

**Programme Evaluation Series**

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

**GCP/GLO/600/MUL  
GCP/GLO/397/EC**

**Annex 5. Honduras case study**

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

ANASILH	Asociación Nacional de Silvicultores de Honduras
CNI	<i>Consejo Nacional de Inversiones</i> (National Investment Council)
EFI	European Forest Institute
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEHCAFOR	Federación Hondureña de Cooperativas Agroforestales
FLEGT-III	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade, Third phase
FPIC	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent
ICF	<i>Instituto de Conservación Forestal, Áreas Protegidas y Vida Silvestre</i> (National Institute for forest, protected areas and Wildlife Conservation)
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SALH	Honduran Timber Legal Assurance System
TOC	Theory of change
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and methodology

1. Background. This document presents the country case study on Honduras, as part of the final evaluation of the third phase of the FAO-EU FLEGT programme (hereafter referred to as FLEGT III or the programme). The programme is financed by the European Commission (EC), Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)<sup>1</sup> 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. Honduras 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, micro, small and medium enterprises [MSMEs], etc.);
  - v. availability of previous assessments for comparison (either provided by the mid-term evaluation or case studies from Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR));
  - 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. Honduras was selected on the following criteria: Latin America; VPA, medium-sized focus country; Mesoamerican rainforest biome; programme started in Phase II; few other initiatives in the thematic area, social-political challenges related to forest governance (public order challenges, human rights violations).
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 (see references section), stakeholder interviews and the review of qualitative and quantitative evidence (data, publications, monitoring and evaluation reports) to gather information. This information is as much as possible validated and triangulated by a combination of information sources. Based on this, findings and lessons learned were elaborated. The evaluation report presents the findings according to the six main evaluation questions included in the evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> Previously (until September 2020) called Department for International Development

matrix (appendix 3 to the overall evaluation report). The case-study is not an evaluation of the FLEGT III programme in Honduras, 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. Also, Outcome 2 of the FLEGT III programme targeted only non-VPA countries and Outcome 5 targeted overall programme impact; therefore, these outcomes were not analysed in this case-study.

6. At the core of the evaluation work was a series of interviews with the different stakeholders. The persons were selected based on information provided by the FAO programme management team, validated and complemented 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. In total, fifteen people were interviewed in ten meetings. A summary of the representation of persons consulted can be found below. These persons were not the only ones who provided information on the country because in addition to this group, several of the interviewed stakeholders at regional (Latin America) and global level also provided information and opinions on the programme in Honduras (see list of interviewed persons; appendix 1 of the overall evaluation report).

Stakeholder group	Number of persons
Government officers	5
Civil society organizations/community organizations	3
International non-governmental organizations	4
Bilateral/multilateral agencies	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>

## 1.2 Limitations

7. 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.
8. 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.

## 2. Background and context of the programme

### 2.1 Context of the programme

9. Forests cover about 5.4 million hectares of Honduras — just under half of the total land area.<sup>2</sup> This includes tropical rainforests (52 percent of the total), coniferous forests (31 percent) and other types such as mangroves, dry tropical forests and mixed forests (pastoral, agroforestry). These forests are rich in biodiversity and are important carbon stores. About 85 percent of the forests are of middle and older age, and they are not being replenished quickly enough to compensate the rate of their destruction. Deforestation since the 1970s has been 1.7 million hectares or 22 percent of the total (data from the *Instituto de Conservación Forestal*, ICF; Bustillo, 2018). It is categorized as the country with highest annual deforestation rate of the Americas (2.2 percent; FLEGT independent market monitoring [IMM], 2021).
10. The main problems that characterize the Honduran forestry sector are the following: i) high deforestation (between 39 000 and 67 000 ha / year<sup>3</sup>); ii) a genetic and regenerative degradation of the forest caused primarily by recurrent forest fires (about 65 000 ha/year); iii) a pressure to change the use of forest lands, caused by a high population growth rate and an unequal distribution of agricultural lands; iv) land tenure and use conflicts, especially in public forests and watersheds (around 52 percent of the country's surface); v) illegal logging and trade in timber, wildlife, and other non-timber products; vi) low contribution to the local and national economy; vii) institutional weakness in the public sector; viii) unstable and short-term sectoral policies; and ix) little or no attention to private owners of forest properties; and x) deficient mechanisms for coordination and conflict resolution (Navarro et al. 2018). This is aggravated by an infestation of insect pests in coniferous forests (2015-2016).
11. The basic types of forest land tenure include: private (35 percent), state (27 percent), community (10 percent), municipal (4 percent) and indigenous (3 percent). The remaining 21 percent of forest lands have not been assessed to determine land tenure. Human activities take place in almost 80 percent of the forest area with the intrusion of, among others, illegal loggers, drug traffickers and immigrants such as impoverished families seeking to alleviate their poverty by entering into agroforestry and pastoral activities (Silva Ávalos, 2019). According to Transparency International, institutional corruption and a low security environment further contribute to a fragile political and administrative governance and a condition of weak governance in the forest sector (Yamauchi, 2021). The country's forests are therefore being threatened by unsustainable activities and poor governance. Social conflicts around forest are also long standing, including among the lack of land rights and limited support for small holder (Indigenous Peoples and community) forest users. The communal agroforestry cooperatives have proved to be good forest stewards in many regions but also considered as being opposed by government agencies and large forest enterprises (Jones and Orr, 2006; Del Gatto, 2013).
12. The forest sector accounted for an average 3.6 percent of the Honduran gross national product between 2010 and 2016. During this period, import values of timber products rose

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<sup>2</sup> The paragraphs in this context description are taken from EU FLEGT Facility (2021) until mentioned otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> The figure included in the third National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (2020) reduced this figure to 23,000 has/yr.

by only 6 percent (from USD 51 million to USD 54 million), while exports rose by 62 percent (from USD 50 million to USD 81 million). In the period from 2010 to 2016, exports to Europe rose from USD 1.7 million in 2010 to USD 4 million in 2016, which constitute only 4.9 percent of the exports. The exports to European Union dropped after this to less than USD 2 million (FLEGT IMM, 2021). The United States of America is the main market, with exports rising by 35 percent since 2010, from USD 23 million to USD 31 million. Exports to neighbouring countries of El Salvador and Nicaragua have also risen, to USD 23 million (28 percent of all exports), making these countries the second biggest market for Honduran timber products.

