



Lesson Learning Study

Forest Governance Forums

**Creating Space for Stakeholder
Participation in Forest Governance.**





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The views expressed in this report are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CIDT, the partners on the project or the funding institutions.



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Above: Some of the Forest Governance Forum participants and Strengthening African Forest Governance project partners at the 2014 Forest Governance Forum in Yaoundé, Cameroon.





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Acronyms

CAR	Central African Republic
CIDT	Centre for International Development and Training
CIFOR	Centre for International Forestry Research
CSO	Civil society organisation
CTIDD	Centre des Technologies Innovatrices et le Développement Durable
DFID	Department for International Development
DOLTA	Domestic Limber Trade Association
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EFI	European Forest Institute
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FC	Forestry Commission
FFI	Fauna and Flora International
FGF	Forest Governance Forum
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
FODER	Forêts et Développement Rurale
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GTMO	Ghana Timber Millers Organization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KWC	Kumasi Wood Cluster
MoE	Ministry of Environment
NGO	non-governmental organisation
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Strategy
RoC	Republic of Congo
RRN	Réseau des Ressources Naturelles
SAFG	Strengthening African Forest Governance
SME	Small and medium enterprises
SRA	Social Responsibility Agreement
TLAS	Timber Legality Assurance System
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

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Executive Summary



BACKGROUND

1. This report was commissioned to capture the key lessons, achievements and challenges from four years of organising and delivering Forest Governance Forum (FGF) meetings in Central and West Africa. The central focus of the study was to document and reflect on what has worked well, and what has worked less well, in terms of the agenda, organisation and representation, and how the meetings have operated as a space for open exchange (see Annex 1).

2. This study was not an evaluation but a lesson learning study. An external evaluation of the overall project, Strengthening African Forest Governance (SAFG), will examine in detail how the project partners responded and adapted their strategies as the project evolved.

3. FGFs were designed and implemented through the SAFG project. The overall objective of the SAFG project is to improve awareness of Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreements (FLEGT-VPAs) and other international initiatives to combat illegal logging, as well as to engage civil society, communities and the private sector in improving forest governance.

4. The SAFG project is implemented in Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana and Liberia. The project involves four main domains of intervention:

- a. undertaking periodic capacity needs assessments for civil society, private sector and community stakeholders in the countries of implementation;
- b. facilitating the delivery of in-country capacity building events;
- c. supporting and delivering European-based courses; and
- d. organising and delivering Forest Governance Forums or the 'Chatham House style illegal logging update meetings' in the project countries.

5. The project is coordinated by the Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT) at the University of Wolverhampton working in partnership with theIDLgroup (UK), Global Witness (UK), Fauna and Flora International (FFI) in Liberia, Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER) in Cameroon, Réseau des Ressources Naturelles (RRN) in the DRC, and Forest Watch Ghana represented by Civic Response in Ghana.

6. The organisation and delivery of the FGFs was led by theIDLgroup, working closely with CIDT and the other partners.

7. The methodology for this review and synthesis of lessons from the FGFs relies on triangulation across existing documents, including FGF reports, participant lists and agendas, field visits to the target countries (Ghana and Cameroon), questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Data for this report was gathered between 13 September and 5 December 2014. Interviewees included participants from the FGFs (national, regional and international), speakers at the FGFs, partners of the SAFG project and donors.

8. Due to the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa, it was difficult to get in touch with participants in Liberia, as many could not access the internet as offices and places of work has been shut down.

FINDINGS

9. Findings are drawn around five thematic areas that have emerged during the course of this study: information exchange, participation and representation, organisation, active citizenship for forest governance, and networking.

Information exchange

10. FGFs have proved to be an effective mechanism to encourage knowledge and information exchange. One central achievement illuminated during the course of the study is that the FGFs have been useful

as a platform for knowledge transfer and in keeping key stakeholders updated on the FLEGT-VPA processes and other international/regional processes in forest governance.

11. The FGFs have improved local stakeholder access to information in two key ways: first through an open space for the sharing of experiences and relevant forest governance information, and secondly through bringing actors together in one space and strengthening the linkages and synergies between them.

12. Transnational exchanges have allowed key stakeholders to track the progress of the different project countries, and to be aware of what obstacles they may encounter during the implementation of the VPA and how they can overcome them.

13. Regional discussions have encouraged a sense of shared responsibility amongst forestry actors on a regional and international level. This is central to establishing a common language and uniform forest governance practices amongst affected countries.

14. Finally, information sharing, communication and face-to-face dialogue are critical elements for the creation of a culture of trust and to build strong working relationships between and within key stakeholder groups.

Participation and Representation

15. Perhaps the most notable finding arising during the course of this study was the level of participation in all project countries; an average of 200 people attended each FGF. With a few exceptions¹, there were no per diems, and travel expenses were only given to some community representatives and speakers. Such a high level of participation reflects the strong motivation for stakeholder participation in forest governance initiatives.

16. Concerning the representation of different sectors, CSOs have been identified as the most represented group, whilst community groups have been the least represented.

However, it is important to note that the objective of the forum was to engage high- and mid-level stakeholders that have the ability and the capacity to influence the forest governance process. Engaging with industry actors proved challenging, but this is an issue that characterises the entire FLEGT-VPA process.

17. Early engagement with private sector can help to overcome some of the barriers to industry participation, such as time and motivational constraints. In addition, it is critical to see the private sector not as a homogenous group that consists solely of large timber companies, and to understand that it also includes small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and independent small-scale loggers.

18. One key lesson that emerges is that further efforts are needed to integrate other sectors, including academia and the media, into the forest governance framework. The FGFs are one of the few platforms through which academia has had a direct involvement with the FLEGT-VPA process.

Organisation

19. The study shows that consulting key stakeholders and local partners in choice of venue, drafting the agenda, format etc. is critical for the success of the forums.

20. Most respondents perceived the format of the FGFs, based on the Chatham House model, as particularly effective in promoting an open and secure space for information exchange. The fact that participants could invoke the Chatham House confidentiality principle empowered them to voice their concerns and be open and frank in their exchanges.

21. There is a need to ensure that local partners and stakeholders are consistently engaged throughout the whole FGF process from inception to delivery; this allows for local ownership and capacity strengthening in project delivery and management.

¹ Per diems were given to community members who were unable to afford transportation and accommodation

Active Citizenship for Forest Governance

22. One of the biggest challenges in many forest countries is poor governance. FLEGT-VPA processes aim to promote policy and legal reforms, good governance, capacity building and transparency. During the course of the lesson learning study, a range of views have been expressed on how the FGFs are helping the VPA negotiating and implementing countries to build governance capacity in terms of active citizenship, greater transparency and the enhancement of accountability.

23. In the case of active citizenship, capacity building at an individual and organisational level has been identified as a critical element in the study; participants felt empowered by the receipt of new/existing knowledge on the FLEGT-VPA processes and forest governance issues. This has led to what has been identified as a 'domino effect'; equipped with new knowledge and confidence, participants' engagement in forestry debates and forums has increased.

24. FGFs provide 'venues of accountability'. They have been employed as platforms for citizens to voice concerns and to ask official representatives some difficult questions.

25. Exchanges at the FGFs provided participants with the opportunity to understand fully the FLEGT-VPA process, its laws and policies and the systems that need to be in place to ensure the legality of timber.

26. A few respondents indicated that FGFs have not only supported forest governance, but have also helped stakeholders to engage in discussions of governance practices in general. Through dialogue, actors are able to strengthen cooperation and to collaborate on efforts; FGFs created a framework for citizens to participate in political processes and integrate their concerns into the structures of forest governance. For example, by highlighting the need for more secure legal

recognition of traditional communities and indigenous rights, FGFs can potentially lead to marginalised and underrepresented groups being integrated into the political framework.

Networking

27. Opportunities for networking and collaboration were regarded as a highly beneficial aspect of the FGFs, which have facilitated strong linkages between sectors, organisations and individuals in the forest sector. These improved links have strengthened access to information, resources and capacity building, and encouraged a two-way learning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

28. To strengthen the processes for disseminating information, so that all stakeholders can take advantage of the information being shared in the forums.

29. To ensure the continuation of such spaces, as active citizenship is needed to foster a culture of transparency and accountability.

30. To include both civil society and governments throughout the process, in order to ensure representation at the local level: communities and indigenous peoples.

31. To consult and engage more fully with the private sector. Further efforts are also needed to ensure local ownership of the design and implementation of such initiatives. This enables such interventions to be adapted to the local context and gives legitimacy to the process.

32. To make further efforts to capitalise on and integrate academic bodies into the forest governance framework.

33. To integrate local partners fully into the FGF model – from inception and implementation to delivery – to ensure ownership and legitimacy over the process.



SECTION 1

Introduction





“FGFs were about bringing people together to exchange the latest data on VPA implementation ... bringing people together from European and African countries and seeing what the state of implementation is in different countries, the gaps and the broader picture.”

