

7th Regular Meeting of the VPA Steering Committee
Monday, April 26, 2010
FDA Boardroom, Congo Town, Monrovia

The 7th regular meeting of the VPA Steering Committee was called to order by the Chairman, Hon. Moses D. Wogbeh who replaced Hon. John T. Woods as Managing Director of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA).

There being no amendment the agenda was adopted as a working tool for the meeting. Prayer was offered after the adoption of the agenda.

Minutes

The Chairman noted that the minutes of the 6th regular SC meeting were earlier circulated via email, as such, each member of the SC was expected to be familiar with its contents and prepared for all necessary comments if there were any to be made. He however gave the body the benefit of the doubt, especially representatives from the communities who do not have access to the internet facilities.

The minutes subsequently reviewed and there were no comments or questions raised from the minutes.

Hon. Wogbeh congratulated the TS for an excellent job, and encouraged the team to continue the hard work.

A motion was made, seconded and accepted by the body for the minutes to form part of the SC's archives.

Matters arising from the minutes:

Though there were no comments on the minutes of the 6th SC regular meeting, however, there were concerns raised about the minutes from the Special Called Meeting between the Negotiating Team and the Steering Committee. That meeting was held on Wednesday, March, 24, 2010. The former Chairman observed that it would have been very useful if these minutes were available, since the issue pertaining to the VPA revised roadmap was being discussed. Mr. Woods noted that it was regrettable that the minutes were not prepared by the

Technical Secretariat. However the TS apologized for the not being able to present the minutes on time. It was promised by the TS to have the minutes prepared before the next SC meeting.

Update from Legality Definition Consultant:

Cllr. Nagballee Warner, the consultant who has been hired to draft the Legality Definition, informed the SC that during his consultation period he achieved a lot. Cllr. Warner said he held series of consultative meetings with stakeholder groups involved in the VPA process to ascertain their views that would help in developing the Legality Definition in the context of Liberia. The consultant graded those consultations as successful. He also informed the SC that though he will do the job he has been hired to do; he still needs a draft LD from stakeholders. Cllr. Warner emphasized that stakeholders should not be spoon fed. They must be given the chance to make their input. He further added that he does not want to adopt the “cut & paste” methodology. He emphasized that there were some key areas that need to be taken into consideration while drafting the LD. He explained that the legal timber consists of two key indicators which he named as: Forest Allocation and Forest Management.

Cllr. Warner disclosed that he has updated the LD working group on progress made thus far. When quizzed as to what help the LD working group has been to him (Warner), the Cllr. said that he inherited a lot of documents from the LD working group but explained that they are not drafts. The consultant further noted that the document he is putting together will not be a draft rather will be considered as guidance notes.

Following the consultant’s report, Mr. Michael Roberts, a community representative of Grand Cape Mount County requested that the TS arrange meetings between the community representatives and Cllr. Warner. He stressed the need for series of consultations since the community is fully involved in the process.

Road Map and Work plan:

As regards to the revised Road Map and Work plan of the VPA, there could not be a complete discussion as the minutes from the Special Called Meeting were not available. Hon. Woods said the minutes should have been used as a guide to discuss the Road Map.

Members of the CSO in separate statements said they have always told the SC that the CSO dissatisfaction should be recorded in every document that is produced after a meeting or working session if it did exist. Mr. Kula Jackson, the facilitator of the NGO's Coalition who travelled to Brussels for the negotiation said he was seen as the "black cow" amongst the team in Brussels. He said he strongly disagreed with the one year period but could not get the support of anyone since he was from the CSO, he alleged. Mr. Jackson claimed that the CSO is always seen as trouble makers. As such his views could not be accepted by any one at the negotiation talks. Mr. Robert Nyahn of SAMFU emphasized that when decisions are being made and a particular group of people are in disagreement, that aspect of the meeting must be reflected in the minutes. He was buttressed by Mrs. Julie Weah of the Foundation Community Initiatives (FCI). The NGO Coalition, SAMFU and FCI are all Civil Society Organizations represented on the SC.

There were several reasons assumed about the rationale behind the decision taken in Brussels. Some of which members of the SC said could be political, economical or was pre-meditated since in fact someone in high position has the power to dismiss individuals from their jobs as the Coordinator and his principle deputy were threaten while in Brussels. This prompted a question to the TS about the reason behind the NT decision to adjust the VPA process from two years to one year. The Coordinator of the TS told the body that the Secretariat did not have any idea as to why the Minister as head of the delegation decided to accept the decision of adjusting the time frame as suggested by the EU. As a way of clarifying some doubts, Hon. Woods (as he stood to be corrected) explained that the Minister said clearly; that if the process is not complete within one year, it will be difficult for timber and timber related products to get on the European market.