13. Efforts to reduce illegal logging were accelerated in 2010, when the ICF developed the *Estrategia Nacional contra la Tala Ilegal* (National Strategy to Against Illegal Logging) (ENCTI). Then, in 2012, Honduras made the decision to negotiate a voluntary partnership agreement (VPA-FLEGT) with the European Union: Official negotiations began in 2013 (Navarro et al., 2018). Honduras was the first country in the Americas to enter into VPA negotiations with the European Union. In June 2018, Honduras and the European Union marked the end of VPA negotiations by initialling the document, ahead of signing and ratifying it. The VPA was signed by the European Union and Honduras in February 2021. It will enter into force after each Party has ratified it in line with their internal procedures. There is optimism on the part of VPA stakeholders for the improvement of the key indicators of forest governance, as they report an effective and inclusive participatory process. Among the achievements in the negotiation process are (FAO, 2021a):
  - i. the VPA in Honduras tackles crucial governance issues such as: i) legal security of land tenure, ii) respect and specific protection of the rights of indigenous and Afro-Honduran peoples; and iii) prevention of illegal logging and corruption;
  - ii. social capital has been built up, and environmental governance articulated beyond FLEGT;
  - iii. the consultation on the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) Law proposal is a concrete result of the VPA;
  - iv. the legitimacy of the multi-stakeholder platforms / forums, which were strengthened during the negotiation process, is recognized; and
  - v. the formulation of the VPA annexes will ensure improvements in governance as a prerequisite for the sustainable management of forests and timber trade.
  
14. Honduras was supported by the second phase of the FAO-EU FLEGT programme and support continued during the third phase. during the latter, a total of 52 projects were funded in Honduras. This was for a total budget of USD 2 873 449 (FAO, 2021a). Almost half of the projects supported the National Institute for Forest and Wildlife Conservation (ICF) for a total budget of USD 882 742. The direct assistance modality was used for most of the ICF projects while practically all other projects responded to open call for proposals.

**Table 1. List of projects**

Service Provider	Project title	Budget (USD)
Participatory national decision-making		
Monitoreo Forestal Independiente (MFI)	Improving the capacities of forest sector actors in the implementation of legislation through the development of protocols to address cases of noncompliance with the FLEGT VPA	74 727
Legislative and policy reform as identified in VPA		
Asociación de Municipios de Honduras (AMHON)	Support for the governance of ejidal forest resources	55 500
ICF (Forest and Wildlife Conservation Institute)	Strengthening governance through the regularization of national land suitable for forestry under community forest management in the Department of Olancho, Honduras	80 355
ICF	Strengthening land governance through the regularization of national land suitable for forestry under community forest management in the Honduran Departments of Atlántida and Olancho	90 903
ICF	Elaboración de propuesta de normativa para el aprovechamiento de arboles dispersos	8 000
ICF	Consultoría "Armonización del Plan de la Estrategia Nacional Contra la Tala Ilegal (ENCTI) con AVA	10 085
Mancomunidad de Municipios del Sur de Lempira	Development of a procedure for harvesting trees under non-commercial permits and managing wooded land in urban and peri-urban areas	100 428
Timber Legality Assurance System		
Federación Hondureña de Cooperativas Agroforestales (FEHCAFOR)	Implementation of legality in community forests assigned to agroforestry organizations through community forest management contracts	74 998
FEHCAFOR	Apoyando el desarrollo de un sistema nacional de rastreabilidad, control y verificación de la madera que sea equitativo y viable para las pequeñas cooperativas que conforman el sector comunitario del país	95 504
Consejo Nacional de Inversiones (CNI)	Promotion of the association of private forest operators and actors for the enforcement of the legality of forest trade in Honduras	56 417
ICF	Implementación del módulo de Industria Forestal en el Sistema Informático de Rastreabilidad de la Madera (SIRMA)	53 557
ICF	Consultancy for the preparation of matrices for control and monitoring of indicators binding to principle 3 of the legality tables	7 200
ICF	Consultoría "Elaboración de un instructivo para verificar el cumplimiento del programa de protección de los planes operativos anuales aprobados	8 000
ICF	Consultancy for the preparation of matrices for control and monitoring of indicators binding to principles 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 of the legality table	8 000
ICF	Consultancy to "strengthen the updating of the ICF forest management plan database"	12 000
Domestic market measures		
Honduran committee for voluntary forest certification (CH-CFV)	Strengthening the forest production chain in the framework of the FLEGT VPA process in three municipalities in the department of Atlántida	49 783
CH-CFV	Facilitando la implementación del proceso AVA-FLEGT, a través de la aplicación de mecanismos que incentiven a los actores de la cadena forestal al uso responsable del bosque, buscando beneficios económicos, ambientales y sociales	94 800
ICF	Update of the census of the primary and secondary forests industries and warehouses or stores selling forest products and sub-products in four forest regions of the country	49 903



Service Provider	Project title	Budget (USD)
Panamerican Agricultural College Zamorano (EAPZ)	Promotion of legality and competitiveness in forest MSMEs, through the creation of a strategy to verify the Legality Tables in three forest value chains in Honduras	74 999
FDSF	Strengthening the capacities of small and medium agroforestry producers in the Department of El Paraíso to participate on an equal footing in the FLEGT VPA process in Honduras	70 000
Asociación Nacional de Silvicultores de Honduras (ANASILH)	Proyecto de fortalecimiento de las capacidades del fomento, legalidad, comercio y gobernanza forestal de los reforestadores y MiPymes locales organizados en la Asociación de Silvicultores de Honduras (ANASILH)	31 000
ICF	Consultancy to "Prepare a proposal for the structure of the department of industries and the business center for forest competitiveness"	10 000
Fundación Vida	Estudio de mercado de los productos forestales en Honduras: Oferta, demanda, barreras y plan para incrementar el uso de madera legal	70 000
ICF	Socio-economic study of SMEs of the forestry sector, on the fulfillment of labor and social indicators of the VPA in selected municipalities of three forest regions of the country	3 250
<b>Institutional strengthening and capacity building</b>		
MFI	Strengthening the operational capacities of different actors in the forestry sector on issues related to public participation and social control mechanisms within the framework of FLEGT VPA	97 805
MFI	Fortalecer las capacidades operativas de los entes Operadores de Justicia, en temas vinculados a su accionar en el marco de la implementación del Acuerdo Voluntario de Asociación (AVA-FLEGT)	97 805
Confederación de Pueblos Autóctonos de Honduras	Support the training in the practice of forest surveillance committees and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) in the Tolpan and Pech indigenous communities to improve forest governance in Honduras	109 999
Rainforest Alliance	Strengthening governance for the sustainable sale of timber and non-timber forest products in Honduras Atlantic and La Mosquita regions	108 484
Rainforest Alliance	Fortaleciendo capacidades de gobernanza y sistemas de legalidad en la cadena de valor forestal en los paisajes de la Reserva de Biósfera Río Plátano y Pico Bonito en Honduras	105 100
ICF	Support for strengthening the Information System for Forest Management and Monitoring (SIGMOF) developed by the National Institute for Conservation, Forest Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife (ICF)	27 000
ICF	Identificación y formulación de propuestas para el fortalecimiento y mejora de la competitividad del sector privado forestal de Honduras, que contribuyan a la implementación del AVA FLEGT	5 000
ICF	Consultoría "Elaboración de plan de capacitación en materia ambiental y forestal dirigido a operadores de justicia e instancias de fuerza pública de Honduras	8 000
ICF	Diagnóstico de las capacidades técnicas y operativas institucionales y programa de capacitación en el Instituto Nacional de Conservación y Desarrollo Forestal, Áreas Protegidas y Vida Silvestre (ICF) para el cumplimiento de los requisitos del SALH de sus competencia	18 000
ICF	Fortaleciendo el diálogo en los Pueblos Indígenas y Afro-hondureños, para la comprensión y apropiación del AVA-FLEGT en Honduras	49 722
ICF	Debate Político entre los Países Miembros de la CCAD para Promover el Comercio Legal de Productos Forestales	40 000
ICF	Organización y Capacitación de Pequeños y Medianos Propietarios de Bosque Privado en Honduras, en el marco del proceso AVA - FLEGT	40 000
ICF- Organización Nacional Indígena	Promoting Forest Governance through the development of the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (PFIC) protocols of Lenca people	49 833

