Assessing Civil Society Participation in REDD+ and FLEGT

Case study analysis of Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and the Republic of Congo

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List of abbreviations

AFLEG	Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance
CACO REDD	Cadre de concertation des organisations de la société civile et des populations autochtones (the REDD+ platform, Republic of Congo)
CCM	Multi-Stakeholder Consultative Committee (Republic of Congo)
CCOD	Conseil de concertation des ONG du développement or Consultative Council for Development NGOs (Republic of Congo)
CCS	Comité Conjoint de Suivi (joint monitoring committee, Cameroon)
CFDCs	Union of Community Forestry Development Committees (Liberia)
CFP	Community and Forests Platform, Cameroon (previously ECPF)
CFWG	Community Forestry Working Group (Liberia)
CNS	Comité national de suivi (VPA national follow-up committee in Cameroon)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWG	Concessions Working Group (Liberia)
ECPF	European Community Forest Platform (now CFP, Community and Forests Platform)
ER-PIN	Emissions Reduction Project Idea Note
EU	European Union
FCI	Foundation for Community Initiatives (Liberia)
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FDA	Forest Development Authority (Liberia)
FFI	Fauna and Flora International
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
FPIC	Free, prior, informed consent
GESP	Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (Cameroon)
GiZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GNC	National Consultative Group (Republic of Congo)
GONGOs	Government-organized non-governmental organizations
GTC	Joint Working Group (Republic of Congo)
IAIA	International Association for Impact Assessment
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGP	National Governance Programme (Cameroon)
PASC	European Union Civil Society Support Programme (Cameroon)
PFNREDD & CC	REDD+ and Climate Change Platform (Cameroon)
PGDF	La Plateforme pour la Gestion Durable des Forêts (FLEGT platform in the Republic of Congo)
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
RPIN	Readiness Plan Idea Note
RPP	Readiness Preparation Proposal
SAMFU	Save My Future Foundation (Liberia)
SCNL	Society for Conservation of Nature in Liberia
SDI	Sustainable Development Institute (Liberia)
SESA	Strategic Environment and Social Assessment Working Group (Liberia)
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from an assessment study on the quality of participation of civil society actors in REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and FLEGT VPA (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade – Voluntary Partnership Agreement) processes in four countries in Africa: Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and the Republic of Congo.

The study was part of an EU funded project, coordinated by Fern on 'Tackling Deforestation through Linking FLEGT and REDD+' for which the quality of participation in REDD+ and FLEGT was outlined as an indicator to assess one of the project's objectives (i.e. *key REDD+ safeguards are respected in practice*).

The focus of the assessment study on civil society participation is at national policy making level in FLEGT and REDD+ processes.[1] Building on key literature on participation and research on civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT, a questionnaire tool was developed and applied in practical case studies in the four countries. The analysis is drawn from the interviews based on the questionnaire tool; some in-depth interviews and secondary research in these countries.

2. Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows: section 3 details the research methodology. Section 4 provides a brief overview of key literature on participation, including major issues with regard to civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT. Section 5 provides a country-by-country assessment of civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT VPA. Section 6 provides a synthesis of key findings. Finally, the report presents some recommendations for policy and research in section 7. Annex-I presents the questionnaire tool that was used for the assessment of civil society participation. A list of civil society actors interviewed in the four countries is provided in Annex-II.

3. Research methodology

The work on the assessment of civil society participation was conducted in two phases: (a) the development of a tool to assess participation (March-September 2015); and (b) the application of the tool in the four countries (January-April 2016). In the first phase, key literature on civil society participation was reviewed for the purpose of developing the tool, which was refined after a review by Fern partners in the four countries[2].

It is noted that there is a large body of literature on participation and a number of participatory assessment methodologies are available (mostly on local community participation) (See section 4). However, a methodological tool to assess participation itself is lacking, particularly in the case of civil society stakeholders. The tool developed for use in this study (see Annex-I) aims to elicit answers to three key questions, critical to assess the quality of participation: (a) *who participates?* (b) *when do they participate?* and (c) *to what degree do they participate?*

The second phase consisted of data collection (based on the checklist in the questionnaire) by contacting key informants, mainly from various civil society organisations (CSOs) but also government agencies, representatives of

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[1] This complements work by project partners in some countries who are looking at participation at the 'project' level – individual concessions or other investments in logging, large-scale agriculture or REDD+ sites. However, the assessment of participation depends on the indicators selected.

[2] The assessment tool was presented to the Fern country partners in a project meeting on 24 March 2015 in Brussels. It was also shared with them later. The received feedback and comments were incorporated in the final version of the tool as presented in Annex-I.

community groups and international non-governmental organisations - INGOs and organising individual and focus group discussions to understand how participation has happened in national FLEGT VPA and REDD+ processes in the four countries of study.

During the focus group discussions, interviewees were asked for their views individually and to discuss and come up with an agreed common response to some of the questions requiring quantitative information.

The assessment tool was implemented in Ghana and Liberia by the lead consultant (February 2016) and by another consultant in Cameroon and the Republic of Congo (February-April 2016). During the field study in Ghana and Liberia, there was an opportunity to witness participation of CSOs in national forums, as two events coincided with the visit. These included: Forest Watch Ghana meeting in Accra (3-4 February 2016) and Tetra Tech SESA (Strategic Environment and Social Assessment) meeting in Monrovia (9-10 February).

Table 1 provides the details of the civil society interviews in the four countries of study.

Table 1. Number and type of interviews

	Cameroon	**Ghana**	**Liberia**	**Republic of Congo**
Interview period	February 2016	February 2016	February 2016	March 2016
Type of civil society members	NGOs, community organisations	NGOs, community organisations, INGOs	NGOs, community organisations, INGOs, government organisations	NGOs, community organisations, INGOs
Interview type/ methodology	Individual interviews; focus groups	Individual interviews; focus groups; participation in the Forest Watch quarterly meeting (3-4 February 2016)	Individual interviews; focus groups; participant observation in Tetra Tech SESA meeting (9-10 February)	Individual interviews; focus groups
Number of civil society members interviewed	18 (9 different quantitative responses in total from individual and focus group interviews)	11 (9 quantitative responses)	12 (10 quantitative responses)	9 (8 quantitative responses)
Number of different CSOs represented through interviews and focus groups	13	10	10	7

For the purpose of the assessment, attempts were made to have a wide variety of civil society groups in the sample so as to reflect their diversity and also their varied experiences and views. For this reason, potential civil society members were purposefully selected with the help of Fern country partners. Some of these interviewees were members of multi-stakeholder forums in their country (e.g. Forest Watch in Ghana; NGO Coalition in Liberia; Community and Forest Platform, and National REDD+ and Climate Change Platform in Cameroon; and PGDF - La Plateforme pour la Gestion Durable des Forêts, and CACO REDD in the Republic of Congo). Some interviews were also undertaken with the representatives from INGOs (Ghana, Liberia and Republic of Congo) and government agencies (Liberia).

Thus, the civil society members included in the study consisted of a variety of individuals and came from a wide range of organisations. Their individual and organisational profiles suggest that they represent a number of broad areas of environment and development: forest governance, sustainable agriculture, climate change, human rights, natural resources management, clean energy, land rights, democratic rights, good governance, decentralisation, gender and development, social entrepreneurship and micro-finance, etc.

These organisations are all working on REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes, however some were more involved in one area than the other. The interviewed CSOs identified the following REDD+ and FLEGT VPA related areas that they are involved in: supporting the involvement and participation of local communities and indigenous people; providing a platform to represent CSO views in policy processes; improving the quality of decision making by capturing the experiences and giving voice to civil society, women, local communities and forest dwelling communities; elaborating position documents and participating in different policy processes; and implementing forest governance, REDD+ and FLEGT related projects.

Triangulation was used for verification of the information by consulting relevant literature and following up with Fern partners in these countries. Wherever possible, the researchers also looked for secondary sources of information including documents/minutes from relevant meetings and published/unpublished reports to collect further data on civil society participation in various stages of FLEGT VPA and REDD+ processes. Where possible, these have been fully referenced in the report.

The findings presented here consist of an analysis of the interviews, policy documents, and other information from secondary sources. The content of the policy documents, brochures and other publications of the organisations and information from other sources provided the background material. This material also provided the context in which interview material was customised. The collected information was processed both manually and with the help of word processor and spreadsheet. The materials from structured/semi-structured interviews based on the questionnaire tool were coded into topics and tabulated in a spreadsheet to see the similarities and differences in the views of civil society members.

The analysis of the collected material involved statistical analysis for quantitative data, supported by follow-up narrative and examples from the qualitative data. Qualitative data from the questionnaire and other information obtained from secondary sources were analysed to buttress the quantitative analysis. Thus, the information collected has been thoroughly analysed and discussed and conclusions have been drawn from these discussions.

There are some limitations to the study. As mentioned earlier, interviewees were selected through Fern country partners' existing networks and knowledge. For this reason, combined with the limited time for fieldworks, some civil society members might have been missed out. Similarly, only in Liberia government organisations could be contacted; this made it impossible to draw conclusions about the views of the government officials and policy makers in other countries. Additionally, the timing of the fieldworks in the Republic of Congo coincided with national elections; this resulted in fewer interviews (9 in total) compared to other countries.

Finally, the focus of this study is on civil society participation in policy processes and whether or not their positions are reflected in the policy outcomes. As raised by many interviewees, "many things can look good on paper" but the most important part is whether those policies are implemented in practice. However, an assessment of the implementation of these policies is beyond the scope of this study.

Despite these limitations, the study attempts to make the best use of the available information and data by capturing the diverse experience of available actors and seeks to provide a thorough analysis of civil society participation in the four countries of study.

4. Assessing civil society participation: a brief literature review and tool development

The idea of participation has received increasing attention for many years, both in academic discussions and actual practice (Osmani, 2008). There is a large body of literature on the topic, mostly focused on community participation. In particular, the works of Robert Chambers on Participatory Rural Appraisal became influential in NGO circles and among national and international development agencies in the early 1990s (Chambers, 1991,1997). As a result, participation became the central focus of discussion in various natural resources management and rural development literature and a 'buzzword on the lips of virtually everyone involved in development' (Attwood, 1997).

With the calls for 'bottom-up planning', 'decentralisation', and a 'community-based approach' in addressing environment and development challenges, the idea of participation was based on a 'put people first' ideology (Brown, 1985; Cernea, 1991) or 'putting the last first' approach (Pretty, 1995; Chambers, 1989). The idea encompasses a diverse set of approaches and practices that broadly share a concern for public involvement and participation of stakeholders on common grounds of equity, efficiency and effectiveness (Vira et al., 1998). However, critics warn that participation should not be seen as a universal panacea that promotes social justice (Osmani, 2006; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Cleaver, 1999; Faysse, 2006).

Participation is emphasised for the reasons of democratic necessity, management legitimacy, sharing of knowledge and understanding, and transparency and accountability (Stoll-Kleemann and O'Riordan, 2002; Glucker et al., 2013). The benefits of participation to decision-making processes are due to the likelihood of reaching practical and credible decisions that reflect a broad consensus among stakeholders (IAIA, 2015; Osmani, 2008). Participation may also promote greater equity in policymaking by improving relations between stakeholders that previously had poor relations, and thus reduce conflict. In fact, participation is argued to be one of those rare instruments that can potentially improve efficiency and equity at the same time (Osmani, 2008).

There are various participatory assessment methodologies available (mostly on local community participation and gender assessment). There are also methodologies available for an assessment of multi-stakeholder processes, specifically at policy development level, however a methodological tool to assess participation of civil society stakeholders is lacking.

Methodologies for the assessment of forest governance do exist. For example, Secco et al. (2014) provide a method with a comprehensive list of indicators to measure forest governance at the local level. They also provide a review of a number of initiatives towards development of assessment methods, criteria and indicators for analysing forest policies and related governance issues at a large spatial and institutional scale (including assessment of good forest governance at the national level). Some examples include: the Forest Governance Diagnostics Tool developed by the Agriculture and Rural Development Department of the World Bank (WB-ARD, 2009), the Governance of Forests Toolkit of the World Resource Institute (GFI, 2009), and the Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance by the FAO and the Program on Forests (PROFOR) of the World Bank (PROFOR/FAO, 2011; Kishor and Rosenbaum, 2012). Among other issues, these assessment tools focus on specific concerns of economic development, illegal logging and

related policies as FLEGT, climate change and REDD+, etc.

As there is already a plethora of literature on participation, the focus of the discussion that follows will be on key elements that are relevant for the purpose of civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT. In REDD+ and FLEGT, there are at least three stages at which participation needs to happen: (a) national level policy making; (b) during negotiation, concession (or 'project') allocation; and (c) during implementation (including dispute resolution and benefit sharing). As highlighted earlier, the focus of this report is on civil society's participation in national policy making and whether or not civil society members have participated fully and effectively in the REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes (see Box 1 for key elements of full and effective participation).

Box 1. What is full and effective participation?

'Full' participation means covering all stages of the process, and 'effective' means that the views, needs and rights of participants influence the programme. Key steps to full and effective participation include:

- identifying the relevant stakeholders, and ensuring that there are independent civil society platforms enabled to participate appropriately;
- establishing processes and structures that allow such groups, from the national to the local level, to participate in programme design, implementation and evaluation;
- allowing stakeholders, especially indigenous peoples and local communities, to establish the modes of participation that are effective for them, including selection of their own representatives;
- ensuring and enabling representatives to inform and be informed by the constituency they represent;
- raising awareness and building the capacity of stakeholders, including providing relevant and timely information;
- creating opportunities for taking advantage of traditional and indigenous knowledge related to forest use and conservation;
- establishing mechanisms for receiving feedback and resolving grievances and disputes arising from the implementation of REDD+; and
- devoting sufficient time and resources to conducting the participation in a full and effective manner.

