

# Foder and the EU-Cameroon VPA: protecting forests, communities and the climate



**FODER is a non-profit association, established in 2002 to encourage sustainable development in Cameroon. Through our activities we ensure justice and equity, preserve biodiversity and restore the environment. This improves peoples' quality of life and strengthens democracy and their rights. At the heart of this work are actions to achieve transparent, participatory and sustainable management of natural resources. Since its creation, FODER has achieved notable successes in domains such as law enforcement, communities' rights, transparency and the fight against corruption, by encouraging participatory decision-making processes.**

## Transparency and the fight against corruption

Corruption is one of the most important issues affecting Cameroon's forest sector. In 2010 the sector was given 7.27 out of 10 in the perception of corruption intensity index – this is an appalling score which implies that the whole sector is corrupt. FODER was the first national civil society organisation to use the Initiative for Transparency and the Fight Against Corruption (ITAC) to curb corruption and its impacts on the forest sector. FODER's anti-corruption work raises stakeholders' awareness about integrity and its benefits. Our regular corruption perception index of the forest sector blows the whistle on dishonesty and has led the Minister of Forests and Wildlife to take firm action to tackle corruption in his Ministry. Several public servants convicted of corruption received disciplinary sanctions. As a result, by 2013, the forest sector received a score of 6.44 in the corruption intensity index, reducing to 5.13 in 2014 due to efforts from both civil society and the Ministry. A lack of funding and a related let-up in civil society awareness-raising and monitoring meant that the rate increased in 2015 to 5.78.

Implementation of the Cameroon-EU Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) has been monitored by FODER and the Communities and Forest Platform (CFP). This led to the creation of a Ministry of Forest web page<sup>1</sup> dedicated to the VPA, which hosts nearly 70 per cent of the information required in Annex VII (known as the transparency annex). Future work includes ensuring the remaining 30 per cent is available and updating the website so that it is more accessible to local communities and other vulnerable groups.

FODER also advocates for improved access to information on the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) process. We have published a guide on access to REDD+ information jointly with the Ministry of Environment.<sup>2</sup> Access to information is recognised as a critical aspect of REDD+ governance and we are continuing to look for ways to ensure that material is available to all, on time, and at a low cost.

## Participatory decision making processes

FODER is an active member of the CFP, a coalition of more than forty civil society organisations actively engaging in the VPA negotiations and the VPA implementation phase. Together we have managed to ensure that the transparency annex of the VPA mentions all the key information which should be available and accessible to ensure sustainable forest management which respects rights and improves life for

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.apvcameroun.cm/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://forest4dev.org/images/documents\\_pdf/Transparence\\_dans\\_le\\_secteur\\_de\\_l'environnement\\_au\\_Cameroun.pdf](http://forest4dev.org/images/documents_pdf/Transparence_dans_le_secteur_de_l'environnement_au_Cameroun.pdf)



forest communities. FODER also builds the capacity of indigenous people and local community representatives' to participate in meetings of the National VPA Monitoring Committee. Community representatives' participation was instrumental in restoring the Annual Forest Royalties (AFR) mentioned below.

Before the VPA process, civil society participation in forest sector decision-making was quite impossible, despite the 1993 Forest Policy objective of achieving participative forest management. The VPA has enabled civil society organisations and communities to influence forest sector policies and practices, and this success is now inspiring other processes such as REDD+. FODER worked with the CFP to ensure indigenous people were involved and their rights recognised in Cameroon's REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal (RPP) and for the first time since independence, stakeholders have been invited to propose law reforms to the government. Although the reform process is slow, the draft text of the Forest Law shows that key civil society and community proposals have been considered. Today, the VPA is the main framework through which civil society organisations, communities and other stakeholders advocate for total compliance with forest laws and hold the forest administration and private sector to account.

## Community rights

From 2002 to 2007, FODER helped 30 communities obtain and manage community forests in the South and Centre of Cameroon. This project improved relations between 200 Bagyeli (indigenous communities) and their neighbours, and enabled 170 local and indigenous communities to complete participatory mapping of their land and natural resource use. By 2016, 170



community maps had been approved by local authorities. Now 54 communities use the maps as tools to claim their land from agribusiness, mining or infrastructures projects.

Since 2016, FODER has supported a community based organisation (SYNAPARCAM) to claim their land rights by facilitating contacts with journalists resulting in a considerable increase of media coverage. Future work will include helping them strengthen their organisational skills and efficiency.

FODER has also been implementing a joint project with the European NGO Fern, helping communities advocate for their right to benefit from the forest sector. Communities had been entitled to ten per cent of the AFR, but it was suspended in 2015. Thanks to our advocacy, forest dependent communities will now receive 6.75 per cent of the AFR, but we are continuing to campaign for the full ten per cent to be reinstated.



## Law enforcement

Since 2010, FODER has been the independent forest monitor of logging activities, with the aim of halting illegal logging. FODER founded a system to coordinate civil society independent monitoring of forests and initiated a standardised monitoring system based on strong controls of management and quality. This longstanding experience means that FODER is a well-established and respected actor in the field. In 2015 and 2016 for example, FODER released ten independent monitoring reports which improved forest control, and in 2016, for the first time in almost 10 years, led to more than 30 logging companies being sanctioned for illegal activities.

FODER is now working to improve law enforcement in the mining sector, by building on independent forest sector monitoring and setting up independent monitoring of compliance with the social and environmental requirements of mining companies. This work has already resulted in nine complaints from workers who were victims of unfair dismissal and accidents at work, and four complaints from communities that have been the victims of unscrupulous expropriation. Administrative authorities have followed complaints through five field missions to check up on concerns.

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