Service Provider	Project title	Budget (USD)
Lenca de Honduras (ONILH)		
Fundación Democracia sin Fronteras; (FDSF)	Fortalecer a las plataformas de gobernanza ambiental para participar en la implementación de medidas complementarias priorizadas del proceso AVA en Honduras	88 765
Fundación MaderaVerde	Fortaleciendo capacidades de incidencia en las Plataformas de Gobernanza de Atlántida y Colón, para la implementación de un AVA viable para todos	85 515
Coordinadora nacional ancestral de los derechos indígenas mayas chortis de Honduras	Promoting forest governance through the development of the consent, free, prior, and informed consultation protocol of the Maya Chortí people of Honduras	47 166
Attorney General's Office	Strengthening of the Attorney General's Office in the investigation of illegalities in forestry cases	42 733
Fiscalía Especial de Medio Ambiente (FEMA)/Ministerio Público (MP)	Strengthening the operational capacities of the Public Ministry and related institutions in forest management procedures	75 271
<b>VPA monitoring structures and efforts</b>		
ICF	Consultancy for "Political approach to the VPA-FLEGT Honduras process"	47 956
ICF	Assistance to the National Institute for Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife (ICF), for establishing the Technical Secretariat for the VPA (SETAVA) as the body that will provide monitoring and follow-up for the multi-year plan for implementing the FLEGT VPA in Honduras	124 743
ICF	Incorporando actores locales mediante la socialización de documentos AVA en Marco de la Sexta Ronda de Negociaciones Honduras-UE	49 220
ICF	Asistencia técnica al instituto nacional de conservación y desarrollo forestal, áreas protegidas y vida silvestre (ICF), en la ejecución y monitoreo del plan de acción año 2018 para la implementación del proceso AVA FLEGT Honduras	21 000
ICF	Consultoría "Elaboración de reglamento para el Comité Petit y Comité Técnico del proceso AVA FLEGT Honduras"	6 098
ICF	Estrategia de inducción del AVA FLEGT a autoridades nacionales, regionales y locales vinculadas al proceso.	5 000
ALIANZAVERDE	Promoción de los derechos colectivos, gobernanza territorial y participación de los pueblos indígenas en los procesos de AVA-FLEGT en Honduras	131 375
Comisionado nacional de los Derechos Humanos de Honduras	Apoyo de CONADEH al ICF incorporando el enfoque de derechos humanos integrales y el derecho a un ambiente sano, en particular, y un mejor conocimiento con los actores locales del proceso AVA FLEGT en Honduras"	55 000
Fundación Democracia sin Fronteras (FDsF)	Generación de mayor contribución a las negociaciones AVA FLEGT en Honduras a través de sinergias entre plataformas de Gobernanza Forestal	85 000
<b>Communication</b>		
ICF	Digital visibility of the FLEGT VPA process in Honduras	92 940

Source: FAO. 2021. Honduras. In: *FAO-EU FLEGT Programme* [online] [Cited 26 October 2021] <https://www.fao.org/in-action/eu-fao-flegt-programme/our-projects/en/#/web/country/HND>

## 2.2 Theory of change

15. The Panamerican Agricultural College Zamorano (EAPZ) developed a roadmap and a country specific theory of change (TOC) for the implementation and monitoring of the FLEGT-VPA in Honduras. According to the “Evaluación del plan plurianual y elaboración de un sistema de monitoreo, seguimiento y evaluación de implementación del AVA-FLEGT” the roadmap was accompanied by a multiannual plan (*Plan plurianual de implementación del AVA 2019-2023*; developed in 2019) that covered the following six intervention areas: Coordination and monitoring mechanisms; interinstitutional coordination; civil society participation; capacity building for field operators; strategic actions and legal instruments; and implementation of a system for planning, evaluation and monitoring. The accompanying TOC (*Teoría de Cambio para AVA-FLEGT Honduras*, developed in 2020) presented three independent result chains (legality compliance, efficient natural resource use, social and labour responsibility) all leading to the overall goal of “adequate governance of the productive forestry sector”. A separate impact pathway was presented leading from this goal to the overall impact of sustainable development (sustainable forest management, use of territory and climate change mitigation). The TOC showed how the actions of the multiannual plan contributed to specific outcomes in the TOC, but it does not include assumptions or impact drivers.

### 3. Evaluation questions

#### 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.** The FAO-EU FLEGT programme has been aligned to national priorities in Honduras, particularly because it supported the development and implementation plan of the VPA as well as other key elements in the area of legislative and policy reform, timber legality, domestic market measures and capacity building for communities, private sector and support to public agencies.

