

Engaging the FLEGT and VPA
Recommendations for the Forestry Development Authority (FDA)

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A delegation of the EC visited Liberia in early May 2007. The delegation met with various government agencies, civil society groups and the private sector to discuss follow-up activities on FLEGT and VPA in Liberia. Based on the comments, suggestions and feedbacks gathered from the various meetings, it is recommended that the Managing Director:

1. Lead a two-pronged approach towards engaging the EU on FLEGT and VPA. This strategy entails a simultaneous conduct of a campaign to raise public awareness on FLEGT and VPA and moving towards engagement with the EC. This will ensure that the public and other actors including civil society, private sector and other international partners are fully aware of the Government of Liberia's efforts to further strengthen the rule of law in the forestry sector and at the same time assure the EU that there is a desire on the part of the government to negotiate a VPA once the appropriate environment has been created.
2. Identify a support person for Ms. Gertrude Korvayan, the FDA current Focal Point on FLEGT and VPA; Moses Gorpudolo, the head of the department dealing with the Chain-of-Custody, is considered an ideal choice. These two persons will lead FDA engagement with civil society, the private sector and other international partners on FLEGT and VPA issues. The Managing Director may consider personally engaging other senior government officials as the discussions on FLEGT and VPA progress.
3. Authorize these two individuals to lead the drafting of a road map or concept paper, in partnership with the Secretariat of the NGOs Coalition for Liberia, outlining the steps towards engaging the EU on FLEGT and VPA. This paper should also highlight the benefits of engaging the process, identify national level stakeholders, and propose immediate steps towards engaging the EC for further discussions on FLEGT and VPA.
4. Present the road map or concept paper on FLEGT/ VPA to the Board of Directors for discussion and approval. Following the Board's decision, the paper should be forwarded to the President for clearance, after which it should be published to inform the public on these steps.

At the same time, the MD should:

5. Establish a national level tri-partite [stakeholder] working group on FLEGT and VPA. The working group should comprise of civil society organizations, private sector operators, the FDA and other government agencies, and selected international partners including LFI members in Liberia. The tri-partite working group should

amongst other responsibilities develop a program for a nationwide campaign to raise awareness on FLEGT and VPA; develop a methodology for the national level consultative process; and mechanism for communicating with the wider public on FLEGT and VPA issues.

6. Request the EC to provide technical and financial support to the tripartite working group for these initial engagements. The support will go towards the consultative and awareness-raising processes to ensure that the FLEGT and VPA are properly understood by all the interest groups.
7. Engage the IUCN to define the role of the IUCN Facilitator to be recruited for Liberia. The ToR should highlight the Facilitator's role as a neutral convener during stakeholder consultations and forums on the process, implementation of the awareness raising campaign, and communication of outcomes of the consultative process to the wider public.

The chain of custody contract negotiating team should be specifically requested to:

8. Integrate key requirements for an acceptable legality assurance system, based on the requirements of the VPA, into the Chain of custody contract during negotiation with SGS. This will ensure that the chain of custody being established for Liberia meets the minimum accepted standards for chain of custody systems worldwide, fits in with the VPA requirements and raises the standards by which the performance of the contractor (SGS) will be measured.

Finally, the Managing Director should strive to:

9. Aim to implement these recommendations within the next forty-five days in order to prepare the government to announce its intentions to negotiate a VPA, with the EU, by mid-July. This will enable the President to announce this decision to the nation on July 26, the nation's Independence Day, along with other similar announcements that are expected on the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the establishment of a Land Reform Commission.
10. Ensure that leadership of the process remains with the FDA. The FDA is the only agency within government that has the technical capacity and is better positioned to lead implementation of an agreement with the EU on VPA