FGF participant, UK

1.1 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FGFs

The Forest Governance Forums (FGFs) or the in-country illegal logging update meetings for ‘high’ and ‘mid’ level stakeholders were designed to foster open and transparent exchange of views and information on relevant national and international forest policy and interventions aimed towards improving forest governance and combatting illegal logging. These forums have helped explore issues that affect the forest sector such as transparency and the rule of law. A key aim was to bring debates on forest governance to four key African countries, allowing for

broader participation and the inclusion of more national voices in the conversation, situating issues within a local and international context. Within each country, a two-day national meeting was organised and delivered. These meetings were modelled on the Illegal Logging Stakeholder Update meetings held bi-annually at Chatham House in London and contribute to the broader objective of the EU and DFID-funded project, ‘Strengthening African Forest Governance’ (see Annex 1). Active stakeholders from the private sector, government, civil society, research institutes, the international community and local communities were invited to attend and give presentations at these Forest Governance Forum meetings.

The structure of the FGFs consisted of a series of three 15-minute presentations followed by around an hour of questions and answers including open discussions and exchanges. The meetings were designed to be free, inclusive and open to all. The presentations and reports were posted on a dedicated website, www.forestgovernanceforum.com, and a report for each meeting was compiled and published. The meetings were bilingual, with simultaneous translation between French and English.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE LESSON LEARNING STUDY

The purpose of the lesson learning study was to draw out key lessons from four years of organising and delivering FGF meetings in Central and West Africa that could be shared with project partners, donors (mainly the EU and DFID), and other national and international stakeholders. These lessons were drawn from examining how the FGF meetings were designed and implemented. The study itself has been a qualitative assessment of the FGFs with a central focus on capturing how people have benefitted from them. The study identifies documents and reflects on what worked well and what worked less well in terms of the agenda (relevance to country context and stakeholder interests), quality and focus of speakers and presentations, and keeping stakeholders abreast of international processes of relevance to their countries.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this review and synthesis of lessons from the FGFs relies on triangulation across existing documents (the FGF reports, participant lists and agendas), field visits to Cameroon and Ghana, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Data for this report was gathered between 13 September and 5 December 2014. A discussion of the survey population and the sampling strategy used to select participants is detailed in the following sections. This is followed by a brief outline of the data collection exercise.

1.3.1 Study Population

The study population consisted of:

- participants from the FGFs (national, regional and international)
- speakers at the FGFs
- facilitators
- partners of the FGF project, and
- donors.

Importantly, in each FGF, participation was not limited to participants from the concerned country only, but ranged from local participants (from the country hosting the FGF) to regional participants (from neighbouring countries of the FGF project countries) and international participants (typically from European countries).

1.3.2 Sampling Strategy

The main target for both the surveys and the semi-structured interviews was the FGF participants. The sampling technique employed was a combination of both stratified random sampling and 'snowball' sampling (whereby each respondent suggests others). The snowball strategy was employed during the field visit to Ghana where a Ghanaian official gave an invitation to the National Kumasi Forest Governance Forum in September, which mimicked a similar model to the FGFs and brought together national forestry stakeholders to discuss forest governance. The respondents were selected from a participant list of all the FGFs. To identify a representative sample, respondents were stratified into civil society, private sector and the community from each respective project country: Ghana, Cameroon, DRC and Liberia. Despite efforts to ensure that the study used a representative sample, the Ebola outbreak made it impractical to plan field visits and reach respondents in Liberia and DRC, although some respondents from the DRC were interviewed in Cameroon.

1.3.3 Data Collection Tools

There were two key data-gathering tools: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Two field trips were organised, to Ghana and Cameroon. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions took place in Accra and Kumasi between 17 September and 26 September 2014.

As shown in Figure 1, out of the twenty-one respondents interviewed in Ghana, twelve were from civil society, four from the private sector, three from the community and two

from the government. Equally, in Cameroon, a field visit took place on 20–27 October 2014, which included attendance at the final FGF. Twenty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted, with four respondents from the community, two from donors, two government officials, four from the private sector and twelve from civil society organisations. Due to security issues, field visits to DRC and Liberia were not possible. Importantly, interviews were also conducted with relevant project partners to gain insights into the implementation process of the FGFs. Overall, fifty-seven respondents were interviewed for this report.

Data was also collected from online questionnaires. Working in collaboration with partners, participants were selected from the participant list: 100 surveys were sent to English speaking participants and 100 surveys were sent to French-speaking participants. Twenty-seven respondents completed the questionnaire; thus, the total number of respondents who have participated

in this study is 84. The surveys encompassed a range of closed and open questions, encouraging respondents to express their perceptions on the FGFs.

1.4 STRUCTURE: KEY THEMATIC AREAS

This report is structured under the following thematic areas; information exchange and knowledge transfer (Chapter 2), representation of the various actors at the forum meetings (Chapter 3), organisation and preparation of the forum meetings (Chapter 4), building capacity for active citizenship in forest governance (Chapter 5) and strengthening of linkages between actors (Chapter 6). The report concludes with a summary of the overall lessons.

FIGURE 1

Interviewees	Civil Society	Private Sector	Community	Government	Donors/ Partner
Ghana FGF	12	4	3	2	
Cameroon FGF	12	4	4	2	
DRC FGF		2		1	
Liberia FGF					
International	3	1			7



SECTION 2

Information Exchange & Knowledge Transfer



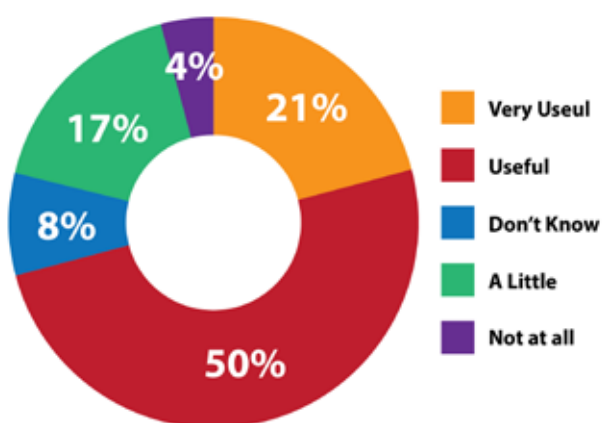


We had an opportunity to be informed about things which we didn't know much about before the forum. The updates on the various countries' progress on FLEGT-VPA negotiations were particularly useful. For example the Coordinator of the FLEGT-VPA negotiations in Congo gave an update providing details on exactly where they had reached in the negotiation process which was very useful as this was new information.

2.1 OVERVIEW

This section examines the importance of information exchange and knowledge transfer activities at the FGFs. It observes the extent to which participants have benefitted from information and dialogue at the forums. Information exchange in this context refers to the direct communication and sharing of forest governance related information. Figure 2 (below) shows that just over 70% of the total respondents felt the FGF meetings were useful in keeping them abreast of developments in international markets and emerging legislation relating to the timber trade and forest governance.

Figure 2. How useful were FGF meetings on keeping participants updated on international markets and emerging legislation relating to the timber trade?



2.2 KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: 'FILLING IN THE GAPS'

In line with the SAFG project objective, the FGFs have endeavoured to provide a productive space for information exchange in order to improve awareness on FLEGT-VPA and other international initiatives to combat illegal logging, and to promote efforts to improve forest governance. A lack of 'capacity' in knowledge and access to information among participants was often cited as the key barrier, impeding the flow of benefits from FLEGT-VPA initiatives. A focus has thus emerged on providing the project countries with an enhanced knowledge and skills base needed for successful VPA

implementation. A key finding from the study is the importance of information exchange, to enable participants to remain updated on FLEGT-VPA processes and raise awareness of illegal activities, their economic value to the country and the effects of corruption. FGFs have successfully created an arena in which stakeholders can participate in constructive debates and obtain new and existing information in order to **'fill in gaps in [their] knowledge'**². As one participant explains, the FGF is a critical driver for remaining **'involved and updated on the VPA process, because the forums have revealed that some actors are still ignorant of the process despite having pledged to follow forest law enforcement'**³.

In one example, a CSO participant from DRC asserted that **'the information obtained on the community forest management, especially in royalties, challenged us to propose management mechanisms that would help communities living [near timber logging sites] and bring development in communities' environments'**⁴.

BOX 1: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY FOREST GOVERNANCE?

Forest governance is a very broad term; however, for the purpose of this study it can be understood as being composed of the following elements:

1. A set of laws and regulations within the forest sector and other sectors that influence forest management
2. An inclusive decision-making process regarding policies and legislation
3. A participatory process that involves multiple actors (government, industry, community, CSO etc.) and multiple levels (national, regional and international)
4. Having the capacity to carry out forest governance activities and implement laws.

