Citizen Voices 4 Change

Congo Basin Forest Monitoring Project

Project Background

NON-STATE ACTORS PARTICIPATION IN FOREST GOVERNANCE, FLEGT AND REDD+[1]

An empowered civil society, including indigenous peoples and local communities, with the capacity to access and analyse information, to monitor forest governance including forest land use policies, to advocate and to hold governments accountable are key to improving forest and land governance. It is central to the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) and Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) processes.

The current scale and pace of deforestation and forest degradation is alarming

As forest and land use policies are susceptible to corruption[2], ensuring transparency and accountability linked to FLEGT and REDD+ implementation is key to the credibility and viability of both processes. The current scale and pace of deforestation and forest degradation is alarming. This has a negative impact not only at a local level – on local economies, community livelihoods and ecosystem goods and services provided to the local population (timber and non-timber forest products, local climate, water availability, protection against erosion and natural disasters) but also globally, especially on climate change and biodiversity, desertification and poverty reduction.

Agriculture is estimated to be the driver for around 80% of deforestation worldwide[3]. Recent analysis suggests that almost half of total tropical deforestation between 2000 and 2012 was due to - possibly illegal- conversion of forests for commercial agriculture, and that a quarter was the direct result of - possibly illegal - agro-conversion for export markets. Although conversion primarily takes place to clear forest-land for agricultural expansion, significant portions of tropical timber come from these conversion areas, and this raises issues of possible illegality of the timber salvaged from these areas as well as of the agro-commodities produced from them. A roadmap for progress towards the good governance required for

1. This section has been drawn from the call for proposals - European Union (2015) Action document Non-State Actors Participation in Forest Governance, FLEGT and REDD+ - CRIS number: DCI-ENV/2015/38120.
2. http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/to_conserve_forests_climate_funds_must_cut_out_corruption
3. Consumer Goods and Deforestation: An Analysis of the Extent and Nature of Illegality in Forest Conversion for Agriculture and Timber Plantations- Sam Lawson.
4. This set of Principles and Criteria was developed as the UN-REDD Programme's response to the safeguards for REDD+ agreed at UNFCCC COP 16 in Cancun.

successful implementation of REDD+ is being developed[4]. Importantly, it has to be owned and understood by a wide array of stakeholders in the countries concerned, preventing the conflict of interest that would arise if, for example, governments or non-state actors were left to monitor and evaluate their own performance.

Forest monitoring has been reported to contribute towards combating corruption, reducing illegal activities and improving accountability in the forest sector. Although such monitoring activities have been implemented mostly in the context of industrial timber harvesting and trade, its potential to improve forest governance has interested actors to carry out independent monitoring activities in other areas of forest and forest land management, for example REDD+.

Supporting increased capacity of stakeholders to build open and accessible information systems responds to the increasing demand for transparency in forest and land use policies. The use of this information through activities such as participative forest monitoring allows citizens to observe how official governance systems operate in practice and to push for improvements if needed. As forest and land use policies are susceptible to corruption, ensuring transparency and accountability linked to FLEGT and REDD+ implementation is key to the credibility and viability of both processes.

Participative forest monitoring assesses forest governance and legal compliance in the forest sector. As a tool for improving forest governance, participative forest monitoring has been carried out using a variety of approaches and by involving different stakeholder groups in specific countries. It has been a major focus of work of many actors engaged in Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) implementation. In several VPA partner countries, independent monitors have established solid networks at national and subnational levels and built their credibility as watchdog organisations. Although only in its inception, regional exchanges are increasingly frequent and there is an interest to build more formal networks in and between regions.

VPAs highlight the importance of this role by establishing the rights of citizens to access information on the forest sector, by including the use of complaints mechanisms and by providing that independent monitors are a source of information to the independent audit of the timber legality assurance system established under the Agreements. As both REDD + and FLEGT implementation makes progress on the ground there is an increasing acknowledgement from partners countries of the need for open, transparent systems and processes and the ability of civil society and stakeholders (including, for example right holders, farmers, the private sector and academics) to effectively engage in these processes. This project responds to these needs.

Context of the Action

Independent monitoring of forest activities is at very different stages of development in the five target countries. In **Cameroon**, official IFM projects ended in 2013 and since then CS has struggled to monitor the sector, due largely to lack of resources. Consequently there has been a reported increase in cases of corruption and illegalities. In the **RoC** the 2014 forest law provides a mandate for CS-IFM of VPA implementation. CAGDF took over from REM as the mandated forest monitor in 2013 but it has operated largely alone. Promoting a wider, decentralised cadre of monitors, including interaction with the evolving national REDD+ strategy, is a key focus of the Action in this country. In **CAR** there has been limited progress with the VPA due to the recent armed conflict. Although CS-IFM is provided for in the VPA texts, it is still in its infancy in this post-conflict context, and CS is relatively 'young' with under-developed

competencies and skills. In **DRC** the VPA negotiations have completely stalled, however the country has made the most significant progress with REDD+ in the Congo Basin. Mandated IFM is conducted by OGF. Despite this range of forest governance monitoring efforts, there remains a significant lack of appreciation and acceptance of IFM amongst decision makers in the Congo Basin. In **Gabon** and **CAR** for instance, there is a lack of knowledge about IFM, whilst in Cameroon there is reluctance from government and private sector to engage with independent monitors. Monitoring findings are rarely acted on by forest authorities and the very role of civil society in monitoring is still contested. Additionally, the monitoring work done by CS, IPs and communities is not readily taken into account by the private sector, law makers, anti-corruption committees, importers and Competent Authorities (CAs) in Europe.