Source: Fern (2011a) [3]

REDD+ safeguards cover issues such as stakeholder identification, clear procedures, social/cultural appropriateness, representation, information, capacity building, resolving grievances, and devoting sufficient time. However, it is to be noted that safeguards are only guidelines and not something that one can hold the state or others to account to.[4] Due to the initial stage of REDD+, the focus and interest of this study on participation is on national level forest policymaking and governance. In particular, the focus of this country assessment is on civil society participation in the development and adoption of respectively the RPIN (Readiness Plan Idea Note), the REDD+ strategy, RPP (Readiness Preparation Proposal) and for Cameroon, Ghana and Republic of Congo, the ER-PIN (Emissions Reduction Project Idea Note).

Similarly, the importance of participation is highlighted in FLEGT, most particularly in the FLEGT VPAs. FLEGT VPAs aim to foster stakeholder participation in decision-making, both in the VPA process itself and as a result of the commitments the parties make (Fern, 2014a). In many timber-exporting countries that have entered VPA negotiations, there have been inclusive and participatory processes. The EU advocates broad stakeholder participation in negotiating and implementing a VPA. VPAs are different from other initiatives that involve stakeholder participation

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[3] Also see the 2010 Cancun Agreements: http://unfccc.int/meetings/cancun_nov_2010/meeting/6266.php.

[4] It is worth mentioning that delivery partners, UN-REDD and Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) of the World Bank, provide some fast-start support to countries in the REDD+ process, advocating for CSO participation and checking this during the Participants Committee, for the FCPF, and the Policy Board meetings for the UNREDD, where national REDD+ strategies, RPPs and ER-PINs and the REDD+ programme are being approved. Countries like Cameroon and the Republic of Congo have had their RPPs and ER-PIN not approved during Participant Committee meetings due to the countries not including key CSO groups in the elaboration of those documents.

because of their longevity, their coverage of national policy and international trade, and the high level of political engagement.[5]

However, there are few challenges in ensuring participation in FLEGT VPAs. For example, a VPA process affects and involves different ministries with different agendas and coordination among these ministries is not easy. Similarly, private-sector stakeholders tend not to be well organised and do not always see the business value in committing to the lengthy meetings that a VPA process involves. At the same time, individually or through small delegations they have been shown to have channels of special access to policy makers. In the case of civil society groups, they may struggle to represent their diverse interests and are often perceived by governments and private sector to be problematic.[6] Similar challenges also exist in the case of REDD+ development and implementation.

After this discussion on issues associated with participation in FLEGT VPAs and REDD+ processes, it is necessary to focus on key elements of participation that are incorporated in the assessment tool. Defining participation is a good start for the purpose. Although participation means different things to different people, it is most commonly defined as "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them" (World Bank, 1998). Effective public participation is emphasised in decision-making process on the grounds that it "enables the public to express, and the decision-maker to take account of, opinions and concerns which may be relevant to those decisions, thereby increasing the accountability and transparency of the decision-making process and contributing to public awareness of issues and support for the decisions taken" (EU, 2003).[7]

As much literature and methodological guidance on participation highlights, there are three key elements that need to be focused on in order to understand the nature and experience of participation of various stakeholders. These include: (a) *who* participates?; (b) *when* they participate?; and (c) to what *degree* they participate?

4.1 Who participates?

The first key element is to understand who participates in the policy making processes and the diversity of stakeholders who are affected by, or can affect the policymaking (IAIA, 2005; Faysse, 2006; Wollenberg et al., 2005). In the assessment of civil society participation, it is obvious that it is the civil society stakeholders of various types that need to be understood and identified, including mapping of their interests, influence and relationships with the government and each other.

Stakeholders are broadly defined as "all those who affect, and/or are affected by, the policies, decisions, and actions of the system… individuals, communities, social groups or institutions of any size, aggregation or level in society… policy-makers, planners and administrators in government and other organisations, as well as commercial and subsistence groups" (Grimble et al., 1995; Vira et al. 1998). Stakeholder identification provides a foundation and structure for the participatory planning, implementation, and monitoring. It involves analysis of persons, groups, institutions affected; whose interests and views need priority; and also distinguish civil society vs. other actors (Grimble and Wellard, 1997; World Bank, 1998; Wollenberg et al., 2005).

Considering different contexts of study, the most fundamental question is: how to define civil society? 'Civil Society'

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[5] www.euflegt.efi.int/participation
[6] www.euflegt.efi.int/participation
[7] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32003L0035

means different things in different places; hence it is useful to understand who is civil society in a particular context and who decides 'who is civil society'. Civil society is defined as "the aggregate of non-governmental organisations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens" or "individuals and organisations in a society which are independent of the government" (Dictionary.com). IAIA (2015) defines civil society as "the network of individuals and groups (both formal and informal) – and their connections, social norms and practices – that comprise the activities of a society and that are separate from its state and market institutions". More broadly, civil society include religious organisations, community groups, foundations, guilds, professional associations, labour unions, academic institutions, media, advocacy or pressure groups, political parties, etc. Many governments, including the EU, argue that civil society also includes the private sector (see for example, Heidbreder, 2012).[8] These definitions thus encompass both the ordinary, unorganised citizens as well as organised groups depending on specificities of different countries.

It is to be noted that civil societies and the organisations that work to represent them, CSOs, are (re)born and evolve according to a complex series of variables in different country and regional settings (Hughes and Atampugre, 2005). It also needs to be acknowledged that there is a wide diversity with respect to capacities, nature, roles of, and relationships with the governments. Hence questions that need to be asked in civil society participation include: (a) the nature of civil society's relationships with government; (b) their respective comparative advantages and capacities in the arena they are working; (c) their potential influence; and (d) their relationships of accountability to those they aspire to represent (e.g. forest-dependent communities, indigenous people, local communities) (Hughes and Atampugre, 2005).

4.2 When they participate?

The other concern is related to the time. Participation differs from one-off event to the one occurring continuously at different phases of a policy cycle (World Bank, 1998; Maier et al., 2014). Hence the questions that need to be asked while doing an assessment of civil society participation include: (a) at what point in policy cycle? (b) how regularly? and (c) through what institutional mechanism? It is important to understand that 'policy process' is not a single outcome but a cycle of events moving from agenda setting to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. While the 'policy' refers to the principled guide to action taken by the state agencies with regard to certain issues, in a way that is in line with law and institutional traditions, a 'process' constitutes "a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end" (Oxford Dictionary).[9]

Hence it is necessary to evaluate the timing of participation, referring to the phase in the policy process in which stakeholders are involved that range from the phase of problem formulation, process design, selecting opinions and outcomes, information gathering and synthesis, decision, to implementation and evaluation (Maier et al., 2014). The policy process is also characterised as being driven by interplay of institutions, ideas and interests of multiple stakeholders, including the civil society actors. While there are various stages in a policy cycle (Figure 1), in this instance the main focus of this study is in the phases of agenda setting, policy formulation, and decision-making.[10] Particularly, the 'agenda setting' can be crucial, as often governments, the private sector and forest-dependent communities have quite different ideas about what is a priority.

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[8] Heidbreder (2012) provides a comprehensive overview of multiple notions of civil society and their participation in EU governance.
[9] In that respect, both FLEGT VPA and REDD+ are 'processes' rather than policies.
[10] The reason for not looking at policy implementation and monitoring and evaluation is due to the split between this study and the work of the Fern partners that focuses on these policy stages of FLEGT and REDD+.
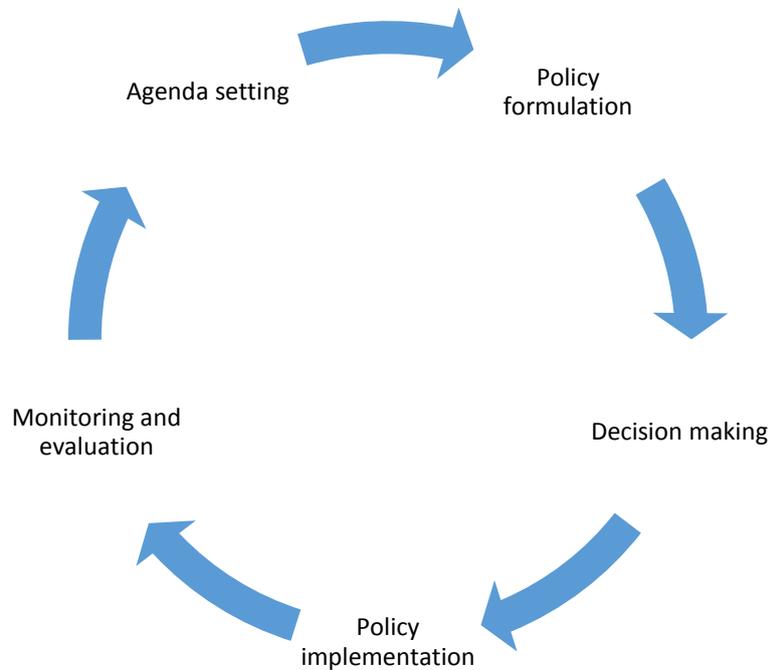
Figure 1. Various stages of a policy cycle. Adapted from: http://bit.ly/1eYI7NR

4.3 Level/degree of participation - how they participate?

The other question is concerning the level/degree at which participation occurs. There are various degrees of participation, ranging from simply being told about a policy process to having a say and being able to influence outcomes (Maier et al., 2014; Cornwall, 2003; Agarwal, 2001, 2010; Pretty, 1995; Secco et al., 2014). One way to visualise this is as a ladder, where each step represents a greater degree of participation than the step below (Figure 2). Related to the degree/level of participation is the question 'who decides what is participation' and 'on whose terms' i.e. an analysis of symmetries of power.
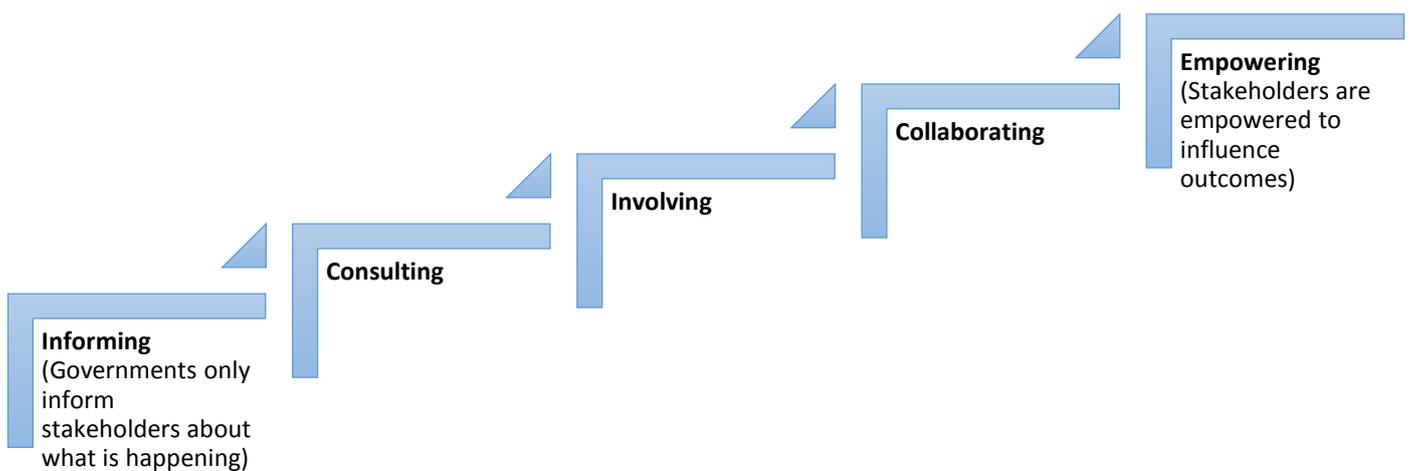
Figure 2. Ladder of participation (Adapted from: www.euflegt.efi.int/participation)

Different degrees of participation can also be classified as 5-scale indicator (from Very High to Very Low), which are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Different types and degrees of participation

| Type of participation	Degree of participation	Description
Informing	Very Low	One-way flow. Being informed of decisions *ex post facto*; or attending meetings and listening in on decision-making, without speaking up. People's feedback is minimal or non- existent, and their participation is assessed through methods like head counting and contribution to the discussion.
Consulting	Low	Two-way flow. Being asked an opinion on specific matters without guarantee of influencing decisions.
Involving	Medium	Being asked (or volunteering) to undertake specific tasks.
Collaborating	High	Increasing control over decision-making. Forming groups of primary stakeholders to participate in the discussion and analysis of predetermined objectives set. This degree of participation does not usually result in dramatic changes in what should be accomplished, which is often already determined. It does, however, require an active involvement in the decision-making process on how to achieve it.
Empowering	Very High	Having a voice and influence in the decisions. Ownership and control of the process rest in the hands of the primary stakeholders.

Source: Maier et al., 2014; Cornwall, 2003; Agarwal, 2001, 2010; Pretty, 1995; Secco et al., 2014.

Besides the above 5-scale indicators of participation, there are some levels of 'non-participation' (e.g. 'manipulation' and 'therapy' in the bottom rungs of Arnstein's original ladder), which have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real motive is not to enable people to genuinely participate in planning or implementation but to enable those who hold power in decision-making to 'educate' or 'cure' the participants (Arnstein, 1969). These tactics thus signify the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by the powerholders.[11]

Osmani (2008) categorises participation in terms of its scope and intensity. With regard to its scope, participation can encompass four distinct types of activities: (a) ascertaining people's preferences over alternative social outcomes and alternative processes of achieving these outcomes; (b) formulation of policies, rules and institutions based on those preferences; (c) implementation of the proposed policies, rules and institutions; and (d) monitoring, evaluation and ensuring accountability of policy formulation and implementation. In each of these four stages, the intensity of participation can vary from the superficial (i.e. informing) to the deeply engaged form of involvement by the relevant stakeholders (i.e. empowering).

Finally, as Borrinni-Feyerabend (1997) argues, there are several avenues for people to participate: (a) *direct participation* (face-to-face, where basically people represent themselves) e.g. personally express their opinions, discuss, vote, work, offer a material contribution, receive a benefit, etc.; (b) *semi-direct participation* (people delegate others – relatives, friends, respected members of their community, representatives of a community-based group – to represent them in all sorts of activities, but maintain a direct, face-to-face relationship with their representatives); and (c) *indirect participation* (people delegate others – experts, appointees of large associations, NGOs, parties or

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[11] In fact, it can be worse than a public relations vehicle, as such participation is often seen as a right wing ideological view in line with the desire to minimise the role of the State.

government officials – to represent them in all sorts of activities, but rarely, if ever, interact with their representatives on a person-to-person basis. In order to understand the participatory processes and deliberative spaces created under REDD+ and FLEGT, it is useful to understand the diverse possible ways (e.g. direct, semi-direct or indirect) participation can occur (e.g. representation of some NGOs by their federations through working groups; or understanding who these civil societies represent or are accountable too).