² Interviewee (6): CSO – DRC

³ Survey respondent

⁴ Survey respondent



BOX 2: CASE STUDY ON INFORMATION EXCHANGE

One participant from the World Resources Institute found the information on the traceability system in Cameroon 2012 FGF **'extremely useful'**. The FGF allowed the **'system to really emerge and has given all stakeholders, markets and consumers a chance to understand the importance of such systems. It allowed people to be well informed about the whole timber supply chain, issues of legality and traceability – so everyone now understands the procedures and advantages of exporting legal timber to the EU.'** (FGF participant, Cameroon)

It is not only participants from the host country who benefit from this exchange; our findings show that participants from neighbouring countries found this equally valuable. One participant from Central African Republic remarked how prior to the FGF in Yaoundé 2014, **'I thought that the only effective means of improving transparency in the timber industry was to certify the wood**

with a scheme such as FSC. I knew little about FLEGT-VPA, but I saw it as somewhat limiting with all the legislation ... but the forum enabled me to understand more about the whole process linked to FLEGT-VPA, and particularly about the benefits it will bring about in terms of reducing illegal activity and all the negative aspects associated with this.'⁵ Such findings are mirrored in the survey results: 88%⁶ felt the forums had increased their awareness of forest governance and FLEGT-VPA related issues.

The forums have not just led to an increased awareness of the FLEGT-VPA process; a number of respondents asserted that the forums had also led to a better understanding and greater awareness of REDD+ initiatives. It was noted that the REDD+ process did not enjoy the same public attention as the VPA process; this can be attributed to various reasons ranging from a weaker consultative process with stakeholders to lack of information availability in the public domain. Within this context, respondents from three of the four project countries⁷ claimed that FGFs provided crucial access to information about the REDD+ process.

⁵ Interviewee (3): CSO – Cameroon

⁶ 88% 'increased awareness', 4% 'don't know' and 8% 'a little'

⁷ With the exception of Liberia

2.2.1 Information Exchange Network

As a multi-stakeholder platform, the FGFs have promoted knowledge transfer across sectors and within sectors, on a national, regional and international level. One of our respondents speaks for many, particularly those coming from civil society organisations, when explaining how the forums have allowed for exchanges not just with **'other civil society actors but also with the government administration and research institutions such as CIFOR. It allows us to widen our information networks; this means I now regularly receive information about research and trainings so I can keep updated on the process.'**⁸ Several participants provided examples where new linkages have strengthened information sharing amongst organisations. The presence of various stakeholders from different groups and levels gave participants **'a massive opportunity'** to build relationships and to expand their knowledge base.

A key success noted by participants during the course of this study is that the FGFs have encouraged close engagement and face-to-face meetings with other stakeholders. As a result, they are likely to go on to exchange ideas and information in the future. This has allowed for the creation of an exchange network spanning several geographical locations and subsequently allowing for a more effective and efficient way of information sharing. Participants from all stakeholder groups have claimed that the FGFs have encouraged access to timely, accurate and consistent forest governance information. In the words of one respondent, **'the FGFs have created an information exchange network between producer countries of wood in Africa against these illegal markets and countries that are consuming these woods'**⁹.

Face-to-face meetings and the space for interaction provided by the FGFs have proven beneficial for stakeholders in a number of

ways. (1) They can reduce the cost and resources required for data collection/information sharing as participants can easily obtain comprehensive information via network partners. (2) Better information allows stakeholders to make better decisions and better-informed choices that support forest governance initiatives; (3) They give access to timely data: in countries where technological capacity is limited, exchange networks can provide timely access to information. For example, one government official mentioned he was able to gain information via email conversations¹⁰. Collectively these elements work to support and sustain forest governance ideas and innovation. Overall, FGF meetings have proved to be a useful mechanism to keep in-country stakeholders abreast of developments in international markets and emerging legislation relating to the timber trade.

2.2.2 Access to Information

In the same vein, FGFs arguably feed into wider initiatives to improve local access to information. Many of the respondents emphasised the importance of FGF support to the FLEGT-VPA process by **'facilitating access to the sharing of information'**¹¹. Hence, it essentially works to challenge the culture within forestry institutions around information sharing. 60% of respondents¹² stated that content was the primary reason for their participation at the FGF (see Figure 3). This implies an increasing demand for information to be readily available and shared for local and regional stakeholders, who otherwise might lack such avenues to obtain information.

Public access to information is required in order for key stakeholders to make informed decisions, and for civil society to effectively carry out its watchdog function in the forest sector. As one respondent succinctly stated, **'without this information it is difficult to intervene in the debate and even take certain steps that would be needed to counter non-compliant entities'**¹³.

⁸ Interviewee (15): CSO – Cameroon

⁹ Survey respondent

¹⁰ Interviewee (30): Government – Cameroon

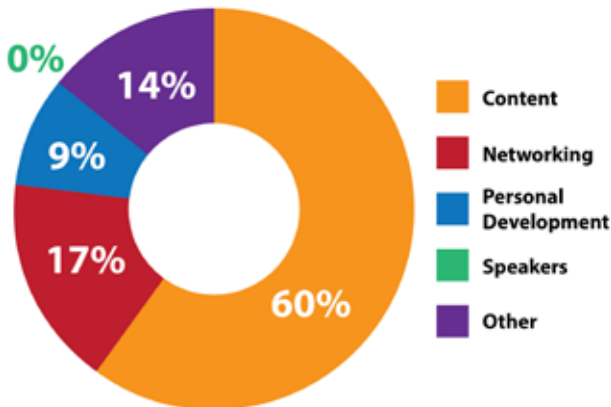
¹¹ Interviewee (16): CSO – Cameroon

¹² Includes both interview and survey respondents

¹³ Survey respondent

“Information received from the forum has inspired us in developing a monitoring project by local communities’ cases of illegalities and human rights violations observed on land in operating sites of resources.”
DRC participant, WWF

Figure 3. Main reason for attending the FGF



Despite the right to information being recognised in VPA countries, participants from Cameroon, DRC and Ghana talked about their struggle to access forestry-related information. In particular, community stakeholders conveyed their frustration with how information related to FLEGT-VPA processes remains at the **‘top level’**¹⁴. Furthermore, the absence of proper information management procedures in these countries has meant that accessing forestry-related information often proves difficult. Thus, civil society and particularly community organisations are limited in their ability to participate effectively in matters of public policy and forest governance. Within this context, FGFs have proven a useful **‘medium for accessing information and keeping [stakeholders] involved in the decision making processes’**¹⁵. Perhaps for this reason, 65% of interview respondents asserted that FGFs should not be held just twice a year in each project country, but that there should be related events and workshops between each forum. This would allow participants to have

a regular **‘flow of information and updates’** rather than having what sometimes might appear as a **‘forum held in isolation’**¹⁶.

However, discussions with interview respondents highlight that downloading and accessing documents and reports from the FGFs website has been a challenge, given the low internet connectivity and low bandwidth in the target countries. The lesson from this is that whilst online resources can be the most convenient, fashionable and efficient way to publish and share information, the local context must be taken into consideration, as the ability of many forest actors to access these resources is often limited. The organisers of the FGF meetings were aware of this challenge and sought to ensure information dissemination via USB sticks. USB sticks containing all the presentations and key documents were distributed to all participants at the end of each forum. This approach was viewed extremely well by the majority of respondents; one CSO respondent remarked that **‘giving participants a USB stick with all the presentations and documents is a really good idea; it means we can access them from anywhere without worrying about downloading where there is a low internet connection’**¹⁷.

‘FGFs really helped to guide stakeholders in directing their efforts towards effective governance by learning from each other. This can’t happen if everyone stays within their own country so this type of event is worth the money.’
FGF participant, Ghana

2.3 VALUE OF TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGES

FGFs were designed from the start to bring together diverse stakeholders, policy-makers and international experts to share experiences,

¹⁴ Interview (55): Community – Cameroon

¹⁵ Interview (55): Community – Cameroon

¹⁶ Interview (43): CSO – Ghana

¹⁷ Interview (28): CSO – Cameroon

explore opportunities and bring together lessons from international and national forest governance processes. Underpinning this process has been the concept of transnational exchanges. The multi-stakeholder platform has not only helped to give a voice to stakeholders at different levels: it has also encouraged local, regional and international exchanges. Below are some of the key lessons and outcomes that participants feel have resulted from such exchanges.

2.3.1 ‘Shared Responsibility’: A Problem Shared is a Problem Halved

It is not enough to make a financial investment and to create a legislative framework to tackle illegal logging. The transnational exchanges encouraged by the FGFs have been central to building a shared understanding of the problems; this in turn has helped to create an ethic of **‘shared responsibility’** and has led to an increasing realisation that **‘everyone has a part to play’** and that affected countries are not **‘alone in the fight against illegal logging’**¹⁸. Respondents have reported three notable benefits. First, they stressed the transnational nature of forest governance issues: **‘The context may be different but the problems are the same.’**¹⁹ In all four countries, issues were raised pertaining to corruption, accountability, transparency, and poor communication and coordination within and between the government and CSOs. In view of this, stakeholders have been able to acknowledge that these forest governance issues **‘cut across boundaries they cannot be isolated to one country ... and therefore it requires regional and international cooperation’**²⁰. This shared understanding of both the problem and what is involved in supporting forest governance should contribute to a transnational governance framework for countries to develop uniform, auditable and practical national legality standards, so that they speak the same language when it comes to improving forest governance²¹. This is also evident within project countries. One Cameroonian facilitator

asserts: **‘as a member of the FLEGT-VPA platform and trainer on issues related to governance, participation at the forum allowed me to update my knowledge and to reconcile the objectives of our NGO to those of the country’**²². These findings demonstrate that FGFs have gone some way to building a foundation for collaborative action and an enabling environment for a shared forest governance strategy.