16. All interviewed persons in Honduras stressed the relevance of the third phase of the FAO-EU FLEGT programme (FLEGT III) for the country. Given the context with high deforestation (the highest rate of the Americas) and illegal logging and extraction of precious timber being one of the reasons (Janayhonest, 2015; Bustillo, 2018), a national programme that targets illegal timber trade is very important. The export from Honduras to the European Union is limited (USD 1.2 million or less than 2 percent of all timber export from the country; FLEGT IMM, 2021) and the programme's initial studies show that most timber is destined to the domestic market (FAO Fundación Vida, 2021), which has a large illegal component: It is estimated that more than 70 percent of the total broadleaf-forest timber is illegal, which in 2004 represented a market value of USD 55 million (Yamauchi et al., 2021). Also, it is recognized that much of the timber production is done by small agroforestry enterprises, managed by community (Indigenous Peoples) groups. However, Honduras' motivation to implement the VPA is mainly related to forest governance improvement leading to prosperous national and international legal timber value chains. Exporting to the European Union is also important but recognized as secondary (CIFOR & ADE, 2021).
17. The relevance of the FLEGT-VPA process is best illustrated by the commitment of the negotiation process. As mentioned in section 2.1, the formal negotiation process started in 2013 and after six rounds, the VPA was signed in 2021 as the first Latin-American country to do so. The negotiation process was considered positive, particularly because of the progressively increasing participation of different stakeholders (see Findings 2, 5 and 7). FLEGT III was highly relevant because it supported (financially and technically) many aspects of the VPA negotiation, including the development of specific annexes. A total of ten project were dedicated specifically to several key aspects of the FLEGT-VPA process, including the support to the negotiations, setting up the multi stakeholder VPA Technical Secretariat (SETAVA), promotion of inclusion of stakeholders and communication of the VPA process (see list of projects, section 2.1). The total budget for these ten projects was USD 620 000, which is more than the total maximum funding designated to non-VPA countries (USD 500 000). The European Forest Institute (EFI) representatives confirmed that their own tasks (support the VPA negotiations) was made possible thanks to financial support from FLEGT III.
18. Other specific elements of FLEGT III that were mentioned by different stakeholders as highly relevant was the support to the development of and the capacities for the implementation of legislation. These were relatively small but crucial elements, such as the alignment with the (previously existing) ENCTI and regulation for use of specific species. According to interviewed external (global) stakeholders, a unique project, even compared to other FLEGT

III countries, was the support to land tenure regulation in Olancho, where 10,000 hectares would be positively affected to improve forest governance. The different projects in support of the Honduran Timber Legal Assurance System (SALH) and the System of Information for Traceability of Timber (SIRMA) was considered relevant, because this was incipient before the VPA negotiations and, according to interviewed public sector representatives, one of the reasons why Honduras engaged in VPA. According to civil society organizations, the projects that supported private forest operators and community cooperatives (Cooperativas Agroforestales) ensured that the SIRMA was more inclusive and aligned with civil society needs. Finally, the FLEGT programme supported three projects with Indigenous Peoples organizations that ensured the process of FPIC for VPA. According to interviewed national stakeholders, this was crucial to establish confidence between the public sector and the Indigenous Peoples organization and ensured participation of the latter in the VPA negotiations. According to external (international) stakeholders, this was also a highly relevant aspect of the Honduras FLEGT-VPA process.

19. The FLEGT III programme in the countries is guided by country specific Theory of Change and FLEGT roadmaps. In VPA countries that have started implementation, such as Honduras, a TOC was developed by EFI and roadmaps are associated to the VPA pluriannual implementation plan. This TOC for Honduras, is highly complex and not considered applicable to the actual delivery of the VPA roadmap. The TOC had three impact pathways (social and labour responsibility, efficient resource use and legal compliance) with numerous outcomes, that are connected through the project purpose (adequate forest governance) from where a forth pathway leads to long-term impact. While this might be good to analyse and understand the process towards increased timber legality and forest governance, it did not include assumptions and it was not monitored or reported upon.

## 3.2 Outcomes

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

**Finding 2.** The FAO-EU FLEGT programme in Honduras has successfully contributed to the development and implementation of the VPA (signed in February 2021). The process supported improved forest governance through creating broad governmental commitment to timber legality, participation of different civil society and private sector organizations in the forest governance debate, institutional strengthening and an improved regulatory and legal environment (Outcome 1).

20. The VPA negotiation process took almost eight years (2013-2021). In absolute terms, this might seem long but in comparison to other VPA countries, this is within the normal range. According to involved stakeholders, both public, private and civil society representatives, this relatively long negotiation process of six rounds was actually a positive factor to increase participation of different parts of society. A systematization of the VPA negotiation process showed how this was managed, what the main benefits were and how stakeholders were included (Casasola et al., 2021). The negotiation process actually managed to include representatives of Honduran civil society organizations, the private sector, government ministries and agencies, and Indigenous Peoples (EU-FLEGT Facility, 2021). The inclusive process was formalized in the different bodies of the VPA. The different oversight bodies are the *Comité Conjunto de Aplicación* (Joint Implementation Committee) (CCA); *Comité*

*Técnico* (technical committee); *Secretariado Interinstitucional de Implementación del AVA* (VPA interinstitutional implementation secretariat); *Comité Petit*; and SETAVA. According to the VPA text (ICF, 2021b) and the document that establishes the bylaws of the technical committee and the Comité Petit, these two committees and the CCA (the highest oversight body) all have established participation from different public sector agencies, private sector, agroforestry cooperatives, civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples and Afro-american and academy representatives. Therefore, the VPA process has led to an intersectoral dialogue that did not exist in the past, build up social capital and articulated environmental governance beyond FLEGT (CIFOR & ADE, 2021).

21. Many projects supported by FLEGT III targeted creating capacity on participation in negotiations and application elements of VPA or promoting elements of legal timber trade among the different stakeholders. For instance, several projects provided to the Honduran Committee of Voluntary Forest Certification promoted legal timber purchase among various part of the value chain and published guidance (Meza, 2019).
22. The programme managed to have a traceability system in place (SIRMA) which is being applied in a beta version by different sectors (ICF 2021c). SALH will be based on Honduras' existing ENCTI and, according to the FAO-FLEGT pluriannual plan 2019-2023, it is now under development (Escuela Agrícola Panamericana Zamora, 2019). Independent forest monitoring (IFM) is not mentioned as such in the VPA but it mainly uses the term 'social control' and 'social oversight'. The VPA considers IFM as a social control step, integrated in SALH. The support FLEGT III has provided to the private sector (the *Consejo Nacional de Inversiones* [CNI]), agroforestry cooperatives (FECHAFOR) and ICF on development and use of SALH is therefore a process to promote IFM (Valerio & Alas, 2017). The fact that SALH is still under development, creates the challenge to consolidate the IFM practices in Honduras through formal recognition and valorization by the authorities. Nevertheless, it shall be highlighted that the pilot experiences held by FLEGT III in some regions have already demonstrated an important potential to contribute and strengthen forest governance and transparency in Honduras (Yamauchi et al. 2021).
23. To improve elements of forest governance in the country, the FLEGT III programme supported the capacities of many different stakeholders, including ICF, but also private sector, agroforestry cooperatives and Indigenous Peoples agencies (see project list in section 2.1). The capacity building to national public agencies, the timber legality assurance system (TLAS), development of FPA and the improvement of legislation and regulations was done through a series of 18 direct assistance projects to ICF. According to FAO, EFI and public agency representatives, this was an efficient modality to effectively develop specific needs and create ownership of the national agency. While, according to the evaluator, this might have implied that less funding was available for call for proposals for other stakeholders, during interviews no concerns were raised about this eventual inequity and rather, support to ICF was generally welcomed.