4.4 Assessment tool and its application

The assessment of civil society participation depends on a number of factors: contextual priorities and specificities (e.g. FLEGT VPA and REDD+ processes, country contexts), civil society and its diversity, forums/avenues of participation, and participation criteria (scope, degree and time). However, the key elements of participation that need assessing are: (a) who participates? (b) at what time? (c) to what degree? The assessment tool developed (see Annex-I) incorporates these three elements and attempts to assess the quality and quantity of CSO participation. Additionally, there is also room to examine what VPA and REDD+ texts say about participation and the gap between rhetoric and reality.

However, there were other questions to consider too: (a) what degrees of participation are the most relevant, and how can they be defined, and distinguished? (b) what contextual priorities and specificities does one needs to watch out for in each country? (c) what avenues of participation are to be analysed (e.g. formal working groups)? During initial consultations with Fern's country partners and follow-up discussions, it became clear that their experience of participation ranges from 'informing' to 'collaborating' and 'empowering' participation. The desirable participation is that it should be empowering from the outset i.e. from the agenda-setting stage. It was also agreed that all possible forums of participation in the national contexts of REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes needed to be analysed to capture decision making at different settings (i.e. within an organisation, multi-stakeholder forums and national working groups).

It should be noted that institutional manifestation of participation can be quite complex although intuitively participation would appear to be a simple idea (Osmani, 2008). Similarly, its scope can vary widely depending on at which stages of the policy cycle it happens, and its degree can span a wide spectrum depending on the institutional framework that defines the rules of the game for participation in each phase (ibid.).[12] As Osmani (2008) rightly argues: "one consequence of this complexity is that participation cannot be seen as an 'all or nothing' affair – rather it is a matter of degree, reflecting variations in both scope and quality. This also means that if the quality of participation in some specific instance falls short of whatever is considered to be the 'ideal type', that is not necessarily a reason for despair. What matters is whether the existing form and structure of participation makes for a quality of participation that is good enough for the purpose".

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[12] The complexity in making a comparison when there are different understandings of participation should be acknowledged. In order to assess the degree of participation adequately it is important that the stakeholders have a common or similar understanding of the concept. For the purpose of this study, the 5-scale degrees of participation (Table 2) was used and explained to the participants before the interview.

5. Civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT VPAs in Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and Republic of Congo: country-by-country assessment

5.1 Background on civil society in the four countries of study

Civil society and CSOs are critical partners and actors in the public policy sphere and as such, are essential in the protection of fundamental freedoms and the development of democratic governance. In all the four countries of study (i.e. Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and the Republic of Congo), they generally act as independent watchdogs, some working as advocates of human rights; others working as service providers, often responding to the needs of communities at the grassroots level (Jumah, 2011; McKeown and Mulbah, 2007; CIVICUS report; Agora Consulting, 2015). With a diversity of CSOs focusing on different specific areas, they are not always unified nor have they always shared interests. For example, in Cameroon and the Republic of Congo, both VPA and REDD+ platforms exist that do not necessarily have a common understanding of the content of effective participation.

Cameroon

Cameroon has been enjoying a long period of political stability even though the country has been ruled by the same president, Mr Paul Biya for over thirty years. Civil society movements in Cameroon, especially in the forest and environmental domain sprouted out in the 1990s with the passing of the law on freedom of association and with reforms in the forestry sector. Since then, the civil society is generally recognised as being more vociferous and the press is relatively free to express dissent. The role and place of civil society in the development, monitoring of the implementation and evaluation of public policies is inscribed in the fifth component of the National Governance Programme (NGP) i.e. 'the participation of citizens and the civil society in the management of public affairs'. To render this provision operational, several platforms for dialogue between the civil society and the government have been established in recent years. These dialogue frameworks include some priority areas to the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) such as human rights, the fight against corruption, forest governance, the business climate, health and education.

Despite the progress in CSO participation in public affairs in Cameroon, a recent survey commissioned by the European Union Civil Society Support Programme (PASC) observed some limitations to CSO participation due to, amongst others: the problems of legitimacy and representation; the quality of the contribution of CSO representatives (which is sometimes undermined due to their low expertise); the lack of recognition on the part of some public sector actors (who are still somewhat reluctant to work with CSOs); and non-existence of feedback mechanisms to CSO networks and platforms by their designated representatives (Agora Consulting, 2015).

For FLEGT VPA and REDD+, there exist two main platforms in Cameroon: Community and Forests Platform (CFP), and REDD+ and Climate Change Platform (PFNREDD & CC). The CFP aims to improve forest governance and promote community rights and is engaged not only in the VPAs but also on other relevant processes that provoke change, including legal reforms. The platform is quite critical towards REDD+. The PFNREDD & CC platform is supportive of REDD+ processes and is generally perceived as being more close to and in line with the government.

Ghana

Since the advent of multiparty democracy in 1992, Ghana's thriving democracy, good governance practice and vibrant media have provided a favourable environment for a moderately strong civil society in the country. There are more

than 3,000 NGOs registered in Ghana under various Acts (about 1,000 NGOs registered under the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare) and tens of thousands of registered self-help groups (CIVICUS report).[13] CSOs in Ghana exist at four levels: community groups, community-based organisations, national CSOs, and networks and coalitions. Some environment and development CSOs in Ghana are members of, or have established, coalitions and networks through various platforms such as the Forest Watch Ghana and Kasa Ghana networks.

Most CSOs in Ghana are engaged in public sensitisation and education, advocacy, or capacity building and professional development (Jumah, 2011). Thus, CSO activities have now evolved from service delivery to active public policy advocacy initiatives and responding to social interests. This is evident from the general consultations on national policies and CSO participation in key national policy dialogue meetings. CSOs in Ghana attempt to influence public policy through their demand for involvement in the early stages of policy formulation, advocacy, and are trying to influence the choices made by political actors (Jumah, 2011). CSOs are free to publish their research reports, share their evidence-based analysis, comment or criticize government policy and interventions without fear of being victimized (CIVICUS report). However, there are some identified weaknesses and challenges too. These include: existence of some non-genuine CSOs; lack of downward accountability; lack of local ownership of decisions and actions; the short duration of their projects and programmes; competition for visibility and funds; lack of financial sustainability; and capacity deficit of organisation and staff (Jumah, 2011).

Liberia

Liberia is a fledgling democracy that came out of war in 2003. The country experienced protracted civil war from 1989, which ended briefly in 1996 and resumed in 1999 until 2003 (Atuobi, 2010). Liberia's economic and political stability was threatened again after 2010 due to the Ebola epidemic that ended officially in May 2015. Civil society has been instrumental in promoting peace, monitoring government accountability and policy development as well as in advocacy and service delivery (McKeown and Mulbah, 2007). It is in this context of peace building that civil society actors in Liberia saw themselves as key partners and continued to demand more space from the state (Atuobi, 2010). Some of these CSOs are involved in a number of environment and development sectors. Some sections of civil society have also been successful in promoting their agenda through their participation in the country's policy arena, in particular women's organisations and environmental groups. This is evident from the election of Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2006 to become the first female head of state for Africa.

There is a capacity deficit in areas such as leadership and organisation development among the CSOs in Liberia. This is also partly due to the fact that some civil society leaders have become part of the government or consultants. (McKeown and Mulbah, 2007). Many of the CSOs in Liberia are also connected to community groups that form their constituents. In the area of forest governance, there are not separate platforms for different organisations as they are all networked through a common platform – the NGO Coalition, which brings together fifteen different organisations working in a variety of areas. Besides a national NGO platform, there are also many other platforms dealing with specific issues.

Republic of Congo

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[13] http://lta.civicus.org/about/90-civil-society-accountability-in-ghana-

The Republic of Congo has experienced civil wars, the effects of which are still present in the minds of its citizens; this has impacted on the social fabric of the country. Civil society played a very active role in the democratisation process of the country in the early 1990s, demanding freedom of expression and the move from a unique political party to multiparty politics. Civil society has been very strong on human rights and has been very vocal on this topic. It is from this background of their work on human rights, relief and other rural development support that the CSOs have taken up issues of natural resources, forest governance and environment management.

Several civil society platforms and networks currently exist in the Republic of Congo. Among others, these networks include those working on transparency in natural resources management, such as the Conseil de concertation des ONG du développement (CCOD) or Consultative Council for Development NGOs; the FLEGT platform, La Plateforme pour la Gestion Durable des Forêts (PGDF); and the REDD+ platform, Cadre de concertation des organisations de la société civile et des populations autochtones (CACO REDD). PGDF and CACO REDD are the two platforms that have been assessed in this report.

5.2 Cameroon: country assessment

As mentioned earlier, CSOs have been represented in FLEGT VPA and REDD+ policy processes in Cameroon mainly through two platforms: (a) Community and Forests Platform (CFP or previously ECPF – European Community Forest Platform), working on areas of VPA and REDD+; and (b) REDD+ and Climate Change Platform or Plateforme Nationale de la Société Civile sur REDD et Changement Climatique (PFNREDD & CC), focusing on REDD+. These two major platforms have quite opposing views, most particularly on their experience of the REDD+ process.

The PFNREDD & CC claims to be a broad grassroots network of more than 73 CSOs and 429 national and community based organisations in Cameroon and is recognised in the RPP (Readiness Preparation Proposal) as an interlocutor between government and civil society. As a member of the national REDD+ steering committee, a multi-stakeholder decision-making body for REDD+ in Cameroon, the platform sees its participation recognised by the government as necessary and obligatory and feels that civil society participation, to a larger extent, is institutionalised in the REDD+ process.

The CFP represents more than 50 national, local and community based CSOs working on forest and peoples' rights issues in Cameroon. It aims to improve forest governance and promote communities rights by using all relevant policy levers including the VPA process. The platform acted as an official CSO representative during the VPA process. It sat on the negotiation table since 2007 and in other working groups till the signing of the agreement in 2010 and currently occupies seats in the national implementation and follow-up committee for the FLEGT VPA.[14] However, CFP was not directly involved or invited to participate in the REDD+ process. The platform has been carrying out advocacy on REDD+ (e.g. writing position papers reacting to the government's RPP and ER-PIN documents that were submitted to the participants' committee of the FCPF).[15]

Both platforms cite the degree of stakeholder participation in the VPA process as one of the greatest strengths of the FLEGT initiative in Cameroon. They acknowledge the inclusive nature of the VPA in which civil society members were invited to take part right from the beginning of the process and the fact that their views are taken seriously in the meetings. Also, both civil society and indigenous peoples have their official representations in the VPA

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[14] During the negotiation process, the platform had developed a common CSO position related to the economic, social and cultural rights of the forest communities that they wanted to be addressed in the VPA. The platform approved the VPA with some criticism.
[15] https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2016/May/Position%20Note%20CFP_final.pdf

implementation.[16] Both platforms agree, civil society's stakeholder engagement in REDD+ has not been on a par with the VPA.

The two platforms have different opinions about their experience in REDD+. The PFNREDD & CC is satisfied with its participation in the REDD+ process and thinks that there are mechanisms to incorporate views of the civil society and marginalised forest communities (e.g. through the flexible institutional structure of the REDD+ steering committee). The CFP is critical of the REDD+ process.[17] For example, the CFP platform in its position paper on the Cameroon ER-PIN highlights the poor quality of stakeholder engagement, most particularly of the local communities and indigenous peoples.[18] Although Cameroon adopted national FPIC guidelines that guide effective participation of all stakeholders, including at the community level, the ER-PIN process failed to implement these FPIC guidelines and communities did not have the opportunity to directly participate in the development of the document.[19]

The two platforms also differ in their views on other issues. For example, there is a difference of opinion on the role of INGOs. A few interviewees from one of the platforms accuse INGOs of manipulation of the agenda. They charge that influential INGOs (or donors) are behind CSO positions rather than genuine national constituencies.[20] On the other hand, many CSOs, particularly the CFP members, point out the positive influence of northern partners (including some INGOs) and the donors for better participation of CSOs. For example, invitations for CSOs at times were 'forced' on the government by the EU, that insisted to have CSO representatives around the table, particularly in FLEGT process. INGOs have been supportive to the CFP and complementary to their advocacy strategy.

When asked how CSOs decide who represents them in the national meetings, interviewees from the two platforms mentioned that they regularly consult with their colleagues in the NGO circle or community members for the purpose. In the case of CFP, for example, they do it through a participatory internal selection where members are selected to represent the platform based on the thematic area to be discussed, their competence, knowledge and expertise. The common position of the platform is then discussed, agreed and conveyed by its representatives. The PFNREDD & CC follows similar criteria for selection of its representatives: competence and expertise in forest, environmental and legal issues; motivation and interest to feedback to the wider CSOs; and positioning and leadership within the civil society (better qualified and committed CSOs getting the priority).

However, some interviewees from one of the platforms complain of high-jacking of the agenda by its influential members. In their view, the platform is captured by three persons coordinating it; as a result other civil society members do not get sufficient space for participation nor an opportunity for joint analysis and coming to a common position. Thus, they put into question the whole mechanism of indirect participation through a platform.

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[16] However, there was no representation of indigenous peoples during the VPA negotiation.