Figure 4. Key Success Factors identified by FGF participants for a Transnational Forest Governance Framework



Secondly, it has long been recognised that building trust within and between stakeholder groups is vital to the success of any FLEGT-VPA initiative and transnational cooperation. In an attempt to bridge the gap between stakeholders, FGFs have effectively situated themselves in a position to build trust steadily through face-to-face dialogue. Again, the building of trust is underpinned by transnational exchanges. For one project partner the fundamental activity of information sharing and transnational exchange of ideas and practices has helped to create a **‘culture of trust’**²³ in an arena that more often than not is characterised by conflict. The heightened level of cooperation and examples of collaboration given by respondents testify to the increasing mutual trust between forestry actors (see Table 2).

Thirdly, transnational exchanges have helped to mobilise political will and strengthen national resolve to tackle forestry issues and improve governance. They encouraged key stakeholders to express commitment and support towards the VPA process. In the words of one respondent, **‘dialogue between countries has helped to create political pressure on governments as people are**

¹⁸ Interview (19): KWC – Ghana partner

¹⁹ Interview (19): KWC – Ghana partner

²⁰ Interview (19): KWC – Ghana partner

²¹ Interview (13): CSO – DRC

²² Interview (51): private sector – Cameroon

²³ Discussions with a partner – UK

demonstrating greater awareness and understanding of what is at stake²⁴. In the Ghanaian context, a growing trend of civil society activism was identified. Although this cannot be solely attributed to the FGFs, participants claimed FGFs have **'definitely enhanced the level of civil society activism on forestry issues'**²⁵.

However, respondents have expressed the need to take this a step further and consolidate growing political momentum into concrete actions that can deliver results. For example, the majority of respondents said that binding resolutions at the end of FGFs would be an ideal and effective way to sustain political will and demonstrate publicly that government and stakeholders are committed to the process.

Similarly, government officials should be encouraged to give pledges and voice commitments to improving forest governance at the forums. However, it is important not to lose sight of the underlying aim of the FGF: to be an open discursive platform. Though a binding resolution has been positively viewed by most of the CSOs interviewed, it may constrain high-level engagement as **'government officials would not feel comfortable to speak out'**²⁶ and they may feel under pressure in such a space.

"FGFs are building a chain of solidarity by facilitating awareness, particularly on the status of the implementation of the FLEGT-VPA.

Survey respondent

2.3.2 Possible Synergies, Collaboration and New Initiatives

The benefit of transnational exchanges is also illustrated by their ability to **'open a window of opportunity for regional collaboration'**²⁷ and realise possible synergies between actors working on the FLEGT-VPA process

and REDD+ initiatives. Several cases were identified where the FGFs have successfully given rise to research collaborations between national, regional and international organisations. A participant from Republic of Congo gave one concrete example on how they were able to conduct a joint research project on the informal timber industry with CIFOR in Congo and IUCN in DRC, after hearing about their activities at the forum (see Box 3). Thus, the FGFs have helped create the conditions necessary for transnational cooperation.

BOX 3: CASE STUDY ON COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

One CIFOR participant from Congo Brazzaville stated, **'I met people from Brainforest in Gabon working on a study on indigenous populations with whom I exchanged information. I also met someone from IUCN in DRC working on a study to identify the actors involved in the small-scale timber industry, which I was working on at the time. I exchanged information. I ended up in fact having research collaboration between CIFOR in Congo and IUCN in DRC; and it was only thanks to the forum that we heard what they were working on and so it was the forum, which gave rise to this collaboration. We carried out research together on the informal timber industry in DRC.'** (FGF participant)

Furthermore, a number of participants cited positive experiences at the regional conference organised in Accra, Ghana, in October 2012, in generating and emphasising the linkages between REDD+ and FLEGT-VPA strategies in terms **'improving forest governance; tackling illegal logging, forest degradation and deforestation; improving sustainable forest management and promoting poverty reduction efforts'**²⁸. It was argued by some stakeholders that

²⁴ Interview (54): Private sector – Ivory Coast

²⁵ Interview (22): Tropenbos – Ghana

²⁶ Interview (18): Government – Ghana

²⁷ Survey respondent

²⁸ Interview (20): Tropenbos – Ghana

government officials, the Ghana Forestry Commission and implementing bodies for REDD+ are able to learn from the **'successes'** of the VPA, including greater public awareness and a multi-stakeholder participatory process.

In Ghana, stakeholders highlighted concerns over the lack of knowledge on REDD+ in the public domain and that it appeared to be less of a consultative process in comparison to VPA processes. Similarly, in Cameroon, participants expressed a desire to strengthen the synergies between both processes and argued both have similar priorities and components, such as **'awareness raising, capacity building and multi-stakeholder participation'**²⁹. Thus, we find that synergies can be created through sharing lessons and experiences, building on the achievements of one process to advance another and identifying joint activities that can help to avoid duplicating efforts.

More importantly, some key lessons emerge from these findings; identification and creation of synergies in forest governance processes require stronger coordination and communication across processes and key actors at the national and sub-national level; multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms are necessary to create harmonisation across the forestry sector and beyond (for example, natural resource management and agriculture), as it facilitates information sharing, looking for commonalities and designing collaborative actions; and finally lack of coordination between processes calls for a need to establish consistency amongst donor-assisted programmes and representatives. This suggests a weakness at an institutional and organisational level, and therefore one interviewee recommended that different sectors and officials hold regular update meetings to strengthen collaboration³⁰.

2.3.3 Overcoming Hurdles

Finally, of particular importance were respondents' comments on learning from countries, which have progressed further in the FLEGT-VPA process, in terms of learning

how they can overcome hurdles that may be encountered during the VPA implementation phase. The four project countries are at different stages of VPA implementation. Whilst Cameroon, Ghana and Liberia are currently in the implementing phase of the VPA, DRC remains in the negotiating phase, and therefore information shared by implementing countries is regarded as highly beneficial for **'good implementation of VPA in DRC'**³¹, and **'indicative of the challenges of governance'**³². Representatives from DRC civil society and a government official expressed keen interest in learning from the experience of regional actors on the **'various steps that DRC should follow for signing and implementing the VPA, in terms of verification systems, independent monitoring and auditing'**³³. As a result, many respondents from the DRC believe that the forum demonstrated that the DRC still needs to make greater efforts to make its marketable timber acceptable on the European market³⁴. Supporting this, one Cameroonian government official claimed: **'FGF facilitates information sharing; it allows us to learn from the experiences, mistakes and achievements of other organisations and processes'**³⁵.

"FGFs are one of the rare spaces of exchanges between countries engaged in VPAs. There is a need to know how neighbouring countries have faced similar issues, exchanging tips. It is very important and FGF fills this gap."
Survey respondent

Consequently, FGFs **'were beneficial in terms of exchanging information from other VPA implementing countries, learning where the hiccups are and where we are behind other countries, as it's important to see the experiences they went through'**³⁶. This learning element is also clearly demonstrated by the Ghana Forestry Commission; a representative explained that

²⁹ Interview (32): Civic Response – Ghana, partner

³⁰ Interview (13): CSO – RoC

³¹ Survey respondent

³² Survey respondent

³³ Survey respondent

³⁴ Survey respondent

³⁵ Interview (30): MoE – Cameroon

³⁶ Interview (6): FIB – DRC



their exchanges at the Liberia 2012 forum gave them the opportunity to learn more about Collaborative Resource Management and the design of the Social Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) in Liberia, and how to apply this to their own context. Importantly, in Ghana only **‘four out of every ten communities are doing this’**³⁷. Thus, there is a clear need to learn from the mechanisms employed in the Liberia context to encourage community engagement elsewhere. As a result, transnational exchanges were useful not only to further participants’ own understanding of forest governance and VPA issues, but also to emphasise that many challenges facing VPA implementation are not unique to one country, meaning that countries can draw up a plan of action and incorporate the experiences of others within their own contexts.

2.4 REFLECTIONS

A couple of lessons emerge from the above findings. First, there is a need to acknowledge and respond effectively to the growing demand for more information on forest governance issues, not just those relating strictly to illegal logging. However, having more information available does

not automatically translate into access to information; further collaboration is needed with marginalised groups and key stakeholders on establishing strategies for information dissemination. Whilst the FGFs have been useful for information and experience sharing on a national and regional scale, it is important to see how to filter information down to people living on the **‘fringes of the forest’**, so that **‘they too can be aware of external process that are happening which might impact on their livelihoods’**³⁸. Secondly, findings reveal the creative value of transnational exchanges. Not only is it an avenue for information updates on the FLEGT process: participants have also been able to capitalise on possible synergies between forest governance processes and to draw on experiences of other countries to employ similar mechanisms to improve forest governance in their home country. More importantly, transnational exchanges and face-to-face dialogue are critical elements in establishing mutual trust between stakeholders, boosting a sense of shared responsibility and understanding of the challenges faced in the forestry sector and strengthening political momentum in participant countries.