**Finding 3.** The FAO-EU FLEGT programme in Honduras has increased the capacities of different MSMEs along the timber value chain. While technical and institutional capacities strongly increased and awareness of responsibilities improved, the sector has still many challenges to improve its active participate in legal timber trade (Outcome 3).

24. The programme managed to increase technical and institutional capacities of a large series of (small) private enterprises and (family and communal) agroforestry cooperatives. This was done through a public agency for industry development (CNI), and the non-

governmental organization (NGO) *Fundación Democracia sin Fronteras* (FDsF) and two private sector agencies, one representing (small) private reforestation enterprises (*Asociación Nacional de Silvicultores de Honduras* [ANASILH]) and the other representing (communal) agroforestry cooperatives (*Federación Hondureña de Cooperativas Agroforestales* [FEHCAFOR]). These worked in good collaboration with ICF for training, VPA negotiations and compliance to TLAS and VPA requirements (FAO & CNI, 2021). Thanks to support to the FEHCAFOR, 4 800 agroforestry cooperatives were reached (FAO & FEHCAFOR, 2021).

25. Interviewed stakeholders associated to the private sector mention many challenges: There is a differentiation in the sector including a small 'elite' that dominates exports while the MSMEs do not reach the primary industry. For this reason, the small products are sold at a price lower than the cost and sold to contractor who extracts the timber (without any rule or control). Also, forests are not given an economic value and no incentives or credits are given. Therefore, associativity is considered key, as it brings together owners who come together to have a great financial proposal. To cite an interviewee "*as long as this sector does not associate, they continue not to profit from it but rather affect the industry*"
26. The FLEGT III identified that the domestic market is complex in terms of producers and consumers and has a series of barriers related to technical and regulative matters (FAO, Fundación Vida 2021). Studies and interviewed stakeholders mentioned the variable level of organization and capacities of the forest-related private sector in Honduras (Timber trade portal, 2021). According to interviewed members of private sector, in Honduras the association capacity of MSMEs is low and external factors challenge efficient delivery of projects (FAO and CNI, 2021). In practice, this was experienced with a project with reforestation enterprises (ANASILH). According to internal reflection of the grant mechanisms done by the FLEGT III team, the ANASILH project encountered challenges because the organization did not have basic infrastructure or the staff required for the operation of the project. This was in part compensated through the collaboration with the national public investment centre (CNI) that has the mission to support private sector in the country. According to interviewed staff, by inclusion of CNI more private sector agencies could have been trained and direct support was given to ANASILH to obtain and implement their project.

**Finding 4.** The FAO-EU FLEGT programme in Honduras generated important base-line information on the domestic forestry sector and it created an Information System for Forest Management and Monitoring. The programme actively contributed to communication efforts about the VPA at national (through ICF) and international level (through the Central American Environment and Development Committee [CCAD]) (Outcome 4).

27. Even though the FLEGT III programme in Honduras did not primarily concentrate on knowledge generation, it did provide important base-line information to support its interventions and for VPA design. Two projects (one with ICF and another with the NGO Fundación Vida) generated information on the domestic market and one project (with ICF) analysed existing capacities for implementation of SALH. In addition, the regional FAO team achieved a collaboration with the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) (staff and MSc students) and achieved a considerable number of publications that forms an important knowledge basis. Under this collaboration, the programme systematized various experiences and implemented studies on different elements of the FLEGT process in several countries, including Honduras (for example [but

not limited to] Yamauchi et al., 2021; Casasola et al., 2021; Barrero Ramírez, 2021; Bello Aranguren, 2020). Also individual project published knowledge products (Valerio & Alas, 2017; Santamaria Guitiérrez et al., 2028).

28. The FLEGT II programme in Honduras has an active communication strategy, supported by the regional FAO FLEGT team. Projects were encouraged actively to produce videos, leaflets and news items. The programme's "communication and visibility report" for Latin America, collected several dozens of publications, videos and news items on FLEGT III projects and the overall VPA process. Also, the programme supported two specific communication projects. One of these was granted to ICF for increased visibility of the VPA process, including the understanding of its set results. The other projects supported ICF and the Central American Environment and Development Committee (CCAD) to initiate policy debates on timber trade (FAO & ICF, 2021a).
29. A CATIE MSc thesis analysed the success of the FLEGT III communication strategies in Colombia and Honduras (Bello Aranguren 2020). This concluded that given the strategy of the programme to support service providers to develop their own communication plans that there was a large different between their experience and results. The study identified a need to better integrate the actual impact of the FLEGT programme in communication priorities. Finally, it found how the impact of the COVID pandemic changed communication strategies to more online media, which was well picked up and provided new opportunities to service providers.

**Finding 5.** The FAO-EU FLEGT programme in Honduras contributed to adequate capacity building of service providers and public and private agencies, including government agencies, private sector associations and Indigenous Peoples organizations (Outcome 6).

30. In total, the FLEGT programme in Honduras supported 19 organizations to implement 52 projects. 27 projects were funded to ICF, mostly through direct assistance. In several occasions, ICF requested that the execution of the project was done in collaboration with civil society service providers. The others were awarded through call for proposals. These organizations included public agencies, national NGO, private sector associations, an international NGO (Rainforest Alliance), a University and several Indigenous Peoples organizations and other civil society organizations. According to interviewed representatives, some of the civil society organizations did not have adequate previous experience in project management. Therefore, they were supported by the FLEGT III programme not only with technical but also with administrative and communication support. According to the programme monitoring data, up to 2020, nine service providers in Honduras received project management training (Output indicator 6.1.1). For instance, in an effort to increase the opportunities for funding to all stakeholder groups, a workshop was held in early July 2019 with government agencies, the private sector, indigenous NGOs and civil society that focused on proposal writing in preparation for the 2019 call for proposals (see FLEGT 2020 annual report). A narrative description of one of the projects reporting to this indicator stated "*the organization was evaluated as having a low capacity during the due diligence process, as the project was their very first experience a few months after official registration*". In the end, project management and finance proved very satisfactory with all evaluations marked as "good", which can be attributed to programme support through training and regular backstopping. service providers highly valued the support of FAO in the VPA process. To quote a public agency representative: "*The VPA is*