[17] The REDD+ process, specifically the RPP preparation, was criticized by civil society members (including CFP) in Cameroon for its lack of effective stakeholder engagement. See: http://theredddesk.org/countries/cameroon

[18] https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2016/May/Position%20Note%20CFP_final.pdf

[19] CFP further questions the limited time available for collecting feedback on the document: "Most of (civil society) organisations criticized the initiative of asking only for constructive comments within a one week time frame as a way for the government to negatively influence the participation of all the stakeholders. In fact, the government took eight months to improve the document but just gave one week for comments from CSOs on a technical document of more than a hundred pages and only written in English when a lot of CSOs do not always have high level of English proficiency staff to fully understand it. How then can CSOs have a fundamental contribution? How can such document be validated without a certain level of participation? Why didn't the government take time to consult and ensure the participation of the CSOs and build a robust ER-PIN for a resubmission?" For more details, see:
https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2016/May/Position%20Note%20CFP_final.pdf

[20] As one CSO argues: "in these meetings (e.g. during the development of RPIN and REDD+ strategy) sometimes, there is better representation of INGOs than that of the national and local organisations and we feel manipulated by their agenda. It is fine if they come with expertise ideas or have advisory positions but they should not manipulate the decision-making process".

When asked whether the CSOs were fairly represented in the REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes, the interviewees from the two platforms had mixed opinions. The PFNREDD & CC, with a sympathetic view to the government efforts, sees a relatively high level of representation of civil society in the REDD+ process. On the other hand, CFP members see a relatively low representation of CSOs in REDD+ and a relatively high participation in the VPA process. Both platforms acknowledge that some important stakeholder groups have been missed in the REDD+ process, including women, indigenous people, local communities, councils, small forest enterprises, and people from some ecological zones (e.g. populations in savannah and some forest zones). Local communities and indigenous people were left out partly because the CSOs were weakly organised or had insufficient technical, financial, and material means. Similarly, there was less or no participation of the CSOs from the grassroots and provincial levels.

CSOs have participated in various VPA and REDD+ meetings, as they were involved in reflection and adoption of the documents being developed.[21] In terms of VPA, they were mainly involved in the development of the VPA legality grid, preparation of agendas, and constitution of commissions, committees and working groups. For REDD+ CSOs participated in training on formulation of safeguard proposals, composition of REDD+ organs, and consultation with local forest communities. While many of the interviewees did not participate directly in the beginning, they have lately been invited for consultation. However, some interviewees think that participation of CSOs is still insignificant, as REDD+ meetings are dominated by members from different government ministries, World Bank, consultant groups and INGOs. For example, CSO have only one place among the 17 members of the national steering committee of REDD+. There is also only one representative for NGOs and one for indigenous peoples out of 14 members of the VPA national follow-up committee (i.e. CNS or Comité national de suivi).

It is important to highlight here the different mechanisms of decision-making in VPA and REDD+ processes. While the VPA is a bilateral agreement of international law between a national and international party and is negotiated; the REDD+ process does not lead to an agreement but a work plan financed by international donors and involving a number of different phases. In the VPA, decisions are jointly made by the Cameroonian and EU parties in the joint monitoring committee (i.e. CCS or Comité Conjoint de Suivi) where civil society and local communities do not have any official representation. They are not invited either to be part of the validation of the documents and hence the voice of civil society and communities can easily be ignored. Additionally, in the national REDD+ steering committee and CNS where civil society have official representations, the decisions are generally taken by consensus and sometimes by vote. Since the CSOs are in minority, as many interviewees argue, they hardly can influence decisions. In those cases, when decisions are taken by a simple majority, CSOs have to use advocacy outside the institutions or meetings to push their positions. In the VPA process, decisions are prepared at the national follow up committee (i.e. CNS), but most often, as the CSOs argue, they are taken in favour of the government administration (e.g. Ministry of Forestry) and private sector. In the case of REDD+, PFNREDD & CC thinks that the platform's voice is sought and seriously taken into consideration based on criteria such as their official representation at the REDD+ organs, invitation for meetings, timely circulation of documents for comments and their involvement in validation of minutes.[22] On the other hand, the CFP thinks that its views are rarely sought in the official REDD+ meetings and they have to do outside advocacy to push their agenda.

Participation is considered as *ongoing* (*medium to long term*) in the FLEGT VPA process (for 7 out of 9 responses) whereas it is an *ad hoc* process that stops and starts (i.e. *short-term*) in the case of REDD+ process (for 8 out of 9 responses). For example, CFP has done several assessments of Annex 7 (i.e. information to be put at the disposal of

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[21] It is important to note that the invitation for their involvement has not always been evident. At times, civil society had to force to be invited. They have often been invited and associated very late which made effective participation difficult and in fact, ineffective.

[22] The PFNREDD & CC participated in the elaboration of RPIN, RPP and REDD+ strategy process and also represented in Brussels for the ER-PIN presentation.

public) of VPA. In 2012 the CFP on behalf of CSOs carried out an evaluation of the implementation of the VPAs in Cameroon and observed that the preparatory phase was weak. They also observed weak implementation of Annex 7 and continued illegal exploitation of forests. Their most recent assessment in 2016 found out that more than 80% of the documents to be published in accordance of Annex 7 were actually put online. This progress in the implementation of Annex 7 and improved access to information as shown in the CFP's latest assessment illustrates a positive impact of effective civil society participation.

In 2015, the CFP also participated actively in the evaluation of the FLEGT action plan conducted amongst others in Cameroon by a team of international evaluators. The platform assessed its participation in the VPA process and formulated a set of recommendations for the future of the FLEGT action plan. The views of the CFP are reflected in the final evaluation of the FLEGT action plan. In this respect, CFP considers its participation at the FLEGT VPA process as continued.[23]

The frequency at which CSOs are informed of consultation in the VPA process ranges from *mostly* (6 responses) to *always* (3) whereas in REDD+ it is *often* (8 responses) to *never* (1). Many interviewees also complain about the way and the timing with which they are informed, which is more important than the frequency at which they are asked to participate. For example in the REDD+ process, documents in English have been shared for consultation with CSO representatives very late in the process; this has hindered their adequate participation.

Selected CSO representatives are usually informed of a meeting by email or invitation letters through their platforms although communication is arranged differently in VPA and REDD+ processes. Both platforms claim that they keep their members informed of the meetings taking place and the outcomes of such meetings, however, as mentioned earlier, some interviewees disagree. Sometimes, CSOs themselves have to call the organisers (e.g. National REDD+ Coordination office, Ministry of Forest, EU, World Bank, GiZ or other members of the platform) to know more about the details of a meeting. This lack of efficient and transparent mechanism of information sharing makes it problematic for any process to be effective, participatory and inclusive.

On the question of whether adequate and accessible information on REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes and meetings is provided timely to the CSOs and indigenous peoples, 5 interviewees responded *yes* and 4 *no*. In particular, poor preparation and late notification of a meeting is common. A CSO representative engaged in both the VPA and REDD+ processes responds:

> Access to information and the quality of information made available is always a problem. In the case of the VPA process, it happens often that the CSOs are invited only to approve a document and they only received the document during the meeting or a day before. In the REDD+ process, it is not inclusive or open to many stakeholders and the quality of information is often worse than in the VPA; the discussion is very technical with highly vague concepts without a national definition: additionality, leakage, offsets etc, which are difficult to understand for many of us.

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[23] However, one interviewee sees some fatigueness in participation during the implementation of VPA, both in part of the CSOs and government administration and adds that it is partly due to the government always seeing CSOs as an obstacle.

Most interviewees consider their participation in FLEGT VPA as *collaborating (high)*, even though they acknowledge that collaboration could be questioned at times when opinions on some issues are highly divergent.[24] Some CSOs think that their views were considered both in the VPA agreement and in the proposals submitted in respect of the forest law reforms, and more specifically taking into account the social, environmental and governance aspects.[25] Some examples in VPA process where their views were widely discussed and considered include: issues of the rights of communities and CSOs to participate in the decision-making, issue of transparency, special disposition (Annex 7 of the VPA), and community capacity building in forest monitoring.

On the other hand, the level of participation in REDD+ is classified as *low (informing)* by most interviewees (except for the PFNREDD & CC). As one interviewee from the CFP charges that the participation in REDD+ is "a deliberate action of the government to get approved what they have already decided" and the CSO participation is only "used for validation purpose". Among the interviewees, only the PFNREDD & CC thinks that their participation is *high (collaborating),* as they have contributed actively in the validation of the RPP and elaboration of the national REDD+ strategy and ER-PIN.[26] According to this platform, the issues raised by the CSOs that were considered in REDD+ include: consideration of social and environmental safeguards, and the need of equitable benefit sharing. However, the CFP argues that the views of CSOs are hardly sought in the elaboration of REDD+ documents; they were only taken into account after strong advocacy actions by the CSOs from outside (for example, when RPP and ER-PIN were submitted).

Overall, most interviewees are thus *satisfied* (5 responses) *to neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* (4 responses) with their experience in the VPA process. Members from the CFP think that the impact of their participation, particularly in the VPA has had a positive impact on forest governance in recent years in Cameroon. In the case of REDD+ process, civil society's experience is overall *unsatisfied* (7 responses), except for the interviewees from PFNREDD & CC who have positive assessment of their experience (*satisfied*). Members from both platforms acknowledge that more needs to be done to enhance the participation of women, local communities and indigenous people in REDD+ process.

5.3 Ghana: country assessment

Forest Watch Ghana and Kasa Ghana are the two main platforms for the CSOs to discuss pertinent issues on natural resources (including issues of forest governance, REDD+ and VPA) in the country. Forest Watch Ghana acts as the national forum of over forty CSOs and individuals working for the rights of poor forest users and has been doing policy advocacy on land tenure, community development and forest governance issues since 2004. In particular, it campaigns for greater civil society mobilisation and "democratic stakeholder participation in forest policymaking and management, particularly for forest dependent communities".[27]

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[24] The CFP attributes high level of participation in VPA meetings to their good preparation and internal discussion: "Our platform has a very good strategy in handling issues of great importance in that it always discusses these issues in its platform meetings and takes its stand before the national follow-up committee sits to deliberate on it. In certain case, our stance is better than the government since we go well prepared. For example in the case of evaluation of the impacts of FLEGT VPA, the government was just dependent on the services of a consultant to develop a methodology, the CSOs had already done their works and submitted it for consideration. Also, while international consultant and experts are only interested in validation of their works, we are more concerned on proper consultation and deliberation among our members and better implementation of these policies".

[25] However, it is still premature to judge the impact of CSOs suggestions on the forest law reform. There is still uncertainty about how the final text of the new forest law will look like and to what extent the positions of civil society are taken on board.

[26] As the platform argues, "several of our opinions were taken in the RPP, and our proposals are taken into consideration during the national steering committee meetings. The Ministry of Environment is one of the rare ministries that cooperate with the CSOs, even though they are not perfect".

[27] https://www.kasaghana.org/kasa-thematic-coalitions

Kasa Ghana claims to have over 100 networks, coalitions and partners, however it strategically focuses advocacy works on seven key areas through its thematic coalitions: Forest Watch Ghana; CSO Platform for Oil and Gas; Fisheries Alliance; CSO Coalition on Water and Sanitation; CSO Working Group on Mining; CSO Working Group on Environment and Climate Change; and Civil Society Coalition on Land. Its mission is to "coordinate effective participation in responsible environment and natural resource governance for the realization of rights of people, particularly the marginalised" and core values are: participation, equity, social justice, and gender sensitivity, among others.[28]

Both platforms organise regular discussions, including pre- and post- consultation meetings before and after a consultation has taken place. When needed, special or emergency meetings are organised. For example, Forest Watch meets on a quarterly basis (i.e. 4 times/year) where issues of concern on forestry sector are discussed and a common position is negotiated.[29] They also organise 'forest fora' at regional and community levels.

In terms of the FLEGT VPA process, Ghana led the AFLEG (Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance) process that started in 2003 under the coordination of IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and was later handed to the government and civil society members. FLEGT VPA negotiations started in 2005 and agreements were finalised and signed in 2009. The REDD+ process started in 2009 in Ghana and the documents that have been developed so far include: R-PIN, RPP, REDD+ strategy and ER-PIN. The ER-PIN had already been developed when civil society members were asked for their feedbacks; they were consulted during the development of the RPP and contributed in the discussion during the development of REDD+ safeguards. In fact, some CSOs such as Civic Response that also coordinates Forest Watch had facilitated the organisation of national and local forest fora that were also used for REDD+ consultations in the beginning.

CSOs are included in steering committees and working groups in both the VPA and REDD+ processes in Ghana. For the VPA, these include: the VPA steering committee[30], the Multi-Stakeholder Implementation Committee, and the Timber Validation Committee (under the Forestry Commission Ghana). For REDD+, there are the REDD+ steering committee (since 2010), and SESA (Strategic Environment and Social Assessment Working Group).

Although civil society members are included in these working groups and committees, some interviewees question whether it is adequate in proportion or fair in representation. They also question whether civil society interests are genuinely represented, as some members do sometimes not seem to represent what they stand for. For example, in the VPA steering committee, civil society elected who should be their representatives whereas in REDD+ steering committee civil society members were directly picked by the government (i.e. the REDD+ secretariat).

Many interviewees agree that women, customary authorities, forest communities and local communities are the groups who have been left out in REDD+ and VPA processes. Although these groups were not deliberately excluded, civil society members argue that the government was not able to reach out to communities due to their limited capacity and confidence. Formal representatives from the local communities are still lacking in the steering committee for both VPA and REDD+ and, as the interviews reveal, they rarely engage with government agencies such as the national ministry or the Forestry Commission Ghana. Furthermore, there is also a distinct disconnect between national

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[28] https://www.kasaghana.org/vision-and-mission
[29] Sometimes the common position is dominated by one or two influential organisations, as not all organisations can articulate their views effectively. Some CSOs agree that they have to be strategic in these meetings so they settle on the position although their own views are quite different from the common position.
[30] One position for civil society is currently vacant, as the person in the committee went abroad for higher education and the position has not been replaced.

and local representations despite local communities often being their constituencies. Similarly, women groups have not been specifically targeted but they are brought on board when required (e.g. delegation through Trade Union Congress or participant from CSOs). Unlike in the VPA, private sector also has been left out in REDD+, as it is not specifically targeted at them. Similarly, other civil society members working on crosscutting issues such as tenure, land and mining seem to have been left out, as the focus has been on forestry sector. However, there has been some information sharing lately with a range of these groups.

In general, most interviewees agree that civil society participation in forest policy processes has improved over the years in Ghana. However, their experience of participation in VPA and REDD+ processes varies. While the VPA was detailed, comprehensive and participatory, REDD+ is not up to the standard although some civil society members think that lately it is picking up lessons from the VPA.