³⁷ Interview (18): FC – Ghana

³⁸ Interview (54): Baka Community – Cameroon



SECTION 3

Representation



“What was good about the FGF was that you could find all stakeholders in one room; politicians were present, the Forestry Commission was there, industry and community was present so there was a balance. It was a good mixture of national and international.”

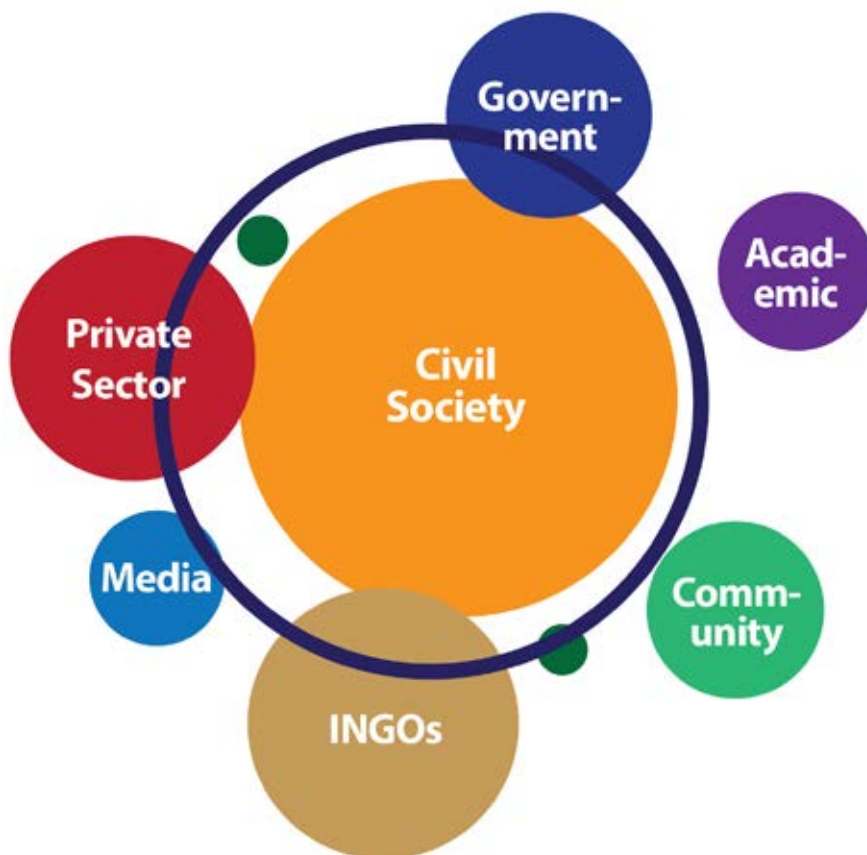
This section gives an overview of the key stakeholders that were represented at the FGFs. Building on the strengths of the FLEGT-VPA process that requires national level stakeholder agreement on forest legislation through multi-stakeholder processes, the FGFs, from their inception, have sought to ensure inclusive multi-actor, multi-level participation, inviting both private and public

actors on a national and international level. The target stakeholders for the FGFs were civil society, government, and the private sector including international organisations. Community members and academics were also invited.

One notable finding was the level of participation in all project countries; an average of 200 people attended each FGF³⁹. No per diems or bursaries for travel costs were offered (except to speakers and in some cases representatives of communities): therefore, such a high level of participation reflects the increasing motivation for stakeholder participation in forest governance initiatives. Indeed, one respondent stated that **‘the most unique thing about the FGF in comparison to other forums on forest governance and workshops is that the participation level is much greater’**⁴⁰.

Figure 5. Representation at FGFs

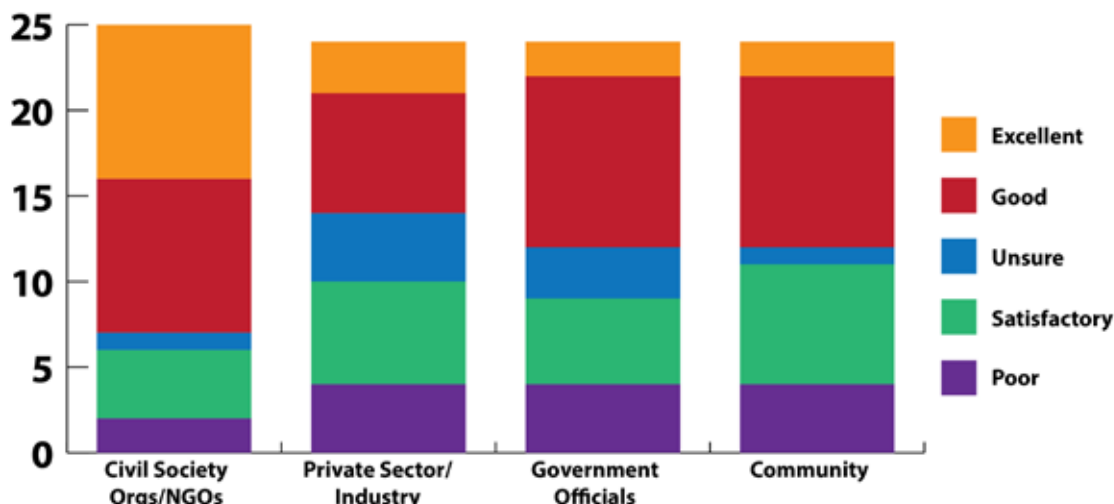
This diagram provides a quick snapshot of the key groups represented at the forum. The data is cumulative from all FGFs. The circles try to capture their level of involvement and representation in the overall FGFs processes.



³⁹ Figure taken from FGF attendance sheets

⁴⁰ Interview (25): EU Delegation – Cameroon

Figure 6. Attendance of the different stakeholder groups at the forums (Survey respondents)

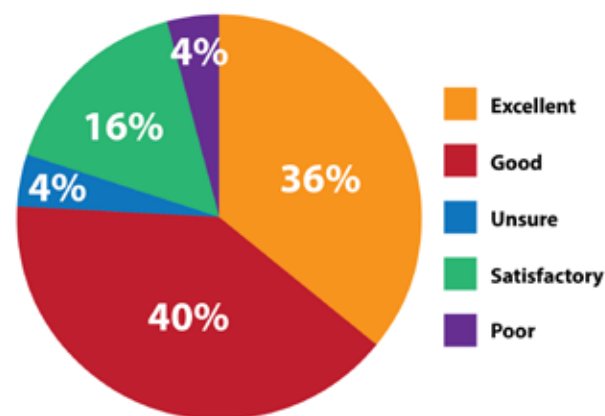


3.1.1 Civil Society Organisations, NGOs and International Organisations

Civil society organisations have been identified as one of the key stakeholder groups to be consistently represented across the board at all of the FGFs. Figure 6 illustrates the participants' views on FGF attendance, highlighting that civil society representation in comparison to other groups was deemed as highly represented. 95% of respondents interviewed stated that civil society was positively represented during the FGF meetings. 76% of survey respondents claimed the same. In Ghana, respondents identified how the FGFs have supported rising civil society activism. The close engagement of CSOs in the FGF process has ensured greater civil society mobilisation and has strengthened the voice of civil society in VPA implementation. Additionally, participants and organisers in all project countries noted that, in some instances during the VPA negotiations and in other events, 'special attention'⁴¹ was given to the presence of international NGOs who were initially deemed as representative of national and local CSOs. However, the 'FGF was different, in that it allowed civil society to represent them'⁴². Furthermore, the interviewee reported that there was a 'good balance between the international and local'⁴³. Consequently, this balance ensured

civil society maintained ownership over the process, which helped to add legitimacy.

Figure 7. Civil society/NGO representation at the FGFs (survey respondents)



3.1.2 Private Sector

Findings from the study show that engaging the private sector has proven challenging. In terms of representation, private sector participation on average has been low; 65% of interview respondents said there could have been better private sector representation and 41% of survey respondents stated the same. Statistics from the final Yaoundé FGF in 2014 show that less than 10% of all participants were from a private sector background. However, the presence of the private sector also depends on the context. One of the FGFs' organisers noted that

⁴¹ Interview (48): Community – Ghana

⁴² Interview (36): Community – Cameroon

⁴³ Interview (46): CSO – Ghana

‘Cameroon and DRC have more CSOs present than private sector, in terms of sheer numbers. Liberia FGFs saw higher private sector participation, as did Ghana⁴⁴. Supporting this claim, one of the FAO Programme Officers argued; ‘private sector is not lacking, but needs to be taken into context as in Cameroon you have for example 500 CSOs and 100 logging companies, so you can’t expect there to be a balance⁴⁵. More importantly, a member of the Cameroon EU delegation stated that the ‘lack of private sector is not unique to the FGF but characterises the overall FLEGT-VPA process⁴⁶. Indeed, discussions with participants reflected similar concerns, demonstrating that such issues are not just limited to the project countries. Thus, the lack of private sector representation cannot be assessed without regard to the context.