Citizen Voices for Change

CONGO BASIN FOREST MONITORING PROJECT (CV4C)

Project Details

Start date: January 1, 2017
End date: December 31, 2020
Duration: 4 years
Project amount: 6.5m euros
Donors: European Union (80%), World Resources Institute (WRI) and the University of Wolverhampton.

Overall Objective

Strengthen the contribution of non-state actors (NSA) – civil society (CS), Indigenous Peoples (IP) and community organisations – to improving forest governance, sustainable forest management and the contribution of forests to development in five Congo Basin countries.

Specific Objective

Strong and effective target NSAs monitor forest governance and forest land use change, inform relevant processes particularly FLEGT and REDD+, and contribute to effective responses from law enforcement and policy making agencies in five Congo Basin countries.

Forest dependent communities, women and indigenous peoples groups are central to the success of this Action

Project Target Groups

- Six national CSOs (co-applicants) in five countries and regional organisation FLAG
- Eight FLEGT and REDD+ CS/IP and forest community platforms in project countries - includes 500+ member organisations;
- 30 regional CSOs involved in independent forest monitoring (IFM);
- National and local government authorities; FLEGT/REDD+ institutions, media, lawmakers, Competent Authorities (CA) in Europe and private sector actors.

Forest dependent communities, women and indigenous peoples groups are central to the success of this Action. They will serve as community observers, reporting illegalities to external and mandated monitors. They will take part in VPA/REDD+ structures, advocate for their positions, and engage with decision and policy makers.

Local and national CBOs will be key members of the multi-actor NSA partnerships.

National CS platforms will benefit from capacity building from CIDT and national co-applicants to play their role effectively. They will make use of independent forest monitoring evidence to develop policy and advocacy positions and engage with decision- and policy-makers as well as track responses from them.

National authorities benefit from identifying the most relevant criteria, indicators and methodologies for monitoring FLEGT, REDD+ and land use change.

Expected Results

1 Increased organisational and operational capacity of NSAs to undertake monitoring of forest governance, land-use, and REDD+ safeguards.

To achieve this we will:
1.1 Conduct organisational needs assessments and prioritisation exercises
1.2 Design & deliver bespoke organisational development capacity support for national
1.3 Undertake market and growth analysis for FLAG
1.4 Design and deliver a forest monitoring support programme for monitoring organisations
1.5 Conduct a Gender Audit and support Gender Mainstreaming for co-applicants and forest monitoring organisations
1.6 Design and Deliver Training of Trainers (ToT) programme for co-applicants

2 Improved quality and availability of independent information on compliance with forest and land sector legal norms.

To achieve this we will:
2.1 Engage with national stakeholders to prioritise areas for monitoring in each country
2.2 Analysis of relevant national legislation and policies
2.3 Develop, review and update 5 country IFM strategies
2.4 Define and harmonise FLEGT and REDD+ indicators and monitoring methodologies including national piloting
2.5 Undertake 80 forest monitoring missions including joint FLEGT and REDD+ missions
2.6 Undertake ongoing monitoring of priority issues such as transparency commitments, lands-use change, REDD+ safeguards, women's rights, participation
2.7 Provide quality assurance support to monitoring outputs
2.8 Compile, publish and communicate quality forest monitoring results and analysis
2.9 Support active media engagement in forest governance and the communication of monitoring outputs

3 Viable, constructive and sustainable networks of well-informed local NSAs, with increased cross-border cooperation and information exchanges.

To achieve this we will:
3.1 Undertake mapping and capacity analysis of key CS platforms
3.2 Provide targeted support to improve the operation and sustainability of national civil society networks and platforms, and their capacity to consult, inform and engage with forest dependent communities, especially women and youth
3.3 Develop a forest monitoring Community of Practice within and between national NSA platforms
3.4 Facilitate and promote dialogue and synergies between national and regional FLEGT, REDD+ actors
3.5 Organise regional multi-stakeholder learning and information exchange forums
3.6 Build evidence base for IFM and strengthen relationships between NSA networks and academic institutions

4 Effective participation, representation, advocacy and engagement of NSAs in national forest policy process, including FLEGT and REDD+.

To achieve this we will:
4.1 Develop and promote actions to improve the extent, quality and gender proportionality of NSA representation in existing decision making structures and policy processes.
4.2 Strengthen capacity for collective advocacy at platform level
4.3 Establish and consolidate strategic national partnerships for more effective influencing
4.4 Establish dialogue between forest monitoring, EUTR competent authorities, importers in Europe, national private sector and other stakeholders

The Partnership

The consortium includes national organisations involved in mandated (CAGDF and OGF) and external independent (Brainforest, CED, CIEDD and FODER) monitoring in the Congo Basin, working alongside two internationally respected and neutral organisations (CIDT and WRI) with the ability to broker linkages between monitors and those they seek to influence, particularly government and private sector.