*very expensive and would not have been possible with our current capacities. Thanks to FAO, we have achieved the agreement including many different stakeholders".*

31. Technical capacities of private sector agencies were enhanced through a public agency that supports the private sector (CNI). Interviewed representatives of private sector agencies and companies admitted that the interaction with FAO on environment/timber related issues was new to them. They admitted to have learned a lot from their interaction with forestry experts. Thanks to the FLEGT III project, they started interacting with more environmentally focused NGOs and Academy. FAO staff informed the evaluation that CNI provided them with a connection to the private sector that would not have been available to them directly: *"We needed an external stakeholder to push agendas forward"*.
32. Generally, in Latin America there was a good collaboration between service providers within a country and among countries through South-South knowledge exchange. The information used for the 2020 annual report included 9 projects (managed by non-governmental service providers) who said to have benefitted significantly from collaboration with other service providers in Honduras. Most of them (7) appreciated the concrete collaboration with ICF. International collaboration was reported through a field tour training in Guatemala, traceability exchange forums with experts from Mexico and Peru; and the Central American Commission on Environment and Development forum (Honduras, 2017). Honduran partners also participated in Latin American congress of Environmental Rights (Colombia, 2016), the World Resources Institute (WRI) regional forum on traceability and transparency (Guatemala, 2016) and CATIE's 31st International Course on Forest management (Costa Rica 2019).

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

**Finding 6.** Stakeholders agreed that increased capacities of service providers and private sector were the most significant changes, as well as improvements on traceability of the timber value chain. Being one of the few initiatives in the area of forest governance and trade currently under implementation in Honduras, the programme's contribution to the most significant changes is evident. The programme distinguishes from other initiatives because of their broad inclusion of stakeholders.

33. Applying the adapted Outcome Harvesting tool in Honduras, interviewed representatives of national agencies agreed that the increased capacity of service providers was the most significant change. This is particularly significant because the landscape of development partners and international cooperation in the forest sector in Honduras is low compared to neighbouring countries and many civil society organizations and NGOs do not have many funding sources. Therefore, the contribution of the programme to service providers capacities is evident.
34. The change in service providers' capacities is considered significant because it helped to create the multi-stakeholder involvement in forest governance issues and VPA negotiation, making Honduras the first American country to have a VPA in place and formalizing a broad multi-stakeholder Implementation Committee. The reasons mentioned by interviewed persons for the good capacity increase of service providers were the selection of beginning organizations through the call for proposals, of different kind (Indigenous Peoples organizations, civil society organizations, NGO, private sector). In some interviews it was criticized that more experienced agencies such as Rainforest Alliance and Zamorano

University also received funding, considering that these agencies are strong enough and do not need the programme's small grants. At the same time, many considered that the inclusion of some stronger agencies, helped beginner agencies in their programme delivery (for instance, Rainforest Alliance supported Indigenous Peoples organizations and Agroforestry Cooperatives, among which several service providers of FLEGT III (Rainforest Alliance, 2020). Also, Rainforest Alliance provided direct technical support to ICF and, according to interviewed non-State stakeholders, was considered a more independent agency in cases of potential conflict between agroforestry cooperatives and ICF.

35. In Honduras, only a few projects failed their execution or had major challenges. This was mostly related to below-minimum standards of service providers. For example, according to the internal assessment of funding modalities, FAO programme management team staff found that a project with a private sector partner in Honduras was challenging because there was no basic structure or staff for the efficient operation of the project. Another project targeting communal agroforestry enterprises in the Mosquitia area was cancelled because the political agenda and the Indigenous Peoples' agenda was not considered adequate for project implementation.

### 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 7.** The FAO-FLEGT programme in Honduras managed to improve social inclusion through targeting Indigenous Peoples' organizations and MSMEs to be included in forest governance and timber value chain. There was specific attention to FPIC and labour conditions. Women and youth empowerment was achieved in particular projects with Indigenous Peoples and agroforestry cooperatives.

36. The FLEGT programme in Honduras had a clear focus on social inclusion. Evidence for this is the project portfolio that included support to private sector, Indigenous Peoples organizations and civil society organizations on issues that are important to achieve social inclusion, such as access to land rights, FPIC and agroforestry cooperatives. These aspects have in the past been considered challenging and were not dealt with by other programmes (Jones and Orr, 2006; Del Gatto, 2013).
37. FLEGT III's work with Indigenous Peoples organizations (direct support or through other agencies) supporting the development and application of FPIC was particularly relevant. Interviewed representatives from both public and civil society organization agencies highlighted that this approach strongly increased the basis for collaboration between Indigenous Peoples and state and good participation in general forest governance debate and the VPA in particular. A specific achievement of the FLEGT Programme was that originally, ICF considered participation of one major Indigenous Peoples representing agency in VPA, but this agency does not represent all ethnic groups. FLEGT III supported the inclusion of the Lenca nation and this has triggered also interest of Maya.
38. FLEGT III also actively stimulated gender equity. In Honduras, there is a low presence of women in the value chain at the producer level (16 percent) with a greater presence in plantation forestry (25 percent), the social forestry sector (32 percent) and in the commercial sector (25 percent) but minimal in the primary industry (5 percent; Valerio & Alas, 2017). The project identified barriers and targeted strategies in several areas to

promote better gender equity. For instance, by targeting women empowerment in areas where women participation was more accepted, such as plantation and social forestry and by supporting women voices in forest governance debate (Barrero Ramírez, 2021). The participation of women in workshops or trainings to develop technical capacities of stakeholder groups was 32 percent (report on output indicator 1.1.5; evaluator's elaboration based on programme monitoring data).

39. Support to the agroforestry cooperatives representing agency FEHCAFOR promoted equity: This organization has a National Committee of youth and women and with FLEGT III support, a youth workshop was organized. The Honduran forest law has several indications to promote inclusion of communities, youth and women and FLEGT based its inclusion support on these provisions (FDsF, 2007).

### 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 8.** The FAO-EU FLEGT Programme in Honduras managed to establish a good partnership around stakeholders working on FLEGT. These partners were actively included in the rounds of negotiations of VPA and participate in the organization structure of the VPA.

40. In Honduras, the VPA was accepted after six rounds of negotiation in which the group of engaged stakeholders increased gradually. Their participation was formalized in three different bodies of VPA (See Finding 2). Seventeen projects targeted capacity building on the different aspects of VPA among various stakeholders and four of these, specifically supported participation of civil society and private sector in negotiations. Two additional projects supported ICF to ensure participation in the negotiations (FAO & ICF, 2021b). This created a continued communication and collaboration among stakeholders that contributed to the programme's impact (see Finding 10). South-south collaboration was actively promoted in Latin America and benefitted cooperation between service providers (see Finding 5).