“Need to tailor agenda to private sector needs: if you want it for me ... what’s in it for me?”
Private sector participant, Ghana

3.1.2.2 Who does the private sector consist of?

One significant finding from discussions is the need to acknowledge that the private sector is not a homogenous group. The private sector is typically characterised by large timber companies⁴⁷. However, many respondents suggested that the ‘private sector is very big and diverse, it consists of both very big international companies, small-medium enterprises (SMEs) and artisanal loggers – this is very important as [the] legality of timber needs to be assessed for all private sector actors, including small ones⁴⁸. Small-scale loggers form critical and active parts of the informal sector, ranging from a few individuals who join to harvest timber two to three months a year, to permanent enterprises with a dozen or more employees⁴⁹. For example, one respondent reported that

‘informal, small-scale logging constitutes the basis of the overall timber production in Ghana, Cameroon and DRC. Thus, there is an urgent need to integrate these small scale operators into the FLEGT-VPA process, as without the presence of small scale operators, improving forest governance has little value⁵⁰. As one participant observed, ‘in DRC, a high percentage of illegal timber trade is sourced through small-scale individual loggers intended for the domestic market⁵¹.

“The elephant in the room is the small scale loggers – small scale operators: so you have large shippers which is what people talk about when we say private sector, but there is a whole plethora of SMEs which is an important area to get a grip on: when we talk about private sector we can’t just talk about big scale, but also small scale right down to the bottom, so domestic traders need to be considered: so it would benefit from more community engagement with chainsaw loggers – individual loggers who are present in each country.”
Partner, UK

3.1.2.1 Engaging the private sector

Given the importance of industry actors in tackling illegal logging and improving forest governance, it is critical to understand what motivates the private sector to participate in such forums. Figure 8 demonstrates findings from the study that identify key external and internal drivers for industry participation at the FGFs; internal factors relate to motivation, whereas external factors consist of factors and pressures outside the organisation, such as stakeholder relations, media and political pressure.

⁴⁴ Interview (10): IDL – UK

⁴⁵ Interview (24): FAO – Italy

⁴⁶ Interview (25): EU Delegation – Cameroon

⁴⁷ Interview (23): CIDT – UK

⁴⁸ Interview (25): EU Delegation – Cameroon

⁴⁹ http://www.forestsmonitor.org/uploads/2e90368e95c9fb4f82d3d562fe-a6ed8d/Description_of_the_Timber_Sector_in_the_DRC.pdf.

⁵⁰ Interview (22): Tropenbos – Ghana

⁵¹ Interview (12): CSO – CAR

BOX 4: CASE STUDY ON PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

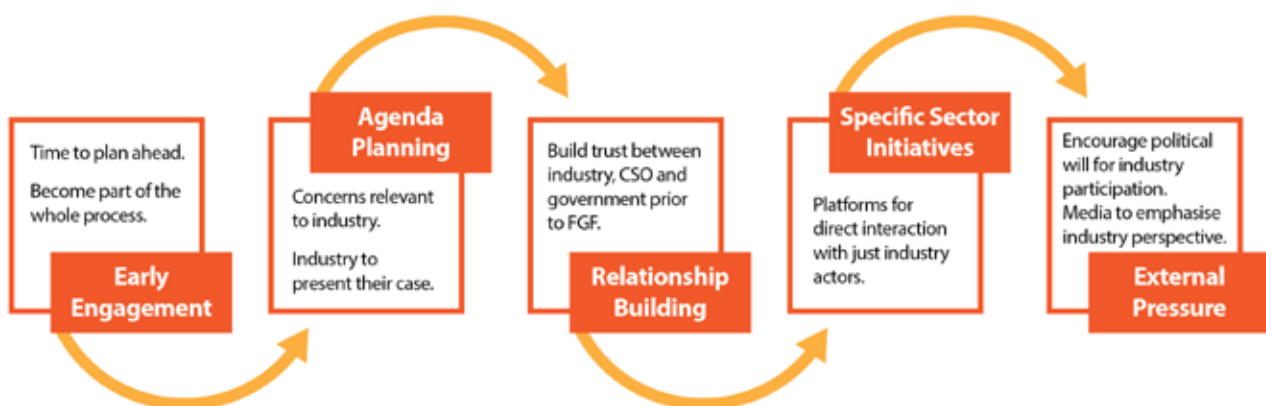
‘When we talk about private sector there is a perception that it is completely distinct from civil society roles, however, this is an unfair impression. For example, when we talk about benefit sharing it seems as if most of the benefit goes to the private sector, not to landowners. But we need to bring out the contribution of industry to rural communities and how this relationship can be productive; for example, industry have helped some communities build schools, medical services: there are two communities in Ghana that are solely dependent on medical services provided by industry. Samreboi is a timber industry town, health services supplied to all there.’
(FGF participant, Ghana)

Given the importance of industry actors in tackling illegal logging and improving forest governance, it is critical to understand what motivates the private sector to participate in such forums. Figure 8 demonstrates findings from the study that identify key external and internal drivers for industry participation at

the FGFs; internal factors relate to motivation, whereas external factors consist of factors and pressures outside the organisation, such as stakeholder relations, media and political pressure.

With respect to internal drivers, discussions with private sector representatives illuminate the importance of engaging very early on in the process, to motivate and encourage industry participation. The director of a Ghanaian domestic timber logging company explained, **‘if you want private sector to be involved you cannot engage with them as an afterthought, rather they need to be directly engaged from the beginning of the process, taken on board and integrated into the actual planning of the event’**⁵². Hence, just sending an invitation is not enough. Rather, there must be focused engagement with industry actors to obtain an understanding of their needs and constraints; this should then feed into the FGF agenda. In some cases, as noted in Ghana, such engagement has stimulated industry actors into putting their case forward (see Box 4); as one respondent argued, **‘they allowed private sector to do presentations to make their case, so other stakeholders can see what the industry is doing for the community’**⁵³. Consequently, FGFs have the potential to become a platform that can capitalise on the private sector’s readiness to engage with environmental and social-political issues.

Figure 8. Factors conducive to private sector participation



⁵² Interview (49): Dolta – Ghana

⁵³ Interview (49): Dolta – Ghana

In a similar vein, engaging early with industry actors can also help to mitigate difficulties such as time constraints, often cited as one of industry's barriers to participation (see Box 5). One industry actor reported that the **'private sector are extremely busy and have a lot of time constraints; they must be notified as early as possible ... they are always attending a lot [of] meetings and events, so they may see these as no different [from] the rest'**⁵⁴. Hence, engaging early on with private sector and emphasising the difference between FGFs and other events may encourage industry actors to attend, and to plan if they are located away from the venue. This was the case in the Yaoundé 2014 forum in which **'many of the industry actors are based in Doula and need to be informed well in advance to make preparations or send a representative'**⁵⁵.

BOX 5: BARRIERS TO PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

The director of GTMO, one of the largest industry associations in Ghana, identified critical barriers to meaningful industry participation. **'The timber manager wouldn't want to leave the factory for more than 3 hours a day to Accra for a whole day'**, he said. **'He would rather send a junior staff that doesn't understand, doesn't have necessary forestry background and cannot repeat issues when he comes back. Therefore, representation is a problem. Under law, timber companies must have at least one professional forester, but they don't enforce this so often meetings don't have the right people due to internal capacity'**. (FGF participant, Ghana)

However, on many occasions, the organisers had made efforts to ensure private sector representation; the organisers had repeatedly approached, and informed industry actors

well in advance about the FGFs, but they did not appear to respond to such overtures⁵⁶. In many cases, organisers argued that **'industry actors were offered to put forward their case and speak at the forum'**⁵⁷, but there appeared to be a disengagement on the part of the industry, which may suggest that industry actors do not attend because they have other channels for influencing policy. Alternatively, it may be sufficient that their industry associations (like GTMO) come on their behalf – and that is a more efficient use of their collective time.

External factors also play a role. Relationships with outside stakeholders such as CSOs were seen as a determining factor to participate or not. For example, some private sector participants felt that the FGFs were geared towards CSO participation: that **'there was little room for contribution from private sector'**⁵⁸, and that **'NGOs and government officials will never take any recommendations from private sector so why should we go and talk to them?'**⁵⁹ Such sentiments demonstrate the continuing lack of trust between industry and CSOs/NGOs. For this reason industry actors expressed a genuine concern that they **'would be an easy target'**, citing examples from other forums where the private sector has been treated unfairly and accused of being responsible for many of the issues around illegal logging.