Civil society members and organisations are informed about consultation meetings through email or letter. They are also notified about it through civil society platforms such as Forest Watch Ghana. While it is not always the case, they are often provided soft copies of the draft reports before the consultation meetings. The minutes and reports are shared but these are not directly made available to a broader group (unless shared by civil society representatives in the working group or platform like the Forest Watch).[31]

Most interviewees think that civil society participation in FLEGT VPA was particularly *high* (7 responses) or *very high* (2 responses), as civil society actors were involved from the beginning of the process. They also point out that they have been able to get on board the issues they raised during the VPA negotiation and consultation meetings, including issues of community rights; benefit sharing; and governance.[32] In fact, governance working group during the VPA negotiation was coordinated by civil society members so the texts reflect a lot of their concerns. A few interviewees further argue that even non-NGO members were brought together and information shared, who then contributed to what goes where in the negotiated texts of the VPA document; hence VPA was very consultative.

However, many CSOs do not see a clear role for participation in the VPA implementation, which they seem happy to have opted out from. They argue that their main concerns are with governance and rights rather than issues of legality so they are not interested in doing audits. Civil society in Ghana is thus happy with its advocacy role in looking into social issues and leave the certification and auditing to independent third party monitors.[33] Unlike in Liberia (and also in Indonesia), civil society in Ghana is thus outside of the auditing system and their role is as a 'watchdog' only. However, civil society members are represented in relevant committees with some implementation roles such as the Timber Validation Committee, multi-stakeholder implementation committee and joint monitoring review mechanism (equivalent to joint implementation committee in some countries).

One of the issues that was raised during the VPA negotiations and which was successfully excluded from the VPA legality definition, which has resurfaced prominently (as observed in Forest Watch quarterly meeting) was the issue of 'special ministerial permits'. While timber rights and FLEGT license contracts can only be issued through a competitive bidding process, 'special permit' can be issued by the minister-in-charge without following laws for concession rights and without needing a parliamentary approval. As this is a potential loophole, NGOs had argued that

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[31] It can be considered as normal, provided that the CSO representatives ensure that they share and hence have time to get feedback from their constituencies.

[32] For example, civil society discussed for two days what constitutes legal timber in Ghana.

[33] Civil society's disinterest is also due to a government provision for VPA implementation that requires: (a) technical skills in monitoring (e.g. measuring timber); (b) paying the costs of monitoring on their own; and (c) going as an observer but not allowed to write a report.

special permits should be excluded from the VPA legality grid and hence timber with these permits could not be legally traded. The current minister argued for reinstating the special permits into the VPA legality grid. Following effective advocacy of Ghanaian NGOs, it now looks likely this issue is closed again.

Almost all the interviewees think that their experience with REDD+ has not been comparable to the VPA; the level of their participation in REDD+ was rated *low* (6 responses) to *medium* (3 responses). They were not invited for consultation in the early days of REDD+ (e.g. in preparation of R-PIN as the first document), however it has improved a bit lately (e.g. in preparation of RPP and REDD+ strategy documents). As one interviewee puts it:

> REDD+ in the beginning had a serious gap, as there was not enough time for consultation. Forestry Commission Ghana rushed into the pressure from the World Bank to prepare and finalise the R-PIN document. It did not really consult and there were a lot of complaints and contestations from the civil society (e.g. on how drivers of deforestation were defined) - blocking its approval and asking to slow down the process. Even for the RPP, the government was in a hurry to complete things because monetary incentives from the World Bank were involved. RPP was contracted out to external consultants but when it came back some views of civil society were incorporated after consultation. They consulted but it was not enough…Moving forward since the RPP was approved, I think that some efforts have been made, with national REDD+ working group having a civil society representation. Participation on REDD+ strategy development has been fairly good but it is moderate, as some of the concerns raised by the civil society were not reflected in the final document.

Civil society participation in REDD+ is thus *ad hoc* and purpose-led, which is in contrast to *long-term* and *ongoing* participation in VPA.[34] In particular, participation was much higher in the VPA negotiation phase. In REDD+ few interviewees argue that the participation can be considered continuous and most interviewees agree that their participation in REDD+ was random and rushed. Information about REDD+ meetings was also not provided in time. For example, civil society members were asked to attend in some meetings, giving a window of two hours. In such a case, civil society members had no choice other than miss the meetings.

Hence, CSO satisfaction level in VPA and REDD+ varies. In VPA, the responses range from *very satisfied* (2 responses)*, satisfied* (5 responses) *to neither satisfied nor unsatisfied* (2 responses)*.* In REDD+, CSO experience of satisfaction ranges from *unsatisfied* (5 responses), *neither satisfied nor unsatisfied* (2 responses) to *satisfied* (2 responses). Overall, most interviewees agree that the civil society participation has been encouraging in Ghana; they want more effective participation in forest governance and other areas of national policymaking.

5.4 Liberia: country assessment

VPA process started in 2009 in Liberia and agreements were signed in 2012 and ratified in 2014. In the process, a number of institutions were involved, including three CSOs (i.e. Sustainable Development Institute – SDI, Foundation for Community Initiatives – FCI, and Green Advocates) from the NGO Coalition that consists of 15 Liberian NGOs working in different areas, including sustainable forest management. VPA in Liberia has a working group and steering committee. These CSOs are also represented in the VPA steering committee (3 out of 15 members are CSOs).

In the REDD+ process, there are both a working group and a steering committee; civil society members are also part of these organs. Few (mainly international) CSOs (e.g. Fauna and Flora International - FFI, Global Witness and Save My Future Foundation - SAMFU) were involved in the REDD+ process (e.g. development of RPP and REDD+ strategy). Some

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[34] Civil society members cite their representation in the Timber Validation Committee, steering committee, multi-stakeholder implementation committee and joint review monitoring review mechanism as their ongoing participation in VPA.

national CSOs such as Green Advocates, SDI and Society for Conservation of Nature in Liberia - SCNL have become active members in the REDD+ Technical Working Group. These CSOs are also part of the Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) Working Group that meets on a quarterly basis.[35] In total, there are several mechanisms to oversee consultations with regard to REDD+ and forest governance: Environment and Social Monitoring Framework, Safeguards Information Framework, Community Forestry Working Group (CFWG)[36], REDD+ Technical Working Group, SESA Working Group, and Concessions Working Group (CWG). Other available institutional mechanisms include: Climate Change Steering Committee and Civil Society Dialogue platform.

Most CSOs argue that no groups have been deliberately left out in both VPA and REDD+ meetings. However, they point out the challenges some groups (e.g. local communities and women) experience in participating and following discussions in these meetings due to technical aspects involved in both VPA and REDD+ processes that require some prior knowledge (e.g. on carbon measurement and benefit sharing for REDD+; and licensing and legality issues for VPA). In words of one interviewee, "there also exists a big gap between few CSOs who know and who do not know in terms of VPA and REDD+ issues". There have also been efforts lately to bring other stakeholders such as the National Chainsaw Union, National Charcoal Union and industries/private sector in the discussion meetings.

It is to be noted that Liberia is the only country that achieved participation by CSOs and, separately, by 'communities' in the VPA negotiation and implementation. Thus, 'communities' have been acknowledged as district stakeholder group in the country's VPA process. Communities are also represented in the VPA steering committee. Whilst there was some measure of organisation/ institutionalisation within communities to select/elect their representatives, and the whole process of doing so was facilitated by CSOs, those involved would not identify themselves as from community-based organisations, but simply from 'communities'. For example, the Union of Community Forestry Development Committees (CFDCs) started its involvement in 2009 and became active after 2011.[37] The Union strongly supports the VPA and thinks that communities' views are incorporated in the final document.

The assessment of the REDD+ process is markedly different from community groups' experience with the VPA. They argue that they have not been fairly represented (e.g. in the working group of REDD+) and their main concern of benefit sharing mechanism for communities has not been addressed. As one community representative argues:

> For VPA our participation through to negotiation stage was empowering and fun but for REDD+ there is no such opportunity, even we cannot go back to the community and ask for their views. Additionally, the issues talked about in REDD+ are too technical for communities to understand. Nobody knows why you are sitting down there. The whole REDD+ structure should do more to provide a useful platform for community participation in Liberia. Additionally, REDD+ is contentious because there are associated costs to local communities. How do you address land tenure? How do you compensate local people displaced by REDD+ projects and private companies doing carbon trade?

This view is also shared by many national CSOs in Liberia. Most of the interviewees agree that the issue of civil society participation in REDD+ is a recent phenomenon, as "things are just beginning to happen". From their experience in participation in REDD+ so far, they argue that REDD+ is a very complex and abstract policy that contains a number of

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[35] Coinciding with the field work there was a meeting to discuss development of environmental management framework under SESA Working Group and participants were developing emission reference levels. In terms of REDD+ policies, RPP has been developed and REDD+ strategy is being finalised in Liberia as part of REDD+ readiness phase. Norway was involved in entire R-package. Communication strategy is also being developed and efforts are under way in operationalising REDD+ Implementation Unit.

[36] CFWG sits under Liberia's Forest Development Authority and is supported by the US Agency for International Development.

[37] The Union of CFDCs represents 23 Liberian CFDCs with both forest management contract and timber sale contract. They argue that they have all three forest regions represented in the multi-stakeholder committee.

technical issues and concepts that they are not always familiar with. Articulating about REDD+ is thus a challenge for them. Additionally, there is also less funding and few incentives to participation in REDD+ as compared to the VPA.[38]

A majority of CSO members argue that most consultations in policy processes in Liberia are done only for the purpose of validation - hence their overall experience of participation in VPA and REDD+ alike is only *medium* level. Despite this, they acknowledge that they have been successful in incorporating some of the civil society issues in national forest policies and VPA negotiation. Some examples include: recognition of customary rights and community entitlements to forests[39] and widening the definition of 'illegal timber' (e.g. including the timber that is coming cross-border from Guinea, a non-VPA country). Some interviewees think that participation has been institutionalised in Liberia due to continuous demand from the civil society although government sometimes tend to use it only to legitimise its policymaking.

When asked whether they consult with their colleagues or community members when CSOs are invited in national meetings, a majority of the interviewees responded that this is not always the case (although it happens when there is an important issue). Through the NGO Coalition platform, they organise pre- and post-consultation meetings to develop a common position and update each other on the issues discussed.[40] Most CSOs argue that their experience with VPA encouraged them to discuss the agenda before the meeting, participate in a series of meetings and go back to their colleagues and communities to inform of the decisions.[41]

Out of 10 responses, the assessment by most CSOs of their experience of participation in VPA is *medium* (3) to *high* (7) whereas their experience in REDD+ ranges from *low* (7 responses) to *medium* (3 responses). REDD+ meetings were considered only for *information sharing* in some cases due to the reason that most of the earlier meetings were technical and relevant stakeholders were not asked for participation. There has been more involvement of CSOs lately, particularly after 2013.

There was a lot of criticism and lack of trust in the beginning of REDD+ process in Liberia. For example, SDI was very critical about any mechanisms of carbon trading initially, however it got involved in the preparation of the RPP. Among other things, CSOs highlighted issues of community rights (e.g. potential eviction from REDD+ projects) and benefit sharing (e.g. community access to bush meat). However, when the final RPP document was prepared there were some disagreements between the civil society members and the government (also the consultant and World Bank) on issues of benefit sharing, financial responsibility and carbon credits. When the final document came out, views from SDI and other CSOs were not incorporated. The RPP document was presented as if everyone agreed and endorsed it. Hence CSOs opted out and said they were not part of the process. They asked to add a disclaimer explicitly stating that the CSOs did not approve the document. From that point onwards, the discussion on REDD+ was focused on entering carbon markets, in which many CSOs lost their interest to engage in. More recently when the REDD+ process began to discuss measures such as forest law enforcement, governance and legality, CSOs found it useful to participate and are now involved in the development of the REDD+ strategy and the SESA Working Group.

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[38] One CSO actor highlights: "in terms of awareness and visibility, VPA is widely known than REDD+ in Liberia. REDD+ was more closed (2008 to 2010) but now it is starting to be open, particularly after 2013".

[39] This was achieved through forest law the provisions on which the government reluctantly agreed to keep.

[40] For example, the issue of community benefits from land rental is a clause that was heavily discussed within the platform and was later put in the forest law. The provision requires 33 per cent of the benefits to be accrued to the affected communities as compensation from the logging operations (33 per cent goes to to national government and 33 per to the counties).

[41] One CSO member highlights the strategy for community engagement: by empowering the communities to "raise their flag, blow the whistle, go in to sit there, and voice their concerns".

Most CSOs consider their participation in VPA and REDD+ as both *ongoing* (*regular*) and *ad hoc* due to the nature of the meetings that take place[42]. However, participation in REDD+ is 'scattered', fragmented and non-consistent. The CSOs also criticize the way information for meetings is provided at short notice and they are asked to review large documents. They do not get enough time to read in advance of the meeting and also not all CSO members understand REDD+ jargon terms like reference level, carbon trading etc.[43]

In terms of their satisfaction level, most CSOs are *satisfied* (7 responses) and some *very satisfied* (3 responses) with the opportunities of participation in VPA whereas in REDD+ their experience ranges: *dissatisfied* (5 responses), *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* (3 responses) or *satisfied* (2 responses).

It is also important to note the views of government. Although local communities and their representatives were missed out initially in REDD+, a government representative argued that the working group has been restructured to include them through the Government's Community Forestry Working Group[44]. The government also claims to be working hard for developing a smart communication strategy for information dissemination and instant follow up. According to the REDD+ Implementing Unit, there have been so far 15 different national and regional consultations with regard to REDD+ and there is a fair representation of CSOs.[45] However, the government's view is that there is some decline in CSO's visibility and influence lately, which sometimes tends to be like 'participation fatigue'. Government's assessment of CSO participation in REDD+ is *weak* and it is *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* with their participation. The government interviewee thus stresses the need for a stronger civil society in Liberia with an emphasis on their organisational capacity needs assessment and focused approach to work. Rather than having different types of NGOs bundled up together to make the NGO Coalition, in the government's view, it would be helpful to have multiple coalitions working on different sectors with more focused areas of work like in Ghana. That way, it would also be easier for the government to work with them.