**Finding 9.** The FAO-EU FLEGT programme established effective collaboration with other initiatives supported by the European Union and Germany, and initiatives on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) mostly at the level of information exchange and support to governmental agencies.

41. Much of the FLEGT programme in Honduras is based on a previous project supported by the European Union in Honduras (Modernisation of Honduras forest sector; European Commission 2021) and was implemented partly in parallel to this project and to the German funded "Community-based forest management and adaptation to climate change" (GIZ 2021). The first project supported the institutional changes and capacities while the second was mostly locally implemented. According to interviewed FAO staff, collaboration with the United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation was positive to overall forest governance issues. According to interviewed public agency representatives, these three initiatives were practically the only that supported the Honduras forest sector.
42. There has been active collaboration with organizations such as CATIE (see Finding 4) the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and WRI. These collaborations were based on initiatives under implementation by these agencies that are similar or

complementary to FLEGT III. For example, ITTO implements projects around the Global South related to forest governance and trade, including the Independent Market of Monitor of timber trade (FLEGT IMM 2021) and WRI works on Global Forest Watch and the Forest Legality Initiative (World Recourses Institute, 2021 a & b). Both institutions support independent forest monitoring in many countries, including Honduras.

43. Collaboration with EFI on FLEGT was positive. According to EFI representatives *“EFI focuses on one of 7 FLEGT Action Plan areas: the VPA negotiation. Therefore, EFI works in less countries but has another level or interaction with the governments and European Union delegations. FAO works on all action areas, more countries and has more funds. EFI can support FAO work by providing access to negotiation areas and FAO supports EFI with support funding for concrete activities”* In practice, this worked well in Honduras where there was decentralized staff of EFI engaged. In Honduras, VPA negotiations that are under the mandate of EFI have been directly funded by FAO and according to interviewed representatives from both organizations, there was active exchange of information and intelligence on the process.

### 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 10.** The FLEGT III programme in Honduras partially achieved stated impacts in terms of improved and equitable forest governance at national level: It contributed to an intersectoral dialogue that did not exist in the past. Also, it helped to strengthen the organization of the forest sector and improved communication and government accountability, with a stronger role of civil society and indigenous peoples. The impact on forest status and timber legality is not yet visible.

44. In 2021, the overall impact of the FLEGT-VPA process was assessed by the programme as a contribution to outcome 5 of the FLEGT III logframe. The assessment concluded that significant positive changes were attained in two dimensions (forest governance and forest conditions) that can be attributed to VPA negotiations. The VPA negotiations have created a collaborative environment whereby all stakeholders see common goals and explore practical ways to reach them. The stakeholder engagement around the VPA negotiations contributed to a stronger stakeholders' awareness, and discussion of the magnitude of the problems generated by poor governance and its consequences on nature. Also, negotiations contributed to improvement of the regulatory framework in the forest sector, yet law implementation is a concern and will require focused and continuous actions. Because the FLEGT III programme was the main instrument (together with the EFI FLEGT Facility) that supported VPA negotiations and because much of the programme's activities were VPA related, the identified changes can be considered positive impact of the FLEGT III programme. They correspond to impact indicators 5, 6 and 7 of the FLEGT programme logframe.
45. CIFOR and ADE (2021) considered that impacts of the VPA on illegal logging, economic development, and livelihoods were less notable. This was expected, because VPA implementation has not fully started yet. However in general, deforestation in Honduras continues at an alarming rate (Guevara & Paredes, 2021). In that sense, the improved forest governance that the FLEGT III programme managed to improve did not yet lead to control of illegal activities, although part of this illegal activity is caused by factors external to the forest and land use sector (Guevara, Paredes & Frazier, 2021).

**Finding 11.** The high level of appropriation of main stakeholders, the continued support to FLEGT (through the European Union and the *Agence française de développement* [AFD]) and created capacities increase the likelihood of sustainability of the results of the FLEGT III programme. The low volume of other initiatives in the field of forest governance and timber trade, low level of association within the timber sector and the instability of government agencies makes the overall sustainability moderately likely.

46. Several findings in this evaluation report include elements of sustainability, mostly thanks to the increased inclusive forest governance (Finding 2, 7, 10) and strengthened capacities of various stakeholders in the timber value chain (Findings 3, 5, 6). The impact assessment showed that there is a general strong perception that Honduras gave a positive signal to economic and development partners by engaging and signing the VPA, and that the country is willing to continue building on the improvements so far, to sustainably develop its forest economy, to improve livelihoods and alleviate poverty (CIFOR & ADE, 2021). FLEGT III has invested in several sustainability actions, for instance by developing a specific sustainability strategy for communications of VPA. Also, the European Union has granted funding to AFD to continue with part of the FAO-EU FLEGT programme interventions in eight VPA countries. And while the exact modalities of this new programme are not defined yet, it is certain that it will support activities in Honduras. These are elements that show commitment and increased enabling environment for sustainability of programme activities and results in the country.
47. On the other hand, in Honduras, the continuity of the results of FLEGT III projects might receive less support after FLEGT III ends, because there are much less technical cooperation programmes here than in e.g. Colombia or Peru and so, the availability of continued funding is low. According to various interviewed stakeholders, this will affect principally the results of smaller organizations that have seen their capacities improved by FLEGT III but do not yet have the capacities or resources to continue without FAO support. This might affect particularly the development of the FPIC process in additional regions in the country and the crucial support to agroforestry cooperatives.

### 3.6 Programme management

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

**Finding 12.** The FLEGT-EU programme in Honduras was well managed (efficient administration and good technical support) and implementation arrangements were appropriate. The relatively high volume of small projects (compared to other countries) represented a critical mass to ensure coherence. The balance between call for proposals and direct assistance was positive between innovative projects and response to institutional demand.

48. The evaluation interviewed eight service providers and all but one considered that FAO provided adequate operative and technical support. One service provider commented that FAO's procedures were slow and did not contribute to an efficient project delivery but admitted this improved when both organizations became more familiar with each other's way of working. Interviewed service providers considered that the FAO focal person for Honduras was easily accessible and both this person and adequate support from the wider regional FLEGT III team contributed to good project delivery. Sixteen projects that reported in 2020 to output indicator 6.2.1 (number of projects that have reached at least 80 percent of their expected results) mentioned they reached all expected outputs.

