated this experience in Congo with ENSAF⁸ with support from FASA.
63. Another example is the OTP. According to information collected during the interviews, it was a Cameroonian NGO (FLAG) that started to deploy this platform. It was not easy to go

⁸ Elaboration des formations de référence en gouvernance forestière.

to the forestry companies and ask them to start sharing their documentation on an NGO platform. FLAG had to go to the forestry companies to explain and raise awareness, to show them how the platform worked, and what benefits these companies could gain from it with their clients abroad, and to do all the work of compiling and putting the documents online with them. It worked quite well. Then this NGO went to support the Congo and the Central African Republic.

64. A Cameroonian NGO (SAILD) has developed a very simple and ergonomic system for verifying traceability and legality in community forests that can work offline, in remote areas. According to information found in an article in the Gabonese daily "l'Union" (2021) and corroborated by interviews (2021), this same NGO has partnered with the NGO KEVA Initiative in Gabon and they have just finished a project in that country where they have also developed and adapted this tool. In Gabon, the government is rethinking its entire community forest strategy after 15 years of CF and a rather negative track record. It is the FLEGT programme that is funding this process, hence the interest in working for FAO at both levels. This is an example of the initiative to give a regional dimension to the programme's intervention by sharing experiences and expertise and trying to connect projects together. Furthermore, through SAILD the programme was able to create synergies and collaboration with various national and sub-regional civil society organisations. SAILD has implemented joint projects with FODER and GDA
65. As heard during the interviews, there was also a very good collaboration between CIFOR and the Direction de la promotion et de la transformation du bois (DPT) for the past ten years. The programme has moved from a consultation phase between CIFOR and the Ministry to make a decision to a format of participation and involvement, even delegation, thanks in particular to the procedure followed by the FAO FLEGT programme, where it is the Ministry that submits the request.
66. FECAPROBOIS has established relations with the association ASD (Action for Sustainable Development) with whom it has organised at least two joint workshops in Yaoundé and Bertoua. It has also been able to conduct discussions with the NGO TRAFFIC on issues of timber legality.
67. Partnership agreements have been established between FODER and civil society organizations since 2016 within the framework of SNOIE (Transparency International, PAPEL, ECODEV). The SNOIE is now ISO 9001 certified. It was developed by the association Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER), in collaboration with other civil society organisations, the administration and other stakeholders in the forestry sector. To obtain ISO 9001 certification for SNOIE, FODER received financial and technical support from the Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT) and the University of Wolverhampton in the framework of the project "Citizens' Voices for Change: Forest Watch in the Congo Basin" (Citizen Voices for Change [CV4C]).
68. Partnerships have been established between FODER and organisations in other countries, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, and Central African Republic. FODER has a registered office in Côte d'Ivoire and works with "le Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement" (CIEDD) in Central African Republic.

3.5 Potential sustainability

Evaluation Question 6: What are the sustainability prospects of the programme results and what is their potential to contribute to long-term changes?

Finding 6. The decree of 15.12.20 signed by three Ministries (under the leadership of the Ministry of Forests and Fauna) which imposes the purchase of legal wood in all public contracts and the creation of the Cooperative of professionals in secondary wood processing, which is now functional and provides concrete solutions for artisans, especially for legally sourced wood, can be considered as two signs of potential sustainability prospects.