The government's claims of information sharing and increased participation are challenged by many CSOs who argue that accessing information from the Forest Development Authority (FDA) has been difficult. Although there is a Freedom of Information Act in Liberia, they complain of the FDA not being compliant with it.[46] For example, one CSO asked for information in December 2015 but it was still waiting for the information to be shared in March 2016. Hence CSOs demand more transparency in information sharing and want the provisions in the Act followed fully.

5.5 Republic of Congo: country assessment

Civil society participation at the VPA and REDD+ processes in the Republic of Congo takes place mainly through two platforms: (a) the FLEGT platform, La Plateforme pour la Gestion Durable des Forêts (PGDF) that was initially set up to improve forest governance but later decided to use the VPA and forest reforms as levers to provoke change (same strategy as the CFP in Cameroon); and (b) the REDD platform, Cadre de concertation des organisations de la société civile et des populations autochtones (CACO REDD). Within the framework of FLEGT VPA negotiations, PGDF

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[42] Besides regular meetings, there are sometimes emergency meetings organised based on urgency (e.g. finalisation of RPP).
[43] One interviewee even goes further to criticize that it is the tactic of the government to deliberately avoid some of the CSOs that are critical of REDD+ in relevant meetings so that it would be easy for the government to validate its policies.
[44] There are now 13 community forests in Liberia.
[45] The government claims of fair representation is 7.5 out of 10 scale and involving all types of stakeholders, including CSOs, community based organisations, local communities, representatives from Chainsaw Union, National Charcoal Association etc.
[46] According to the Act, a Liberian citizen has a moral duty and right to ask for any information, which can be accessed free. However, the cost for processing the information (e.g. photocopying) has to be paid by the person requesting it.

representing the CSOs also comprises representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities. The REDD+ platform, CACO REDD also has two components one for civil society organisations and one for indigenous peoples.

The CSOs in the Republic of Congo that were interviewed had participated both in REDD+ and FLEGT processes.[47] Some CSOs had participated in the negotiation of the VPA, through the decision-making bodies, such as the National Consultative Group (GNC) and Joint Working Group (GTC). Formal negotiations started in June 2008 and the VPA was signed in May 2009. In the VPA negotiation, a number of issues were discussed in the legality grid, including mechanism of participation; FPIC and benefit sharing. A number of CSOs participated in the negotiations, however communities and indigenous peoples were not directly represented in the negotiation phase other than through a few CSOs working with indigenous peoples, or composed of indigenous peoples participating in the PGDF platform (Fern, 2014b).

CSOs have also participated in the process of revising forest law and elaboration of forest policies, including RPP and other technical meetings on REDD+ (e.g. legal, safeguard and secretarial groups). However, some CSOs argue that they were not able to participate in the drafting of REDD+ documents, as these were written by consultants. In their views, the CSOs were only invited in the REDD+ workshops to validate these documents (e.g. RPP), during which they were handed copies of the documents. Most CSOs interviewed argue that there was almost no CSO participation in REDD+ meetings that followed (e.g. elaboration of ER-PIN in 2014), hence they had to publish position papers to protest against the lack of participation of civil society, local communities and indigenous people in the REDD+ process.

With regard to the VPA process, most of the CSOs were involved in negotiation, discussion and validation through the PGDF platform and the process was found to be intense and constructive by them. As one interviewee argues, in the VPA process most of the time the "CSO representatives were in the driving seat with their control of the issues being discussed".[48] By contrast, attendance at REDD+ meetings was organised based on the government's preference and only those persons who 'cooperated' with the government's agenda and interest were invited.

When the CSOs were asked whether they had had prior-consultation with their colleagues or community members before attending meetings, there were mixed responses: 6 (*yes*), 1 (*no*), and 1 (*yes* or *no* depending on the type of the meeting they are invited to). The decision on who is represented at meetings is based on a number of factors: profile/competency of the representative, availability and theme discussed.[49]

When asked whether the CSOs were fairly represented in the national policy processes, 6 interviewees agreed that it was the case in VPA whereas in REDD+ only 2 responded *yes*. The interviewees thought that FLEGT VPA provided a multi-stakeholder platform through PGDF in which all stakeholders (including CSOs, indigenous peoples and local communities) were represented fairly. While they consider their participation in VPA negotiation, joint working group (GTC) meetings, and discussion of the draft forest law and forest policies to be quite fruitful, they think that their participation in REDD+ meetings is for validation purpose only. As a result, CSO participants had no powers to block a document when there were disagreements in REDD+ meetings. The REDD+ meetings were instead heavily dominated by the government administration while there was less representation from civil society members. Most CSOs think that local communities and indigenous people were conspicuously missing or excluded from REDD+ meetings. It was also the case of FLEGT VPA, as local communities were not present through negotiation and implementation phases

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[47] However, the main thrust in the Republic of Congo has been REDD+ rather than FLEGT. REDD+ is driven by the World Bank. However, as the World Bank is more interested in carbon credit, it has been difficult for the civil society actors to share the same position.

[48] Many CSOs also appreciate the help of international organisations like Fern who put the agenda of CSO participation vociferously.

[49] Sometimes it is also based on the type of invitation from the platform coordinator (e.g. under whose name the invitation letter is addressed to).

of the meetings.

When asked about the time of the policy cycle that CSOs are invited for participation, most of the interviewees agreed that it happens *during policy development* (there were only 2 interviewees for VPA and 1 for REDD+ who thought it happens *before policy development*). While CSOs were involved during all key stages of FLEGT VPA (e.g. including legality definition, traceability system and the independent forest observatory project)[50], for REDD+ they were asked for participation only in validation workshops (e.g. for adoption of REDD+ strategy, RPP, R-PIN and ER-PIN).

For most interviewees, their participation in VPA is an *ongoing (regular)* process (6 responses) whereas REDD+ is an *ad-hoc process* that stops and starts (6 responses). The way CSOs are invited for participation in meetings (i.e. institutional mechanism of their participation) also varies. Some CSOs were part of working groups such as the legal working group for REDD+ and FLEGT and they produced CSO proposals for negotiating documents (e.g. VPA and RPP). Others were invited because they were either part of the national consultative group or member of the joint/mixed working group (e.g. GTC), technical secretariat or communication working group.

Majority of the interviewees think that they are invited *often* (7 responses) for REDD+ meetings whereas for FLEGT the frequency at which CSOs are invited for meetings is comparatively higher, with 1 response for *always*, 3 responses for *mostly* and 4 responses for *often*. Usually, the CSOs are invited through phone calls, letters or emails; the information is not put in the public domain (e.g. media). Some CSOs learn about the event through platforms such as the PGDF for FLEGT and CACO REDD for REDD+ or third parties. For REDD+ meetings, letters are sent to the CACO REDD platform from the national REDD+ coordinator and at times these invitations are formal with hard paper signed by the director of the minister's cabinet.

The available information on meetings was thought to be *complete, timely and understandable* to most interviewees (7 responses) in the case of FLEGT VPA whereas for REDD+ it was not the case for a majority of interviewees (6 responses). The CSOs argue that they often receive an invitation with terms of reference for REDD+ processes a day before the actual meeting (sometimes after it has happened) and thus do not get enough time for preparation and consultation.

For FLEGT, most CSOs thought that their views were considered in the final version of the VPA, as their contributions are often taken seriously. CSOs use different strategies to make their concerns heard; they take up the issue through active deliberations in the meetings or outside of the meetings through position papers and lobbying both national and internationally.[51] However, in REDD+ CSOs experienced difficulties to integrate their views due to weak consultations, most particularly during the development of RPP.

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[50] CSOs participated in VPA via the national consultative group and different working groups charged with elaborating the VPA annexes, agreement itself, technical sessions and direct negotiations in Brussels, and implementation of the VPA through technical secretariat for implementation and the joint working group i.e. GTC.

[51] As one CSO member shares his experience: "within the framework of the revision for the Forest Code as required by the FLEGT VPA, the government wanted to pass a version of the code that did not go through consultation for CSOs and communities. During the first meeting of the multi-stakeholder consultative committee (CCM) in May 2013, I was charged to talk about the quality and legitimacy of the text proposed by the government. We did not recognise the document, which led to a redoing of the document with a real consultation with the communities. Additionally, we threatened to pull out from the CCM if the question of conversion timber was not put in the discussion agenda. After the presentation of this issue, the debates that followed led the minister in-charge of forests to recognise that there was a problem and our proposal to consider conversion timber in the revised forest law got approved".

Additionally, in most of the REDD+ consultations CSOs were not given sufficient time or resources to prepare for the meetings. As a result, their participation was far from being effective; it was more formal, standardised, and at times, 'staged'.[52]

In the views of many interviewees, the REDD+ and FLEGT processes have not generally involved local communities and indigenous peoples; it is usually the CSOs who have to speak on their behalf. The only effective consultation that took place at the grassroots level was during the process for the revision of the Forest Code. Some interviewees even think that consultation meetings still have the connotation of party representations, often dominated by influential CSO members from the capital (Brazzaville) and other big towns, and usually men. Although a platform like CACO REDD has provisions for both civil society and indigenous peoples, community groups feel that the current set-up does not permit them to be autonomous or self-reliant but puts them under the authority of the civil society component. One interviewee even questions the capture of participation space by influential elite community members who do not necessarily represent grassroots views or work for community interests.[53]

All of the CSO interviewees agreed that the level of their participation in FLEGT processes was *high/collaborating* (7 responses) to *very high/empowering* (1 response). In the case of REDD+, there was mixed categorisation of their overall participation level: *manipulation/ non-participation* (1 response); *informing/very low* (4 responses); and *consulting/low* (3 responses). Overall, REDD+ experience was not comparable to VPA for a majority of CSOs, as participation was only offered to them after a strong protest and demand. For example, the CSOs first blocked the development of RPP at the FCPF Participant Committee, as it had published a position paper with disagreements over their level of participation. The administration came back and discussed the document with participation of the CSOs that was later validated after most of the inputs from civil society were taken in to account.

The overall experience of civil society participation in FLEGT process ranged from *satisfied* (6 responses) or *very satisfied* (1 response) to *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* (1 response). In REDD+, the overall experience was *unsatisfied* (6 responses) or *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* (2 responses).

6. Civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT processes: a synthesis of major findings

It is clear from this assessment that there is a growing recognition of civil society participation in national policy making of forest governance in Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and Republic of Congo, and a majority of the CSOs in these countries are participating in REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes, with some civil society actors more involved in one area than the other. Although most of the interviewees were civil society actors themselves and they will positively value their participation for obvious reasons, their role in national policy making of forest governance has been acknowledged by external non-civil society actors (for example, by government representatives in Liberia and INGO actors in Ghana).

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[52] As the interviewee shares his REDD+ experience: "what is agreed does not always appear in the minute or the final document that is circulated to the participants after the meeting. What is determinant is the process of elaboration of the document and the stakes and stance we take. Because during the validation meetings the civil society is usually in a minority, we cannot stop the adoption of these documents. As such, we usually have to recourse to denounce the validation after the workshop through other platforms (e.g. lobbying or position paper). But this is not always effective".

[53] The interviewee also argues whether having representation in the meeting can be considered as participation: "within the framework of REDD+, it is true that the indigenous people option is put forward but one can pose the question if presence in a meeting without saying a single word means participating in the name of a group. To have their voice heard, indigenous people and local communities should be given necessary training on how to speak and put their views more effectively".

Varying degree of participation in REDD+ and FLEGT

The assessment of the degree of participation varies considerably depending on the perception of the CSO actors interviewed. For example, in Cameroon and in Republic of Congo, there are two different platforms that often do not share the same vision and have different perceptions about the effectiveness of their participation. However, a common observation from the four case studies is that the FLEGT VPA process is more accommodative in terms of representation and participation of CSOs (with *medium to high* level of participation) whereas the experience of civil society participation in REDD+ policy process is generally *low*. The overall level of civil society participation thus varies: sometimes (e.g. in REDD+) CSOs are just *informed* (i.e. they are informed of the decisions after such decisions are made or they attend the meetings but their feedback is minimal or non-existent) while sometimes they can see their participation (mostly in VPA) as *collaborating or empowering* (i.e. active involvement of civil society with increasing control over decision-making and having an influence over the decisions made).

Design of participatory processes in VPA and REDD+

The difference in participation level between REDD+ and VPA is also related to the design of these two processes. VPA has been more inclusive and participatory right from the beginning of the process whereas participatory spaces are generally lacking in REDD+ process, most particularly in its initial stages. Other reason for low participation in REDD+ is due to the technical nature of consultations and complexity of REDD+ terminologies (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions, MRV, reference levels, leakage, carbon trading etc.), which are difficult to comprehend and can be uninteresting to discuss for some members of the civil society. Concerns of civil society and communities are focused on issues of land tenure, benefit sharing and community rights. There are also few incentives (monetary and other) for the civil society and communities to participation in policy making for REDD+. Despite the good experience of the VPA process and its successful effort to ensure civil society participation, only few good practices have been taken up in the REDD+ process. REDD+ process should benefit more from the 'lessons learnt' from VPA experience of involving civil society and local communities. The fact that civil society representatives involved in the participation at the VPA process are more critical of their participation experience in REDD+ process also illustrates some integration of lessons learnt by civil society actors, as they have become more vocal, critical and able to develop a coherent analysis and defend it. However, more needs to be done to address institutional disconnect between the REDD+ and VPA processes.[54]

Frequency of participation

The analysis shows that participation has not really been institutionalised in the four countries studied although it is a more common occurrence lately. Overall, the frequency of civil society participation in national policy making is on and off i.e. inconsistent. As civil society actors in these countries highlight, a desirable participation is when they are involved from the beginning of a policy process, their inputs are discussed, accepted or rejected 'but taken seriously into consideration'. Therefore, there is a need to enhance participation in decision-making, most particularly in the REDD+ process, by involving civil society and communities from the outset in the design, development and implementation of policies and actions.