49. Another good indicator of efficient programme management is the large number of projects in the country: Although Honduras is one of the youngest VPA countries in the FAO-EU FLEGT programme (because previous phases did not include Latin America VPA support), it managed to negotiate the highest number of projects (52) and funding (USD 2.7 million) of all 27 countries included in FLEGT III. Thanks to good communication and training to prospective service providers, the number of proposals increased considerably from the 2017 to the 2019 call for proposals.
50. There was a balance between grant modalities: call for proposals, which was mostly dedicated to NGOs, private sector associations, and civil society organizations, and direct assistance mostly for public agencies<sup>4</sup>, dedicated for institutional strengthening (Finding 2, 5). According to the FAO programme management team's internal reflection (and confirmed by stakeholder interviews) this balance was well evaluated by both. The high amount of direct assistance to ICF was also a result of a management decision to manage specific consultancies by the national government partner rather than by FAO itself. While some other programme partners warned that ICF considered the FLEGT III programme as "petty cash" for different needs, the evaluator considers that all projects implemented by ICF are directly related to the programme outcomes.

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<sup>4</sup> Direct assistance was only given to public agencies and private sector institutions. In Honduras, ICF received most of the direct assistance but requested that the execution of the project was done in collaboration with civil society service providers.

## 4. Lessons learned

51. In April 2021, the regional FAO-EU FLEGT team for Latin America organized an internal reflection workshop on the lessons learnt of implementation of the programme, particularly the grant mechanism. Based on the findings of this evaluation, the evaluator validated many of the lessons identified by the which are presented below:
52. The service providers, especially those organizations with less experience in project management (indigenous and MSMEs), have developed capacities to formulate and manage projects and reporting, identify counterparts, and are able to master the different technical, operational, financial and administrative formats used by the programme, which enables them to work in the future with our donors, FAO and government entities; and also guarantees results of greater impact in the short, medium and long term.
53. Processes to improve governance are processes that require longer periods of implementation, so that, by having long-term support, the impacts generated are greater and visible in the beneficiaries. Specific support and continuous monitoring are the foundations for improving forest governance and consolidating results. Some processes developed have been taken over by other projects/donors that can give them continuity over time. A better understanding of the processes is generated within the framework of the project cycle management, in addition there is an appropriation and empowerment of the service providers by the governance process that make them more legitimate.
54. In a few cases, some service providers have taken confidence by relaxing implementation times, and reducing the quality of their proposals and their products and reports.
55. Administrative weakness required several very small projects: In some cases, the administrative weakness of some service providers did not allow large or long-term grants, this required several rounds of projects with low budgets and a high level of supervision.
56. Having a roadmap/implementation plan, as well as having an active SETAVA was fundamental to guide the projects. Proposals that had clear relevance and contribution to the implementation plan/roadmap, with realistic results, budgets and timelines were better evaluated and generated better results.
57. The evaluation process, recommendations and negotiation with the private sector were relatively time-consuming processes (2-3 months), but fundamental to guide the projects to be efficient, effective and therefore generate the desired impact. The negotiation period is nevertheless shorter than other (non small-grant) mechanisms).
58. In the case of the projects selected under the mechanism of call for proposals, with phases of concept note and preparation of project proposal, these were reviewed by the program team, EFI, and by a panel of external experts. These projects had inputs that allowed them to make better project proposals, with more clarity in the results, activities and products, which allowed them to contribute more concretely to the VPA processes in Honduras.
59. Initially the process did not have a clear path on the priorities that should be supported by the programme's projects. However, the projects were focused on supporting the processes of socialization dialogue of the actors to know the VPA. These projects yielded results, since there was much greater participation of the different actors of the forestry

sector in the different stages of the negotiation of the agreement. This also contributed to improving the participation and involvement of key stakeholders in the process.

60. The quality of the projects increased with the last two calls (2018 and 2019) when there was already an implementation plan of the VPA in Honduras, and even more when the FLEGT technical secretariats took ownership of the project. Prior to the publication of the 2019 call, the regional team developed training workshops for organizations / institutions linked to the forestry sector, on the formulation of proposals, which include the socialization of VPA priorities. This resulted in being the country that sent the largest number of proposals in the 2019 call of the programme and to which the largest number of projects were approved.
61. The call for proposals mechanism was more objective, favouring more competent organizations to execute the projects as there was an external panel of experts. The AD mechanism and direct contracting were to some extent susceptible to pressure from the forestry authority and the European Union delegation in the country. Although many proposals were rejected by the program and FAO representation, it was forced that some grants had to be accessed for indigenous organizations, urban NGOs, and consulting contracts for political operators. This meant an additional effort on the part of FAO in its management, with pressure to approve products that did not meet the minimum quality, and therefore did not have the expected impact.
62. Projects to generate/strengthen capacities at the operational organizational level, promote participatory processes for policy and regulatory reform, and practices to improve forest governance require the development of long processes (two or more consecutive projects) because they need time to generate political momentum and high ownership by the beneficiaries, which generally require more time to be assimilated and put into practice by the project beneficiaries.
63. Several projects to strengthen governance required a second phase, since the intervention areas need greater attention and / or procedures to achieve the required results. For example- governance platforms to participate in the VPA by FDsF, and the Regularization of Land Tenure by the ICF.
64. Making a country coordinator responsible for promoting the development of actions from the technical and operational point of view has been fundamental for the generation of synergies with other initiatives within the programme, within the country and with other countries in the region; in addition to generating relationships with other technical cooperation organizations. The person in charge of each country gave important technical guidelines for the development and promotion of ongoing actions.
65. Close working dynamics between FAO and service providers generated good coordination with the private sector from the beginning of the negotiation and implementation until the closing of the project. The due diligence process allowed FAO to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each service provider and thus the time to invest in trainings with each of them, as well as a complete packages of support materials and other support tools. Operational and technical support to the service providers during the entire project implementation have helped to reach satisfactory management of the projects.



66. Close financial accompaniment and monitoring of the service providers during the implementation phase, especially with those service providers with the weakest and most difficulties, made it possible to avoid delays and to provide support in order to have a quality final financial report.
67. There was thorough and strong technical feedback. Many service providers have shared their appreciation for the comments provided on the progress reports, as they often "push" the service providers to deliver at a higher quality or to consider additional reflection and analysis that they would not have done otherwise. It also served as a "second check" to the work done by expert consultants hired by the projects.
68. For Honduras, among the positive changes generated by the programme was the establishment of synergies between the organizations that have executed projects with funds from the FAO-EU FLEGT programme, since a lot of coordination has developed between civil society organizations, public institutions, organizations of the private sector.
69. Having a technical committee of the programme in each country, integrated by the forestry authority, the European Union, FAO and other organizations in the country, allowed the custody of the implementation of the roadmap, as a driving force in the coordination of all the actions of the programme. This allowed a strong and permanent collaboration from the national government, the European Union and FAO, in favour of the programme.

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