Consequently, **'minimising this fear is important'**⁶⁰; this implies that workshops and trust building initiatives should take place prior to FGFs. Such ideas were strongly recommended by both CSOs and private sector respondents. In the light of these issues, some industry respondents have suggested the need for sector-specific initiatives⁶¹, and for platforms that target solely the private sector. Ideally, such initiatives would provide more of an incentive to participate, as they would directly target the concerns and issues pertinent to industry actors and encourage market-based solutions. This would send out a strong message to industry actors that their participation is very valuable to the process.

⁵⁴ Interview (49): Dolta – Ghana

⁵⁵ Interview (25): EU Delegation – Cameroon

⁵⁶ Interview (1): IDL – UK partner

⁵⁷ Interview (1): IDL – UK partner

⁵⁸ Interview (49): Dolta – Ghana

⁵⁹ Interview (22): GTMO – Ghana

⁶⁰ Interview (22): GTMO – Ghana

⁶¹ Interview (5): Private sector – UK

3.1.4 GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Government officials are influential in the forest sector in the project countries. At the legislative level, officials have been instrumental in approving policies and laws that impacted on the forestry sector in both negative and positive ways. Thus, their presence was critical at the FGFs. Participants from all stakeholder groups claimed that government officials were present at all of the FGFs. Just over 60% of survey respondents claimed that government representation at the FGFs was good (21% rated it as excellent and 42% as good). Conversely, some respondents observed that senior government officials – though they are present – do not stay for the entire two days of the forum, and in some instances leave after delivering a keynote speech. Furthermore, discussions with respondents highlighted the importance of taking a holistic approach to forest governance and not limiting government participation in the FGFs to the forestry departments: **‘The Environment Minister was represented but as FLEGT processes and legislation does not only concern the environment, but also trade, finance, tax, customs etc., representatives from these ministries should also have been present. It is only by bringing everyone around the table that people can learn from each other and find workable solutions’**⁶². Perhaps one of the most crucial reasons for ensuring government representation is that it has allowed for the reconciling of **‘informal processes with formal processes’**⁶³, and has situated FGFs within the trajectory of national forest objectives and the forest sector. Consequently, integrating forestry officials into the FGF framework has helped to consolidate the FGFs as complementary to the policy process, working in parallel, rather than as a stand-alone forum.

3.1.5 Community Participation: ‘Fringes of the Forest’

The focal point of the FGFs was not primarily community participation: rather, **‘the idea was to have mid-level people attend these**

meetings in the capital and then take the ideas to the communities. The meeting is not designed for intricate debates on community forestry, [but] rather forest governance in general and updates on FLEGT-VPA processes’⁶⁴. In this respect, the FGFs were **‘deliberately designed to be national; looking up and out rather than down and in’**⁶⁵. Nonetheless, over 60% of interview respondents felt that there should have been a greater contribution from community groups, as **‘people on the fringes of the forest are at the heart of forest governance process’**⁶⁶. Community groups and traditional authorities, although they often have no formal role in forest management, comprise a key group of the overall beneficiaries of the FLEGT process and have been identified as fundamental for the legitimacy of any FLEGT-VPA initiative or forest governance programme.

Despite efforts to ensure that community groups were represented at the FGFs, respondents revealed how across the board **‘it was difficult to hear the voice of the community as during the forum we get a lot of mid-level perspectives, not the voice of the community; we tend to present on behalf of them or we try and bring out what they are thinking’**⁶⁷. One Ghanaian government official called for **‘genuine community participation’**⁶⁸. Indeed, one Cameroonian community leader stated that most **‘international and national organisers had a common misperception in assuming that NGOs and CSOs represent community groups’**⁶⁹. However, engaging the community, like the issue of private sector representation, is not restricted to the FGF process, but characterises the whole of the VPA process. It is also context-dependent; it has been noted by organisers that the Cameroon and DRC FGFs had a much greater community presence than those in Liberia and Ghana⁷⁰.

However, it is not enough just to increase participation. It is important to identify a community individual who is able to present the collective interests and concerns of

⁶² Interview (11): CSO – DRC

⁶³ Interview (50): Government – Ghana

⁶⁴ Interview (23): CIDT – UK

⁶⁵ Interview (23): CIDT – UK

⁶⁶ Interview (28): FODER – Cameroon Partner

⁶⁷ Interview (21): Government – Ghana

⁶⁸ Interview (50): Government – Ghana

⁶⁹ Interview (54): Community – Cameroon

⁷⁰ Interview (35): RRN – DRC Partner



“Typically communities are not represented; generally communities don’t have a voice, but if you don’t keep them in they can invalidate all what you have done, as some community groups can be powerful and can rise up and say they were not involved.”

Ghanaian government official



“Organisers must remember to include students who are too often neglected in the fight to eradicate illegal logging.”

Cameroonian student, Yaoundé University

the group and, more importantly, who is **'legitimate in the eyes of the community and can influence the process'**⁷¹. Taking this into consideration, local FGF partners have engaged heavily in a consultative process with community groups and identified key members to participate in the forums. One concrete example comes from the 2014 Yaoundé FGF; two Baka community members mentioned how FODER had consulted with them, briefed and updated them on the necessary forestry information. Assistance was also given towards the travelling costs to the FGF venue.

One recommendation given by many respondents was to decentralise FGFs to the community level to increase and support community participation. Such initiatives could ideally be part of a two-pronged approach: national forums in parallel to provincial or district FGFs.

3.1.6 'The Others': Academic Bodies and the Media

A reoccurring issue raised by respondents from all stakeholder groups was the need to incorporate academic and media institutions into the forest governance discussion, even though they are not a target stakeholder group in forest governance. Universities and students who study forestry have vested interests in attending the FGFs, as a learning platform. Three mutual benefits arise from integrating them. First, academic bodies are a central element in sharing and disseminating research, and can keep stakeholders informed of the latest updates and developments on timber legality. As one professor argues, the FGF organisers **'should collaborate with forestry institutes to share cross cutting research on FGFs'**⁷², as such relationships are **'mutually beneficial'** in terms of improving research outputs, and align with the FGF objectives to raise awareness on forest governance issues. Such partnerships may also mean that FGF organisers have better access to academic journals to disseminate information. In spite of the low participation by academics, a couple of university researchers

and students interviewed in Cameroon and Ghana claimed the information presented in the forums was very useful. One participant studying an MSc in Forestry Management in DRC said that such platforms provide **'students with first-hand knowledge from experts in the field and establish links between academics and practitioners'**⁷³.

Secondly, integrating academic bodies into the forest governance paradigm can help to support information sharing and knowledge dissemination, as students are often more technologically advanced in terms of using various social media tools and the internet. In one instance, a student from the DRC reflected that **'student bodies are increasingly politically aware and active'**⁷⁴, and FGFs can capitalise on this to increase awareness of forest governance issues and bring about more innovative approaches to forest governance. Similarly, including students in the FGF paradigm can help to ensure that when students leave university they are already informed about the current forest governance initiatives.

Thirdly, integration of national academic bodies may also embed forestry discourse in the local, social and political context by adding a **'new academic dimension to debates'**⁷⁵. As one respondent claimed, the FGFs have encouraged forestry narratives based on **'local issues for local people'**⁷⁶. As a result, we witness increased national ownership over the process that ensures it is more pertinent to the needs of local stakeholders. Finally, the FGFs were an **'ideal opportunity for the academic sector to collaborate with and create links with private sector'**⁷⁷. As identified earlier (Box 5), many private sector companies in Ghana, despite being mandated by law, lack a professional forester. Within this context, FGFs can help industry create linkages with academia to identify trained potential recruits and help newly trained foresters find jobs or understand the employment market.

Similar arguments were made regarding media participation at the forums. Despite

⁷¹ Interview (54): Community – Cameroon

⁷² Interview (56): Academic – Cameroon

⁷³ Interview (29): Student – DRC

⁷⁴ Interview (29): Student – DRC

⁷⁵ Interview (56): Academic – Cameroon

⁷⁶ Interview (14): CSO – CAR

⁷⁷ Interview (29): Student – DRC

many respondents commenting on the effectiveness of collaborating with media institutions to publicise the FGFs, in terms of live radio debates and news features, there was also a genuine demand from all stakeholder groups to utilise media institutions and for journalists to disseminate key conclusions from the forum. For respondents, therefore, the question for future events is how best to employ the media as a tool for promoting forest governance. At the same time, organisers must be cautious of the risk of utilising media actors, as issues of confidentiality may arise, and certain stakeholders (e.g. government officials) may feel uncomfortable in speaking out in such environments⁷⁸.