Civil society representation through platforms

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[54] For example, many civil society members in Ghana argue that there is literally a physical wall between the Climate Change Unit, REDD+ Steering Committee and the FLEGT VPA Steering Committee with no sharing of information and communication between these agencies. As a result, good practice and lessons learnt are rarely exchanged. Moreover, these agencies and civil society talk about the same issue but in different language (for e.g. governance is talked in terms of timber in VPA and in REDD+ in terms of carbon).

As observed earlier, civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT processes in the four countries mostly happens through *semi-direct* to *indirect* representation Although most of the civil society participation occurs through specific platforms that are recognised in these countries, wider participation depends on the process and the way these platforms have been organised, including the rules and criteria for membership, institutional and organisational structures of CSOs and platforms, internal accountability and selection process etc. It is therefore necessary to ensure that independent civil society platforms are accessible to all relevant stakeholders and appropriate mechanisms are available for them to participate fully. Furthermore, as reflected in the analysis of individual countries, although civil society groups are represented in the steering committee for REDD+ and VPA and other working groups, there are sometimes questions whether or how representatives represent the views of civil society organisations or just represent themselves.[55]

Internal and external participation

Although the internal rules and procedures for selecting civil society representatives vary from one country to another, the basis for internal selection of participants by civil society platforms is based on some criteria, such as responsibilities, competence and expertise on the subject matter, which sometimes favours the participation of the same people going to different meetings. Selection of a representative also depends on the organisational structure of a particular CSO or platform. In most cases, civil society representatives are selected through a democratic process by the civil society themselves and the representatives are expected to feed back from the meetings that they have participated in. However, there is often a lack of proper reporting, feedback or internal accountability mechanisms from the civil society representatives to their colleagues and constituencies (e.g. community groups). In some cases, civil society representatives are picked by the government, which can not only create distrust and division between the civil society but is also an important barrier to genuine participation and effective representation. As some interviewees argue, the government still looks for familiar faces when they want civil society to participate in the meetings: "if you are not known, you are not invited". As a result, new members rarely get a chance to participate and thus there is a danger of a persisting capacity deficit for new, small and non-influential CSO members. However, it should be noted that across the countries 'old representatives' are, over time, being replaced by a younger generation; it requires time and effort to become knowledgeable and trusted.

Civil society diversity and participation

It is noted that CSOs are themselves very diversified in terms of their interest, size, capacity, sources of funding, influence, networks and so on. They are also divided in their views and do not always pursue common goals. Sometimes, they also tend to compete and be exclusionary to each other for reasons of funding, reputation and interest. Furthermore, diverse political economy and different institutional settings under which national policy processes take place in each country also influence the level of civil society participation. Hence it is important that participatory spaces and platforms are not only consolidated but transparent and that CSO structures are not only well functioning but also inclusive and accountable so that they are open to accommodate a diversity of voices from its members. It also needs to be noted that in some countries when civil society actors are successful in having their voices heard they are confronted with a lot of pushbacks and attempts to be silenced. Competing civil society actors with opposite interests are often instrumental in neutralising and even oppressing the most critical civil society voices

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[55] As one interviewee argues: "whether one person sitting in the national REDD+ working group means that civil society views are represented depends on several factors: whether that person speaks for the group, whether there is enough feedback coming back or maybe that person is just providing personal views".

(e.g. the case of CFP in Cameroon). As a result, space for dialogue gained at some moment risks to be lost a bit later. It thus requires a long-term investment and commitment to maintain and enhance the level of participation.

Capacity deficit and organisational will for participation

There is also a common problem of capacity deficit among the CSOs in the case study countries. Many CSOs highlight the need to strengthen their capacity in several domains (e.g. organisational leadership and management; communication skills; knowledge on forest governance, REDD+ and FLEGT; transparency and accountability; inclusiveness and involvement of communities etc.), which will help them prepare for effective participation in various meetings. It is only through the CSO platforms, INGOs or international partners and bilateral or multilateral agencies that the civil society gets some opportunities of training for capacity building (and less so from the government agencies). Raising awareness and building the capacity of civil society, including providing relevant and timely information and creating opportunities for training are some of the activities that both the government and donors can do to support the CSOs. Engaging the CSOs from early in the policy development can increase their confidence and skills. For example, even though the VPA was technical because many CSOs were involved from the beginning they got an opportunity to increase their awareness and participate effectively; whereas REDD+ has not been able to provide the same level of experience. It is also important to note that civil society participation is not only linked to the capacity of CSOs but depends on how willing the CSOs are to advocate for a positive change (e.g. changing the power dynamics, becoming more democratic, accountable and responsible etc.).

Communication and prior notification of meetings

It is common across all the countries studied that prior notification of meetings is given rarely on time to the civil society members. They are not expected to just go to attend meetings and legitimise the policy process without proper preparation and consulting widely with their group and constituents. There is thus a need to have a proper framework or minimum standards (e.g. FPIC guidelines) developed to ensure that civil society participation is meaningful. The recently developed government- CSO consultative framework in Ghana is a positive example. Under the provisions in this framework, it is required that civil society is notified of a regular meeting two weeks in advance and for special or emergency meeting, the requirement is three days' prior notice. However, it is yet to be seen whether such frameworks will be effectively implemented. Similarly, adoption of FPIC national guidelines in Cameroon is another good example.[56] The guidelines have been developed in a participatory way in order to enhance stakeholder engagement in the REDD+ process; again the problem is that these guidelines are not applied.

Participation of local communities, indigenous peoples, women and youth

Among other stakeholder groups, representation of the local communities and indigenous groups in particular is lacking in both VPA and REDD+ processes (except in the VPA process in Liberia). In the four countries of study, there is also a low level of participation of the vulnerable groups, particularly the poor forest people, women and youth. Although civil society platforms recognise this gap and progress has been made, more needs to be done. More specifically, there is a need to ensure and enable representation of local communities and indigenous people at higher levels by their own selected/elected representatives and also to link the national CSOs better with the grassroots. Extra efforts are also required to enhance participation of vulnerable groups.

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[56] It is also useful to underline that VPA arrangements foresee a seat at the table for civil society actors in official VPA institutions in a number of countries.

Collaboration between the civil society and other stakeholders

As observed in this study, the collaboration between the government and CSOs in the four countries of studies is generally quite poor and needs strengthening. [57] While CSOs consider themselves to be complementing the government efforts (as the government has not all the human, material and financial resources), they feel that the government looks at the CSOs with suspicion and considers them as their opposition. This was a recurring issue for CFP in Cameroon and was also raised by some CSOs in Ghana and Liberia. The government officials in Liberia also agree that there is clearly a lack of confidence in their relationship. Thus, there is a need for development of more trust and regular communication between the CSOs and government. Only then, can CSOs complement the work of the government and add value by their involvement.

Time and resources for full and effective participation

Finally, participation is not just a tick-box exercise. It requires sufficient time, resources, adequate organisation and a clear decision-making framework to conducting participation in a full and effective manner.[58] As highlighted by many interviewees in the four case study countries, CSOs are tired of endless discussions and meetings that take place; they rather want a meaningful participation process.[59] For this, they stress the need to focus on the quality of their participation rather than the quantity (i.e. taking control of the decision-making and making their participation more collaborating and empowering than having a number of meetings where they are just made to listen). They also highlight the need to promote more participatory processes and structures across all levels (from local to global) in order to involve civil society more actively in the policy design, implementation and monitoring. Achieving full and effective participation of civil society in policy processes[60] is not easy, as one interviewee from an INGO in Ghana cautions:

> How many consultations do you do? If your representative is not putting the whole group views, whom should you blame?... Civil society is so diverse. There are so many types. There are only few genuine CSOs working in forests, mines, and natural resources; there are too many one-man NGOs. Who do you consult? There is also no clear framework on how civil society is to be mobilised and what entry point government or others can use? This is a challenge. Sometimes we have to be selective and ask those civil society members who can contribute. Definitely you cannot involve everyone but you have to target selectively. Unfortunately, it is sometimes the same people that you are consulting mostly.

7. Looking ahead: recommendations for policy and research

The interest and involvement of various CSOs in national policymaking of REDD+ and FLEGT in the four countries is a positive indication of the establishment of partnership between the government and civil society (as well as other stakeholders such as the donors, INGOs, community groups) and represents an initial step towards achieving CSOs' full and effective participation. Hence it is necessary that a favourable environment be created for understanding and enhancing different aspects of their participation. Some useful measures include: involving civil society right from the beginning of a policy process, providing appropriate platforms for deliberate discussions, creating more inclusive

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[57] However, NGOs would generally argue that the collaboration has increased massively through the VPA process (see Fern, 2013). CACO REDD in Cameroon also sees increased partnership with the government in REDD+ process.
[58] This is particularly so in the case of REDD+ process which is not very participatory by its design. The problem with REDD+ is also because it is often unclear what civil society is able to decide upon.
[59] Some CSOs are also critical of the unending studies that international experts do in the name of pilot projects and consultations.
[60] It must be acknowledged that CSOs are, however, not always part of decision-making in the building blocks of the process.

avenues for participation, providing sufficient time for preparation, and increasing capacity of the civil society and communities for their meaningful participation.

Based on the analysis and discussion on civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes in Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and Republic of Congo, the following policy and research related recommendations are made to understand and enhance CSO representation and participation in national policy processes in these countries. These recommendations can also be applicable for governments, CSOs and researchers more widely elsewhere in other similar contexts and countries:

Addressing gaps in information sharing
- Poor access to information remains one of the challenges in the four case study countries. Timely information by the government and the civil society representatives themselves on meetings (both timing, agenda and documents) and meeting outcomes through all available channels remains the key for a productive participation.
- There should be more efforts for transparency and accountability in decision-making and information sharing, including assurances that provisions in the Freedom of Information Act (e.g. in Liberia) or the national FPIC guidelines in Cameroon are duly and fully implemented. Moreover, accessible and transparent communication system should be developed or used (if they exist) with provisions for easy access to required information, most particularly focusing on communities and civil society (e.g. information on community benefit from social agreements, REDD+ benefit sharing, national financial mechanism etc.). However, it requires more time for feedback and consultation and agreements on what constitutes participation.

Synchronising participation and policy processes
- In order to encourage active involvement of civil society and communities, it is important that their participation is achieved right from the beginning until the very end of a policy cycle. It is essential that they are involved in the design of a process in which they have the power to make and influence decisions from the start. Civil society participation in policy processes should also be clearly visible in the policy outcomes (i.e. their views are incorporated in the final documents). This increases the ownership of the decision-making process and helps their empowerment.

More support to CSOs and their platforms
- Since some new and small NGOs, community organisations and CSOs have financial constraints and limited capacity, it is essential that concrete initiatives from the government, INGOs and donors are available for them, including a commitment of continued support (financial or otherwise, e.g. incentives for training). However, increased resources will not necessarily lead to improved participation; it also depends on the will of the civil society actors for change. More efforts are required in terms of adequate support and coaching, strategic involvement, openness to create appropriate space for dialogue in a sustainable way etc.
- Although there are specific recognised civil society platforms in each of the countries, they sometimes seem to favour influential CSOs and sometimes they are opaque and closed. Internal institutional arrangements within platforms to ensure they are accountable and open and transparent is an important component of effective participation. Hence more participatory spaces and sufficient opportunities should be available for all types of civil society actors in these platforms.
- More opportunities should be provided by governments for representation of CSOs in existing avenues of participation and institutional settings (e.g. steering committees, working groups or other appropriate

forums). At the same time, 'governmental' interference in non-governmental action and organisation needs to be avoided. This is because the existence of government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), which are set up or sponsored by a government in order to further its own interests and mimic the civil society, is a real problem that limits the development and functioning of genuine CSOs in many countries.

Trust building among stakeholders
- There should also be extra efforts to develop trust in relationship between different stakeholders, such as the government, civil society, communities and private sector. For example, civil society is often thought of as a noisemaker by the private sector and government while civil society is mostly suspicious of the government. More dialogue is necessary for sorting out differences and working on commonalities. With this, CSOs can also complement and add value to the work of the government. However, it highly depends on the interest of the government and civil society actors and the goals they pursue. For example, in Cameroon, the interests of government and majority of CSOs may be different and opposite. Hence it is important that CSOs keep their non-governmental character and should be supported to fully play their role as watchdogs and not become a substitute of the government.
- While the reach and power of some INGOs have helped in enhancing civil society participation in some cases, there were anecdotes of manipulative participation by some INGOs for their own vested interest (as highlighted by some interviewees in Cameroon). Hence national CSOs should carefully choose their partners and build strategic alliance through selective networking.

Focus on vulnerable groups
- The focus should be on increasing participation of vulnerable groups such as women, youths, indigenous groups and local communities, which are underrepresented in existing civil society structures, platforms and policy processes. It requires more time and efforts to represent these groups, particularly when they are not organised (e.g. in Cameroon, Ghana and the Republic Congo). Insights can be gained from the experience of Liberia where the reason communities were involved is because they were organised through the CFDCs.

Addressing the disconnect between scales
- There is a need to open more decision-making processes at local, national and global scales to civil society and their representative organisations. The decision-making processes will need to relate to each other across scales, (local to global), taking a nested approach to civil society participation. It is important in light of the observation that there is currently a clear disconnect between CSOs and communities (for e.g. there are CSOs who do not have projects in the community and there are activities that are not really connected as a project/ action plan).

Issues for further research
- Although this study focused on understanding the views of civil society actors (also enhanced with few additional interviews with the government representatives, INGOs and community groups), it would be useful to know more detailed views of diverse actors such as the government, private sector and communities of different kinds on how they see the role of civil society actors. Hence more follow up research with involvement of diverse stakeholders is recommended.
- While the focus of this assessment was participation in policy development and policy making, it is equally important to look into how participation takes place in implementation (e.g. VPA compliance and implementation, monitoring of social agreements and safeguards, community benefit sharing etc.). As pointed

out by many interviewees, "what you see in the paper does not mean anything unless it is duly practiced", there remains a gap between policy development and implementation. Hence there is a need to do follow-up analysis on how policy outcome brought through participatory approaches is practiced on the ground, including an assessment of continuous efforts for civil society and community participation.