69. Impact and sustainability depend often on the context and the political will in the country. From the interviews it appears that the programme has done what it should and could do in Cameroon, but if there is not enough political will to implement enforcement measures and fight corruption, progress is slow.
70. As the programme was addressing forest governance and the legality of timber, beneficiaries and programme partners recognised during the interviews that a long-term commitment was needed. While the programme has had three successive phases (it began in 2009 with the ACP-FLEGT Support Programme and then continued with the FAO for two further phases from 2012 to 2021), the nature of the support provided by this programme through the funding of one-year projects probably lacked the guarantee of a long-term commitment of the different service providers.
71. However, some concrete achievements were mentioned during the interviews. With the ESSOR project I, it was the first time that it has been possible to understand the national demand for timber and to characterise them. This made it possible to see with the Ministry of Forests and Fauna how to influence these demands via media campaigns for the general public and a lobbying campaign that made it possible to issue this decree of 15.12.20 signed by three Ministries (under the leadership of the Ministry of Forests and Fauna) which imposes the purchase of legal wood in all public contracts. The ESSOR II project allows for the dissemination of information on this decree so that it can be respected. At this stage, it remains a binding document, which could be better controlled as it is not yet well known.
72. During the interviews, representatives from the private sector said that the Cooperative of professionals in secondary wood processing (Coop-CA Extraboicam), is now functional and provides concrete solutions for artisans, especially for legally sourced wood. The membership has grown significantly from 32 members at the beginning to 44 members today, all SMEs and formal artisans. Several services are offered by the cooperative to members: legal timber, markets, information on the sector, and participation in visibility spaces (exhibition-sales). Thanks to the FAO-EU FLEGT programme, the artisans have had access to legal timber of superior quality. The cooperative created is an instrument for regulating a transparent timber trade on the national market. The cooperative is functional, it has functioning bodies and partnerships developed with suppliers of legal timber.
73. The interviews show that civil society organizations that have emerged through the support of the programme as independent observations are to some extent sustainable (provided they find the necessary funding). Communities are increasingly involved in reporting infractions. Other stakeholders in the forestry sector through multi-stakeholder exchange meetings on legality and forest law enforcement have seen their knowledge and capacity improved through these various exchanges. Even state institutions working with FODER

have seen their knowledge of FLEGT and their role improved and today they play an active role in the process.

3.6 Programme management

Evaluation Question 7: To what extent were the management and implementation arrangements appropriate?

Finding 7. The mechanisms proposed by the programme (calls for proposals and direct assistance), as well as the support and reactivity of the project management team were considered by the majority of beneficiaries as very positive. An example of efficiency away from the usual bureaucracy of large organizations. Some weaknesses and limitations of the process were mentioned that should be considered in the future.

74. Two instruments were available within the programme: the first was more mechanical, with the organisation of annual calls for proposals, a process based on prior consultation between the various actors in each country to define priorities, and the second was direct assistance (started in Phase III), which allowed a slightly faster-track mechanism and more limited budgets (up to EUR 50 000) to meet urgent needs. A good example is given with the Ministry of Forests and Fauna who asked to test the legality grids on the basis of a decision taken at the meeting of the joint committee between the European Union and Cameroon and the results were needed within three months. Once the *Union de gestion du programme* (UGP) had agreed on the principle to the funding, a consultancy firm could be quickly contracted.
75. Initially, the principle was to fund an action over one year with a clear outcome to be achieved and a limited budget (amount set between USD 100 000 and USD 130 000). The possibility of renewing or not renewing the funding was not taken for granted at the beginning. This allowed the programme to intervene quickly and to exclude projects that did not guarantee results over a year, even if they were interesting. This approach has evolved over time, particularly in the way projects are selected and in the choice of criteria. While Phase III remained based on the principle of one project-one year, and the criteria of feasibility/credibility of the project leaders and feasibility of the budget continued to be taken into account, the possibility was also given to renew funding for the same organisation that had proved its worth in the framework of a first funding.
76. Programme management realised that the private sector and governments had difficulty positioning themselves with the calls for proposals and that practically only civil society organizations proposed projects that met the conditions set by the programme. The programme could support the private sector (professional organisations), but not the private sector companies themselves. This is the reason why the programme opened a special window for direct technical assistance, especially for the benefit of states (public sector). These files were generally handled directly between the programme and the states and did not go through the panellists. The amount was limited to USD 50.
77. There was willingness at the panel on African countries to try to form a coherent approach, yet the approach adopted by the programme did not always allow this in a clear way. The panellists could only deal with the files they received. They could see if the dossier presented was consistent with what was being done in the country, and its credibility could be assessed, but it was difficult to go further.

78. The majority of beneficiaries of the programme were very positive on management and implementation arrangements. For example, FODER mentioned that the call for proposals process was open to everyone. The competition was tough and they had to have good projects to win. But when reports were approved, disbursements followed and the programme intervened quickly to solve problems.
79. The management rules of the programme were very clear for SAILD. Beyond the management rules, the project team coached the beneficiaries of the projects which strongly contributed to the efficiency of its action. The programme proposed an innovative grant mechanism, taking into account the specificities of the main groups of actors (civil society, private sector and administration).
80. The main challenges related to the management and administration of the project were mainly the modalities of granting funding in tranches that did not always correspond to the volume of activities in the period.
81. In the contract with each "provider", there was an obligation to organise a start-up workshop and a closing workshop with media coverage and communication actions throughout the project. In principle, this is good. In practice, it depends on the actors and the project.
82. Through the different communication platforms of the programme SAILD has had access to different publications of the programme. Also, SAILD has benefited from the support of the programme to participate in meetings which have been the frameworks of excellence for sharing experiences and lessons learned from projects funded by the programme. In the framework of the projects implemented by SAILD, capitalization documents and even documentary films that present lessons and solutions to the identified challenges have been produced.

