



Migrating from FLEGT VPA to PEFC Certification in Ghana

In early 2018, the National Working Group Ghana, with the support of UK DFID and in cooperation with PEFC International and the UK Timber Trade Federation (UK TTF), completed a study titled 'Migrating from FLEGT VPA to PEFC Certification in Ghana: an overview of PEFC and FLEGT VPA synergy'.

The comprehensive analysis reviewed Ghana's FLEGT VPA requirements together with the requirements of Ghana's recently completed National Forest Certification System.

Recognizing that the FLEGT Timber Legality Assurance System in Ghana should soon come into effect, the study looked to better understand the overlap in requirements of the two systems and to identify the specific, additional, sustainability elements that companies will need to address if they wish to build upon the achievement of FLEGT license and migrate towards PEFC certification.

Now, with more clarity on the specific gaps between the two systems, practical tools and support can be developed to support the forest sector. This will support the competitiveness of Ghana's forest industry and enable forest producers to meet a broader suit of market requirements and consumer expectations.

The synergies between EU FLEGT Action Plan and Forest Certification have been long recognized...

While FLEGT initiatives are specifically focused on long-term efforts towards improving forest governance and ensuring legality in the forest sector, forest certification is focused on promoting sustainable forest management and communicating forest products' sustainable origins throughout supply chains on a voluntary basis.

The two approaches work at different levels in many regards but with outcomes that are complimentary: improving forest management and combating illegal logging and associated trade.

Now with FLEGT VPAs and their timber legality assurance systems operational or becoming so in some tropical producer countries, this analysis looked to compare the detailed requirements embedded within FLEGT and a national forest certification system from an implementation perspective in Ghana.

Highlights of the analysis reveal that:

FLEGT VPA legality requirements cover (to some degree) a wide range of the environmental, social and economic requirements outlined in the national standards for sustainable forest management and chain of custody certification.

However, there are specific areas where the national forest certification standard goes significantly further than the FLEGT VPA requirements. These areas include:

- A broader consideration for the environmental and social benefits derived through forest management activities.
- Further consideration and responsibility around the long-term social and economic well-being of forest workers and local communities, including offering local communities opportunities for employment and training, and providing opportunities for local producers to integrate in wood supply chains.
- Managing environmental impact beyond traditional forest management planning and forest operations requirements.
 - For instance, the national certification requirements requires explicitly addressing chemical use and management, preventing forest conversion, outlines direct responsibility for timber companies to manage a range of issues including safeguarding species, protecting forest areas and restoring ecological functions.
- Ensuring the timber company implements an ongoing monitoring and assessment program of forest management and its impacts on social and environmental aspects.
- Identifying, managing and maintaining high conservation value forest areas.

Beyond the detailed forest management requirements, other key differences between the FLEGT VPA and national certification requirements relate to the nature of the requirements themselves:

Responsibility

Where the FLEGT VPA requirements defer to government responsibility for implementing regulations to meet many requirements, forest certification requires that the timber companies themselves illustrate a direct responsibility for fulfilling the requirement.

For example, the FLEGT VPA does not explicitly address the issue of fire control measures (it's considered within the purview of the regulator) whereas the national standard requires each certified timber company to have in place an internal forest control and management plan. This also applies to forest management plans generally and many other requirements.

Procedures

The national certification standard embodies a management systems approach. This means it is not only about ensuring the outcome or performance, but also detailing the process and procedural requirements to ensure that the outcome is delivered on a consistent basis. This is also the basis of a system for continuous monitoring and improvement.

This management systems approach creates a significant difference between the requirements of the two systems. FLEGT requirements lack specific reference to establishing and utilizing internal procedures, guidelines, checklists, plans for many issues, etc., as are articulated as requirements in the national certification standards.

For example, whereas VPA Article 1 and the National Standard both require the protection of forests from illegality, the National Standard articulates in more detail how the timber companies needs to: 1) develop a forest monitoring plan; and 2) have in place a system of documentation to record illegal activities and the associated actions and/or remedies undertaken.

Looking forward

Establishing a FLEGT VPA and operationalizing the timber legality assurance system is an ambitious commitment of producer country governments and stakeholders. The process strengthens forest governance and improves forest management and transparency throughout the forest sector. In parallel, forest certification provides a voluntary approach for organizations wishing to go beyond legality and achieve internationally recognized benchmarks for sustainability.

With the completion of this project, it becomes a lot clearer exactly which forest management aspects timber companies in Ghana will need to address in order to build upon their FLEGT compliance and achieve forest certification. It will also enable the Ghana Working Group to develop the additional tools, templates and training to support operators wishing to move beyond mandatory requirements towards fulfilling international market requirements for sustainability.

With the National Working Group Ghana's completion of the national forest certification system in late 2017 and the submission of the national system to PEFC International in May 2018 for assessment, Ghana's national certification system is on track to have international recognition through PEFC in early 2019.

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