Having only two international organisations in this consortium ensures that the majority of financial resources are directed towards national co-applicants. The national co-applicants are the leading forest monitoring actors in their countries with considerable experience and technical expertise in monitoring FLEGT, REDD+ and land use changes. They hold strategically important positions within national Civil Society networks, making them ideal conduits for capacity strengthening of other NSAs.

Our national partners are the leading forest monitoring actors in their countries

International Partners

The Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT)

CIDT is a department within the University of Wolverhampton (UoW), based in the United Kingdom. As a centre of excellence in capacity strengthening for international development, we offer practical solutions for positive change, based on our experience in over 140 countries worldwide.

CIDT will represent the project team to the donor, handle overall financial and administrative management of the grant, coordinate and support activities, with an emphasis on organisational and institutional capacity development, facilitating networking and promoting lesson learning and sharing of good practice among members of the consortia and beyond. CIDT will lead establishment of NSA-governments partnerships, development of training protocols and facilitation of cooperation and communication between NSAs and local authorities and private sector.

World Resources Institute (WRI)

WRI is a leading global research organisation specialised in natural resources management with an established presence in the Congo Basin. WRI convenes the Global Forest Watch (GFW) as well as the Forest Transparency Initiative (FTI) – both aimed at catalysing a radical increase in transparency and capacity to manage the world's forests. WRI's suite of applications constitutes one of the world's largest open access online databases on forest monitoring – linking data from satellites to those crowd-sourced from actors on the ground. WRI will work with national partners to compile, analyse and publish all independent monitoring observations and reports via the GFW and FTI online platforms. WRI has established agreements (MOUs) with all national governments across the Congo Basin - improving access to official forest information. Its affiliate the "Forest Legality Initiative (FLI)" - www.forestlegality.org - will relay monitoring results to stakeholders in the United States, the EU, Asia and South/Central America – leading to impact of the Action well beyond the borders of the 5 target countries.

Cameroon

Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement (CED)

CED's 25+ years' experience in forest governance includes forest monitoring and policy analysis, especially on forest conversion, IP rights, and REDD+. CED will play an important role in implementing this Action in Cameroon, as well as providing capacity building support to national partners and CS platforms in other project countries. CED coordinates the national CS platform in Cameroon and the regional African Community Rights Network (ACRN). It has also established the first land observatory (OBSTER) in Cameroon with a national system of local observers.

Gabon

Brainforest

With 18 years of experience, Brainforest is the leading NGO in Gabon and heads the national CS platform. Brainforest will lead on the implementation of the Action's activities in Gabon. It will undertake regular forest monitoring missions and lead on advocacy with national NSAs platforms and other stakeholders.

Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER)

FODER is a skilled and innovative organisation with established experience in external independent monitoring, anti-corruption, and monitoring the implementation of transparency annexes in the VPA. It helped establish the national IFM coordination of 12 organisations and has developed the "Système National d'Observation Indépendante Normalisé" based on ISO quality standards, which involved development of a REDD+ monitoring guide with the Ministry of Environment. It has successfully delivered several forest monitoring projects in Cameroon and will lead on IFM and capacity building of a network of monitors.

Regional

The Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG)

FLAG will provide technical assistance and capacity building for national co-applicants in IM and operationalise the regional IMFLEG and IMREDD platform. Based in Cameroon, FLAG is the leading regional IFM organisation in the Congo Basin. It boasts the top experts in the region, with strong links to all organisations working on IFM. A key objective of this Action is to strengthen FLAG's capacity to become the regional point of reference and Centre of Excellence in IMFLEG and IMREDD+.

Republic of Congo

Cercle d'Appui à la Gestion Durable des Forêts (CAGDF)

CAGDF is the national co-applicant in RoC and will lead on IFM and capacity building of a wider network of monitors. It will also benefit from organisational/operational capacity building from CIDT and FLAG. As the mandated independent monitor of the VPA since 2013, it has been instrumental in the development of external independent monitoring and REDD+ methodologies, collaborating with FLAG and EFI.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Observatoire de la Gouvernance Forestière (OGF)

OGF is the most experienced CSO working on independent monitoring in the DRC. It is the mandated independent monitor of the VPA and has been instrumental in the development of external independent monitoring and REDD+ methodologies in collaboration with FLAG and EFI. It will carry out forest monitoring, provide training for magistrates and forest control staff, establish a network of independent monitors in provinces, and engage with national CS platforms.

Central African Republic (CAR)

Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD)

CIEDD is the national co-applicant in CAR and will lead on IFM and capacity building of a network of monitors. It holds a strategic position among the NGO members of the Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles et l'Environnement (GDRNE) platform and plays a very active role in the VPA and Transparency in the Extractive Industry Initiative. It is the most experienced organisation involved in monitoring forest governance in CAR.

Project partner contact details

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