4. Lessons learned

83. The traceability system (SIGIF) is still not fully operational. It has been launched as a pilot by the Ministry of Forests and Fauna in the country. The Ministry of Forests and Fauna has always wanted a centralised system developed and imposed on private operators. There could have been another option, which was to recognise the existing systems already developed by certain operators and to exchange information on the basis of a platform, but without wanting to impose a single, centralised system. The debate on this issue is justified and it is a concern for the different parties. However, if the actors want to break the current deadlock, they should give priority to dialogue. As described in paragraph 54, it seems that a compromise has been found.
84. As explained under Finding 3, FLEGT was probably too ambitious in a few countries, among which Cameroon, where the local market was integrated in the VPA. A step by step or a modular approach would have been better.
85. Combining training and modules on legalisation together with support in management for the PMEs (accounting, marketing, woodwork technics, etc.) is considered by many beneficiaries as a success story. However, adaptation of the approach is needed by selecting tools that are more adapted to the local context (ergonomic and user-friendly) and by taking more into account the realities in the field.
86. To make progress, it is important to give more priority to supporting the private sector and working with associations and federations in the forest sector to put them in the centre of the game.
87. It is better to have a series of small projects that follow one another than a mega project over several years, which will concentrate efforts on methods, procedures, reporting, etc. Smaller projects are easy to set up, more responsive and more easily operational.

5. Observations

88. Despite the blockage of the process for several years, it seems important to continue to support the country in the VPA process. It appears that an agreement has been reached between the European Union and the Ministry of Forests and Fauna so that an independent audit of the SIGIF2 system can be carried out with European Union funding. Cameroon is ready to accept this audit.

89. The interest of Cameroon compared to other Congo Basin countries is that it has among the best structured and best trained civil society organizations, which are able to build a dialogue with national authorities, but also with international organisations. Moreover, Cameroon remains one of the main suppliers of tropical wood to Europe, hence the need to unblock the current situation by working with all parties.

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Appendix 1. People interviewed⁹

Last name	First name	Institution/Agency	Role
Bastin	Didier	Giz (GRP)	Conseiller Technique Senior Projet Forêt et Environnement (ProFE) (COO)
Borelli	Maylis	ATIBT (GRP)	Coordinatrice adjointe ATIBT gouvernance forestière et gestion durable
Duhesme	Caroline	ATIBT (GRP)	Coordinator of the FLEGT-REDD projects
Fabing	Aline	Palladium group	FGMC Cameroon Intervention Coordinator / VPA-FLEGT Facilitator 2016–2019
Fomou	Ghislain	SAILD (service provider)	Chargé de programme gouvernance des ressources naturelles (COO)
Fumey	Sarah	FAO (FAO FLEGT Africa)	FLEGT Technical Consultant for Francophone Africa
Hewitt	Daphne	FAO	FAO-EU FLEGT Programme Manager + Senior Forestry Officer
Kamdem	Angeline	FODER (service provider)	Project manager (COO)
Kamga	Justin Christophe	FODER (service provider)	Coordinator (COO)
Lescuyer	Guillaume	CIFOR (GRP)	Senior Research Associate (COO)
Nkodo	Arielle	FAO (FAO FLEGT Africa)	Technical consultant - francophone Africa, backstopping projects in Cameroon, CAR and Gabon
Noiraud	Jean-Marc	FAO Cameroun (FAO FLEGT Africa)	FAO FLEGT Africa (COO)
Ntanga Nsinyakebam	Pamphile	FECAPROBOIS (service provider)	Deputy Secretary General (COO)
Vandenhautte	Marc	EFI (GRP)	Forest Governance Expert Area FLEGT and REDD (COO and COT)

⁹ Ten more people had been contacted for interviews, but without success

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