- It is important to understand how political, social-economic and cultural contexts shape and influence civil society participation in individual countries. There is a need to do follow-up research on available structures and processes in other areas of national policy making (thus going beyond REDD+, FLEGT and forest governance).

- Understanding the nature and role of INGOs in shaping the influence and position of various CSOs in particular countries is also an interesting area of research. Some issues that might be interesting to consider include: synergies between national and international NGOs, coalition building, joint actions (as if), standpoints of different INGOs, their differing interests and agendas etc.

- More research is also suggested on analysis of other forest governance issues such as, the links between information access and participation; links between poor tenure security, inequity in benefit sharing and illegal logging; and ethnographic analysis of participation of CSOs in policy processes (focusing on their potential, actual functioning and limitations).

- Finally, it would also be useful to have more research on who creates and recreates the knowledge (the politics of knowledge production and dissemination) in these participation processes, who owns the decision-making, and who benefits and loses (if any) from participation.

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Annex-I: Assessment tool for civil society participation

Note: This assessment tool has a number of questions that will be used as a checklist for interviewing key civil society stakeholders in REDD+ and FLEGT in each country where the tool is to be administered. The consultant with the help from Fern partners will undertake data collection by contacting civil society members in individual countries and organising focus group discussions (based on the checklist in this assessment tool). The consultant (with the help from partners) will first screen a number of civil society stakeholders to determine if they fall within the scope of the assessment and then interview the selected civil society members using this checklist.

Introduction

As part of the LFR project, Fern is undertaking an assessment of civil society participation in the process of preparation and implementation of REDD+ (Reducing Emissions for Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and FLEGT VPA (Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade – Voluntary Partnership Agreement) in four countries (Ghana, Liberia, Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo).

The purpose of this tool is thus to assess the level of civil society participation in FLEGT and REDD+ processes in each country under study. Although the frequency and degree of civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes might be different from each other, for practical reasons we have included the questions together. The focus of our country assessment for REDD+ will be on civil society participation in the development and adoption of respectively the R-PIN (Readiness Plan Idea Note), the REDD strategy, RPP (Readiness Preparation Proposal) and for Ghana and Republic of Congo the ER-PIN (Emissions Reduction Project Idea Note). For FLEGT, the focus will be on the development and adoption of the VPA in the four countries of study.

The assessment tool is divided into 4 parts.
Part I consists of general questions about the civil society stakeholders.
Part II explores who participates in REDD+ and FLEGT processes i.e. who are the key civil society stakeholders.
Part III explores when and how frequent the participation takes places in these processes.
Part IV explores the level/degree of participation.

The questions in this assessment tool will be used for a focus group discussion/interview facilitated by the consultant. There are some questions that need participatory discussion among the focus group so as to choose the most appropriate response from a list of ranking and scoring type of answers. We would encourage you to elaborate your response by providing brief explanations on your answers, including illustrative examples if at all possible. The information can be based on your memory of the experience with your organization's participation in various stages of FLEGT and REDD+ processes. If necessary, you may want to point to relevant documents and minutes from the meetings for the consultant to follow up.

Part I: General information

In order to understand the roles and main features of your organization or community, this section asks for general information about you and your organization or community.

1. Your name and email address:
2. Name and address of which organisation or community you represent:
3. Your role in the organization/community:
4. Please state the main areas of your organization or community's work.
5. Please briefly describe your organization/community's involvement and familiarity with the REDD+ and/or FLEGT VPA processes in your country.
6. When you are asked to participate in a national meeting, did you consult with your colleagues in the NGO community or community members?
   a. Yes   b. No
   If Yes, how did you decide who will represent who in the meeting from your organization/community?

Part II: Who participates?

This section seeks to explore in more detail who participates in FLEGT and/or REDD+ processes. The focus is on your or your

organization/community's participation in national policy making but there are some questions related to other civil society stakeholders' participation.

7. The key processes for REDD+ were the development of the RPIN, the REDD strategy and the ER-PIN (the latter only for Ghana and Republic of Congo). Did you participate in the development of any of these documents? Did your or any other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or community representatives approve any of these documents?
8. The key processes for FLEGT were the negotiation and adoption of the VPA. Did you participate in the development of this document? Did your CSO or other CSOs or community representatives approve the VPA.
9. Do you think that the civil society stakeholders were fairly represented in the national policy making process with regard to above mentioned REDD+ and FLEGT VPA processes?
   a. Yes   b. No
   Briefly explain, why or why not
10. Do you think any important interests or stakeholder groups were missed or excluded in the REDD+ and FLEGT meetings leading to the adoption of these documents?
    a. Yes   b. No
    If Yes, who were the missed or deliberately excluded?
11. Why do you think you were invited/ or were not invited to participate in the meetings leading to approving these documents?

Part III: When you participate?

Participation differs from one-off events to ongoing processes. As REDD+ and FLEGT processes are at different stages in different countries, participation of civil society stakeholders should be considered in terms of: (a) at what point in policy cycle (e.g. preparation, negotiation, implementation, monitoring); (b) how regularly; and (c) through what institutional mechanism. Therefore, the questions in this section focus on the time, frequency and institutional mechanism of participation.

12. When were you asked for participation or when did you demand participation?
    a. Before the policy development (preparation)
    b. During the policy development (negotiation)
    c. After the policy development (adoption/implementation)
    Please briefly explain how your participation was sought.
13. What stage of document development and approval have you participated?
    a. R-PIN   b. REDD strategy   c. ER-PIN (for Ghana or RoC or Cameroon)   d. FLEGT VPA
    Please elaborate with examples of your participation.
14. Was your participation
    a. Ongoing process?   b. Ad-hoc process that stops and starts?
15. Was your participation sought for
    a. Short-term?   b. Medium-term?   c. Long-term?
16. Institutional mechanism of your participation in the event: Please explain how were you invited for participation in the event (e.g. were you a part of working group for REDD+ and FLEGT)?

Part IV: Level/degree of your participation i.e. how you participate?

This section has questions on the level/degree of your participation in the process of preparation and implementation of REDD+ and FLEGT. The degree of participation can range from manipulation (non-participation) or being told about a policy process (very low) to having a say and being able to influence outcomes (very high) as described below:

Manipulation (non-participation): distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by the powerholders; people are placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of "educating" them or engineering their support.

Informing (very low degree of participation): one-way flow of information; being informed of the decisions after such decisions are made; or attending meetings and listening in on decision-making, without speaking up. People's feedback is minimal or non- existent.

Consulting (low): two-way flow: being asked an opinion on specific matters without guarantee of influencing decisions.

Involving (medium): being asked (or volunteering) to do specific tasks.

Collaborating (high): increasing control over decision-making; forming groups of primary stakeholders to participate in the discussion and analysis of predetermined objectives set. This degree of participation does not usually result in dramatic changes in what should be accomplished, which is often already determined. It does, however, require an active involvement in the decision-making process on how to achieve it.

Empowering (very high degree of participation): having a say and being able to influence outcomes; ownership and control of the process rest in the hands of the primary stakeholders.

17. Please mention if there is any evidence of manipulated, reluctant or forced participation. Also, state if you ever experienced participation 'fatigue' or burden (due to requirements to comply with participation criteria or commit to time and efforts).
18. When there is a meeting for REDD+ and FLEGT, how often are you informed?
    a. Never   b. Often   c. Mostly   d. Always
19. When, by whom and how were you informed? How did you know about the meeting? Was the information also in the public domain (e.g. media, internet)?
20. Was the available information on REDD+ and FLEGT meetings provided in a complete, timely way and understandable to you?
    a.   Yes   b. No
    Please elaborate your choice.
21. When you participated in the national policy processes, were you consulted to review and comment on texts/materials? How do you rate the consultation process?
    a. Weak   b. Moderate   c. Strong
22. Did you express your views in these meetings? How do you rate your involvement in the REDD and FLEGT processes?
    a. Weak   b. Moderate   c. Strong
23. Were your views considered in the final version of the national REDD+ and VPA documents? Please elaborate your participation and its likely impact on the policy outcome.
24. Briefly discuss how the decisions are taken? Do CSO have a say? How are decisions communicated and to whom in civil society?
25. Are there any instances where you can consider your level of participation in the REDD and FLEGT processes as high (collaborating) to very high (empowering)?
    a.   Yes   b. No
    Please elaborate your selection.
26. Do you consider these meetings/policy-making processes as representative of different community organisations, indigenous people, men and women etc.?
27. Which of these statements apply to your participation in REDD and FLEGT processes? Please choose the ones that are relevant in your case.
    a.   You had prior information
    b.   You had agreed instructions from the government
    c.   You had enough time
    d.   You had appropriate skills and mechanisms for participating effectively
    e.   You received training to prepare yourself for these meetings
    If you had none of the above, explain why.
28. Based on the above classification, how would you categorize your overall level of participation in REDD+ and FLEGT processes? (Please choose the most relevant category that applies and elaborate on your selection).
    a.   Manipulation (non-participation)
    b.   Informing (very low degree of participation)
    c.   Consulting (low)
    d.   Involving (medium)
    e.   Collaborating (high)
    f.   Empowering (very high)
29. How was your overall experience of participation in REDD+ and FLEGT processes so far? Please highlight how satisfied you are with the way it took place.
    a. Very satisfied b. Satisfied   c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied   d. Unsatisfied   e. Very satisfied
    Also provide any suggestions on what could have been better.
30. Finally, if you have any further insights that you would like to add with regard to civil society participation in REDD+ and FLEGT processes, please tell us.

Annex-II: List of interviewees and focus group participants in Ghana, Liberia, Cameroon and the Republic of Congo

Cameroon

SN	Name	Organisation and position
1	Victor Amougou	Coordinator, CEFAID (Centre pour l'Education, la Formation et l'Appui aux Initiatives de Developpmement au Cameroun), Yokadouma
2	Moise Kono Bidzo	CED (Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement) Programme coordinator, CFP (Community and Forests Platform)
3	Patrick Kamkuimo	CED - Programme coordinator, CFP (Community and Forestry Platform)
4	Ntonifor Charlie Ambe	Projects Manager, CERUT (Centre for Rural Transformation)
5	Téodyl Nkuintchua	CED (Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement)
6	Laurence Wete	FODER (Forest and Rural Development)
7	Anziom Brigitte	ASTRADH (Association pour la traduction, l'alphabetisation et le development Holistique de l'Etre Humain)
8	Djofang Patricia	CED (Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement)
9	Cécile Ndjebet	PFNREDD and CC (National REDD+ and Climate Change Platform)
10	Michel Takam	ADEID (representing PREDD and CC)
11	Chacgom Aristide	GDA (Green Development Advocates)
12	Ghislain Aimé Fomou Nyamsi	SAILD (Support Service for Local Development Initiatives)
13	Sebastien Tchebayou	FODER (Forest and Rural Development)
14	Harrison Nnoko Ngaaje A	AJESH (AJEMALIBU Self Help)
15	Tchepnang Barthélemy	CAJAD (Centre for Assistance to Justice and Animation for Development)
16	Albertine Tchoulack	CAFER (Support Centre for Women and Rural Entrepreneurship)
17	François Zamsia	CAFER (Support Centre for Women and Rural Entrepreneurship)
18	Bernard Ondo	ONED (Organisation pour la Nature, Environment et Development)

Ghana

SN	Name	Organisation
1	Eric Lartey	Programme Coordinator, Forestry and Biodiversity, Friends of the Earth
2	Mustapha Seidu	Director, Nature and Development Foundation
3	Samuel Kofi Nyamen	Project Coordinator, IUCN Ghana
4	Wale Adeleke	Consultant, IUCN (formerly REDD Forest Governance Thematic Coordinator – West and Central Africa Programme)
5	Saadia Bobtoya	REDD Project Officer, IUCN
6	Kafui Denkabe	Civic Response
7	Samuel Mawutor	Civic Response
8	Elvis Oppong-Mensah	Promag – Western Region coordinator (formerly) but now with Civic Response and Forest Watch
9	Mumuni Joseph Shaibu	Northern Ghana Coordinator – Kachito
10	KS Nkeitiah	TBI (Tropenbos International-Ghana)
11	Kwame Mensah	Kasa Ghana [Speak Ghana – NGO coalition]

Liberia

SN	Name	Organisation and position
1	Bowen Sayon	Forestry Development Authority, REDD Implementation Unit (formerly worked with CI and FFI)
2	Andrew Togba	Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU) – Programme Coordinator
3	James Makor	Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU) - Director
4	Thomas Torkorlom	Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU)
5	Julie T.B. Weah	Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI)
6	Peter Mulbah	Conservation International (formerly coordinator at REDD Working Group, worked with Skills and Agriculture Development Services/SADS and NGO coalition)
7	Assaf Kumeh	Formerly with EPA and worked as REDD+ coordinator (2009-2010), now with UNDP project on Early Warning System
8	Mathew Walley	Ex-President of the Union of CFDC (Community Forestry Development Committees)
9	Augustus Kwalah	Current President, Union of CFDCs
10	Joel Gamys	World Resources Institute (WRI)
11	Jerry Garteh	US Forest Service
12	Silas Siakor	Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)

Republic of Congo

SN	Name	Organisation
1	Brice Séverin Pongui	Institut Cerveau Vert
2	Roch Euloge Nzobo	Cercle des droits de l'Homme et de développement (CDHD)
3	Barros Lilian Lauren	Comptoir Juridique Junior
4	Maixent Fortunin Agnimbat Emeka	Forum for Governance and Human Rights or Forum pour la Gouvernance et les Droits de l''Homme' (FGDH) also coordinated the FLEGT platform, La Plateforme pour la Gestion Durable des Forêts (PGDF) and the REDD platform, Cadre de concertation des organisations de la société civile et des populations autochtones (CACO REDD)
5	Nkodia Alfred	Cercle d'Appui à la Gestion Durable des Forêts (CAGDF)
6	Sylvie Nadège Mfoutou Banga	Organisation pour le Développement et les Droits Humains au Congo (ODDHC)
7	Nina Cynthia Kiyindou Yombo	Observatoire Congolais Des Droits De L'Homme (OCDH)
8	Sylvie Miombo	Azur Développement
9	Lambert Mabiala	Cercle d'Appui à la Gestion Durable des Forêts (CAGDF)