After several divergent of views on the revised VPA Road Map, the SC agreed based on consultation with their various constituencies, that the Road Map be

accepted as proposed but with the option of necessary time adjustment whenever the need arises. The TS was then instructed to communicate to the NT concerning the SC conditional acceptance of the revised Road Map.

At this point the presiding chair Hon. Wogbeh wanted to know as to who was responsible to give technical advice to the process. The TS responded that the two working groups are responsible to advise the SC on technical matters.

Executive Order:

The Coordinator of the TS informed the SC that Hon. Saytumah has promised again to inform the President about the VPA and will encourage her to sign the proclamation instead of an Executive Order.

FLEGT Licensing Authority:

The SC was informed by the TS that members of the Legality Assurance System Technical Working Group (LAS) has decided and willingly agreed that the FLEGT Licensing Authority be given to the Government of Liberia through the Forestry Development Authority (FDA).

The SC further accepted the decision tentatively and requested for a more official report from the LAS Working Group. It was then agreed that the LAS Working Group communicate officially to the SC regarding the issuance of FLEGT Licenses.

May 17th Video Conference:

It was also agreed that a formal letter be communicated to EU since there is a conflict of schedule with the Chairperson of the NT. The TS however promised to conclude the schedule with Hon. Chenoweth as early as possible.

Consultations in communities:

Mr. Kofa disclosed that the VPA Budget does not have any allocation for consultation to the various communities. He explained that there is a need for the GoL to provide resource to the VPA process. He made reference to the Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI) and the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) who were taking on the initiative to assist in community's awareness campaign but they are facing difficulty due to lack of funding.

Hon. Wogbeh asked the VPA Secretariat to work along with the community representatives and prepare a financial proposal that will serve as a guide in seeking external assistance. The Chair said if the proposal is available the FDA will be in the position to speak with institutions like the World Bank to assist.

Report from ToR Committee:

The Chairperson on the committee for VPA ToR gave a brief report on behalf of her Committee. Madam Victoria Cole noted that during the work of the Committee, it was observed that the two working documents given to them, (the proposed ToR from the CSO and the previous ToR from the SC were similar). Madam Cole said that owing to the similarity of the two documents, the Committee made only few changes as will be observed. She reported that this was done with the consent of every stakeholder group represented.

The document was accepted by the SC but it was requested by the SC that the report be signed by every committee member.

Review on SC Regular Meetings:

The TS explained that the SC regular meetings are too frequent and are becoming very costly. Mr. Kofa pleaded with the SC to reduce the regular meetings from once a month to at least every other month. This request was however rejected by the SC in view of the revised VPA Road Map. In the opinion of the SC, there is a need for more frequent meetings since the VPA timeframe has been adjusted from two-year to one year timeframe.

Mr. Lawrence Satia of the MOF/BOC indicated that it was necessary for the TS to sacrifice all it can to host SC meetings. He however complained of the amount SC members currently received as transportation allowance when they attend meetings. The MOF representative said there has been passage of budget since the SC started meeting regularly but it has not been implemented. Mr. Satia cautioned the TS to provide a stable and encouraging amount for SC representatives.

The Office and Finance Manager of the TS clarified to the body that originally, SC members were entitled to \$ 30.00 USD per meeting at 8 meetings for the two-year period. But as the need arose, the SC decided to have regular monthly

meetings which necessitated the re-allocation of amount initially allocated for transportation at SC meetings. The OFM noted that SC members are now receiving \$10.00 USD per meeting and \$5.00 USD per Working Group meetings. (LD & LAS).

It was finally agreed that the VPA SC regular meetings remain at once a month.

AOB:

Hon. Woods was concerned about the Chainsaw management. The TS said Mr. Warner will be asked to give an update.

At this point the Presiding Chair thanked everyone for attending regular meetings. He encouraged members to continue their commitment to the process.

The meeting was adjourned with 19 persons in attendance including the VPA Staff.

Attendance:

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| 1. Abraham M. Kromah | MOA |
| 2. Shauna Leven | MOA |
| 3. Sely R.L. Williams | COM. REP. |
| 4. George F. Kpawulu | COM. REP. |
| 5. William V. Page | COM. REP. |
| 6. Michael M. Roberts | COM. REP. |
| 7. Lawrence N. Satia | MOF/BOC |
| 8. Bropleh N. Walka (Alt.) | MPEA |
| 9. Thomas Z. Barleh | COM. REP. |
| 10. Sollie K. George | COM. REP. |
| 11. Robert L. Nyahn | SAMFU |
| 12. Julie T.B. Weah | FCI/CSO |
| 13. Kula L. Jackson | NGO's Coalition/CSO |
| 14. William Gegeh | MOF/Customs |
| 15. Victoria Cole | FDA |
| 16. Queta J-Hessou | VPA |
| 17. F. Dadeh Harper | VPA |
| 18. Amos T. Kofa | VPA |
| 19. Charles K. Miller | VPA |