

The Ghana Rosewood Mess: Fast-Tracking Ghana VPA Implementation as a solution

Rosewood logging and trade under salvage permit is undermining significant strides made over the last decade at addressing illegal logging; and reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation in Ghana.

As rosewood and other trees in the northern regions are logged, the area fast becomes a desert, making agriculture difficult, compounding their increasing poverty levels.

CSOs have sighted a letter from the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources authorizing the Forestry Commission to grant to Messrs Attakey Limited, salvage permit for the removal of 5000 cubic meters (250 units of 40ft containers) of Rosewood from Brong Ahafo, Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions (combined is 57% of the total landmass of Ghana).

This permit gives us the impression that the company has been granted a blank “cheque” to remove as much Rosewood as the company can. This is an example of bad forest governance that we have been campaigning against. This, to us, is legally questionable and environmentally injurious.

It is legally questionable because, Regulations 37 and 38 of the Timber Resources Management Regulations (LI 1649), 1998 clearly articulates how abandoned logs (the case of lying rosewood) should be disposed. They also establish the basis for granting a salvage permit for trees from an area of land undergoing development such as road construction, expansion of human settlement or cultivation of farms. None of these legal rules seems to apply to the letter we have seen.

This permit is environmentally injurious because it adds to the problem of logging the fragile savannah regions. Ghana exported 10% of the global rosewood trade in 2016. Exports for June 2016 were 467% higher than same period in 2015. A total of 292,000 cubic meters, equivalent to more than fourteen thousand (14,000) units of 40-footer containers, of Rosewood have been exported from ecologically fragile areas to China between January 2014 and June 2016. This also translates to 170km of truckloads of 40ft containers from Accra to Takoradi. This is not sustainable.

It also defeats Ghana’s commitment to combat desertification in the 3 northern regions while people from local to national authorities condone the pillaging of every rosewood and valuable timber species in this fragile zone.

Five (5) bans have been placed on the trading of rosewood since 2012, with the latest coming into force in February 2017, yet there is no solution in sight.

The three challenges that have rendered all these bans ineffective are:

1. The continued issuance of conveyance certificates by the Forestry Commission to selected companies to transport lying rosewood only encourages community members fell more rosewood illegally.
2. Inadequate or failed supervision by the failure of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR), Forestry Commission (FC), the local District Assemblies and Traditional Authorities on the removal of lying rosewood.

3. The failure to make logging of trees by local people punitive and dissuasive: the root cause of the problem. This demonstrates a lack of commitment.

As institutions charged with managing resources we think that their priority should be keeping trees standing and improving forest conditions rather than pursuing actions which only make the situation worse.

To curtail this in the long term, Civil society in the sector supported the movement of Rosewood (*Pterocarpus erinaceus*) from Appendix III to Appendix II on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) list to ensure more stringent measures in its trade.

Rosewood exploitation under CITES requires setting annual quotas for rosewood export. We therefore expect that the necessary studies would be done transparently before setting the quota. We also expect that strictly only the Bui-dam catchment area would be the source of rosewood, rather than everywhere in 57% of Ghana (Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Brong Ahafo Region combined).

The grant of this new salvage permit would renew the chaos that has existed in the three northern regions since 2012, with many young people finding reason to cut standing rosewood without valid authorization.

Civil society groups under listed here, find this continued approach, inconsistent with the political commitment to fight illegal logging and address emissions from deforestation and degradation.

While we are expecting that irregularities such as this would be flagged when the Timber Legality Assurance System is fully operation, we urgently call on the Honorable Minister to reverse this blanket Salvage Permit directive, in keeping with his mission of sanitizing the forest sector.

Rosewood logging and trade in the fragile savanna eco zone of Ghana is a vicious mess that needs to be sanitized.



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