3.2 REFLECTIONS

Despite the differences in context, several lessons concerning representation emerge from the study. First, it is important to maintain a balance between international and national organisations, as otherwise the FGFs can be in danger of succumbing to the rhetoric of external interventions implemented without taking into account the local context and sensitivities. Secondly, early engagement with the private sector as a means to obtain feedback on the agenda is critical in motivating private sector participation: the

private sector will engage in the process only if it is relevant to them and they can truly influence it. However, lack of private sector presence does not necessarily translate into disengagement with the VPA or even the FGF process, as it may be that they have alternative means to access and influence policy-making mechanisms. Findings have also highlighted a need to move away from a simplified understanding of the private sector, and to recognise the importance of embracing all types of industry actors; SMEs and small-scale loggers are often left behind. Consequently, the FGF organisers must recognise and ensure participation of SMEs and artisanal loggers, as they are key players in the forest governance arena. In some instances, respondents recognised that ensuring participation might not be enough; some capacity building may be necessary in terms of informing small-scale loggers of forest governance issues and legal systems beforehand, so that they can participate effectively in the FGFs.

A third lesson, pertaining to community and forest-dependent peoples, is that while the forums are mid- and high-level processes, the presence of community groups is strongly required. Their inclusion is necessary for any forest governance initiative, and so the current design and format of the FGFs may need to be changed in order to accommodate a larger presence from community representatives. This could involve organising provincial or district FGFs that could link to the national FGFs. Moreover, by integrating academics, media bodies and other non-forestry actors, organisers can capitalise on their links and networks to raise awareness of issues, and can potentially transform neutral actors into active supporters of the FLEGT-VPA process.

Finally, it is crucial to point out that despite the fact some stakeholders were less represented, the key characteristic of the FGFs is their open nature, which means that anyone (or no one) can attend. They are inherently a discursive platform as opposed to a decision-making venue that necessitates inputs from all stakeholder groups.

⁷⁸ Interview (25): EU – Cameroon



SECTION 4

Organisational Issues



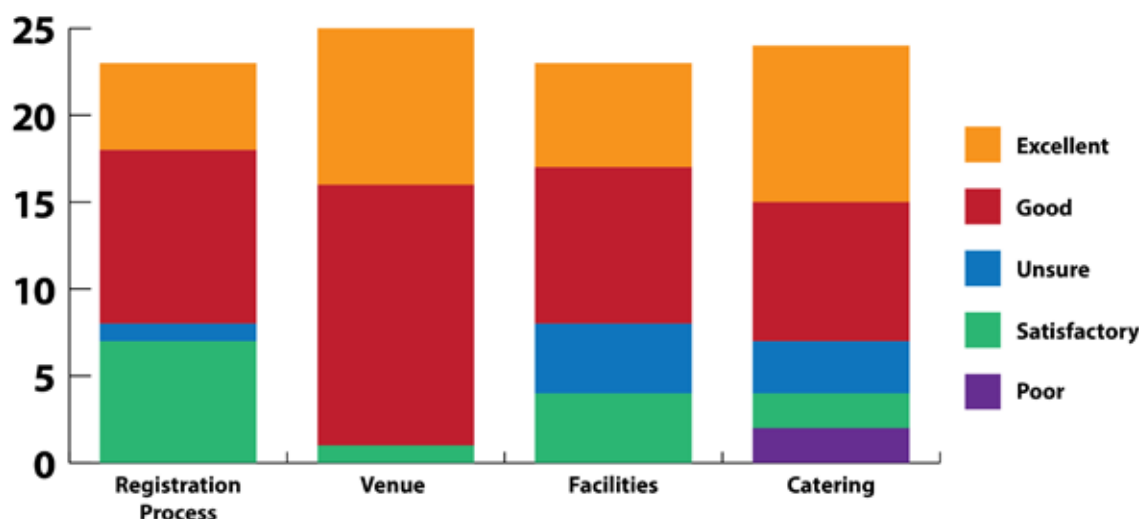
4.1 OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANISATION OF FGFS

This section provides a brief overview of the organisation of the FGFS in terms of creating the agenda, venue, participants and speaker selection, publicity and the format of the forums. theIDLgroup in close collaboration with CIDT and the in-country SAFG partners led the organisation and the delivery of the FGFS.

As indicated by the graph, findings illustrate that participants noted high levels of satisfaction with the overall organisation of the FGFS. Over 95% of survey respondents viewed the location of the forums positively: 36% as excellent and 60% as good.

“The forums are always very well organised. The process of organising the forums is participatory. They always publicise it well in advance and ask for contributions from participants. For the forums in Cameroon, FODER always does a great job in terms of communication. There is a very good level of attendance from the press and there are always features on TV in the evening and articles in the newspapers in the morning. There is always a good representation of the national authorities also.”
FGF speaker, Cameroon

Figure 7. Participants’ overall satisfaction with the organisation of the FGFS (survey respondents)



Similarly, just over 65% expressed their satisfaction with the facilities at the FGFS and 71% stated that catering was good, including 29% who rated it as excellent⁷⁹. Participants’ ratings regarding the registration process show a slightly different picture, despite 65% claiming it was good (including 26% who rated it as excellent); 31% claimed it was satisfactory and 4% were unsure. Discussions with interview respondents showed high levels of satisfaction with the registration process, with many praising the organisers’ preparation

and distribution of **‘badges, folders and agenda hand-outs’**⁸⁰.

Similarly, respondents identified the location and venue as an important factor in the decision of whether or not to attend. Many noted it was better when the location for the FGF was outside of the town centre/ central areas, such in Yaoundé 2011 when the FGF was held in Mont Febe Hotel, as this meant **‘participants would not go away to the centre during breaks but would stay**

⁷⁹ 8% stated it was satisfactory, 8% said it was poor and 13% were unsure

⁸⁰ Interview (52): CSO – Cameroon

and network and have interesting side discussions⁸¹. However, a small percentage of respondents expressed concerns at holding FGFs in ‘grand venues’, such as the Hilton in Cameroon 2014 and the Royal Grand Hotel in Liberia 2012, as this may inhibit community participation and be ‘intimidating’⁸².

4.2 AGENDA

“The objective of the forum was well aligned with national priorities and policy discussions, as the forums looked at the progress being made in FLEGT-VPA negotiations and we are still following these [processes] at the national level.”

Cameroonian participant, CSO

At the national level, for participants from Ghana, Cameroon and DRC, there was a consensus that the agenda and topics were ‘highly relevant’⁸³ and that the ‘agenda overall was very good, it was both national and regional, realities seemed local’⁸⁴. SAFG project partners; Civic Response in Ghana, RRN in DRC and FODER in Cameroon stressed the participatory process for creating the FGF agenda, noting that theIDLgroup consulted with them for possible inputs and sent out a draft agenda to key stakeholders and partners, integrating any feedback into the agenda. theIDLgroup status as a neutral player in the forest sector allowed them ‘access to a wide range of networks’⁸⁵.

This is echoed in the findings from the FGF survey; 100% of respondents agreed that the presentations and agendas were highly relevant to the context of their country. Some of the most pertinent topics identified by survey respondents included presentations on corruption and transparency (92% of survey respondents found this highly relevant), monitoring forest governance (87% of survey respondents found this highly relevant), and

legality and sustainability (84% of survey respondents found this relevant). Discussions with interview respondents reflected similar findings, although emphasis was also placed on understanding international market perspectives. In particular, combatting corruption was identified as a critical issue addressed at the FGFs, as this was ‘constant problem in the VPA country processes’⁸⁶. Similarly, in DRC, the FGF session on artisanal logging was identified by a number of participants as very relevant. Although some saw this as ‘specific to the DRC case’⁸⁷, similar problems with enabling the legal operations by small-scale loggers exist in all four countries.

However, there were some concerns noted by both partners and participants on the level of stakeholder consultation. There were some suggestions that there should be more national stakeholder consultations and greater involvement of the private sector, government officials and local communities, in order to prevent the risk of the agenda becoming too ‘internationalised’⁸⁸. For example, one government official commented: ‘to what extent were the government involved?’⁸⁹ Greater government involvement can equate to greater government responsibility and more importantly align the FGF objectives to national objectives. This integrates the process into the forest governance agenda of the country. On the other hand, a unique component in FLEGT-VPAs is the trade component; the demand for legal timber in European and other markets is a key reason why there is an international element to the FGFs.

4.3 ‘CONVENING POWER’: ATTRACTING SPEAKERS AND PARTICIPANTS

In general, the speakers were found to be of high quality, with a ‘good balance’ between international, regional and local speakers. As the organisers explain, ‘we make the agenda rooted in the national context –

⁸¹ Interview (30): Government – Ghana

⁸² Interview (6): Private sector – DRC

⁸³ Interview (20): Government – Ghana

⁸⁴ Interview (7): UNEP

⁸⁵ Interview (10): IDL – UK Partner

⁸⁶ Interview (47): CSO – Ghana

⁸⁷ Interview (24): FAO – Italy

⁸⁸ Interview (6): Private sector – DRC

⁸⁹ Interview (20): Government – Ghana

agree a thematic session – then we have a national speaker, regional speaker and an international speaker for each thematic session⁹⁰. Thus, the FGFs offered a wide range of high-profile interdisciplinary guest speakers: 84% of survey respondents viewed the speakers positively (32% as excellent and 52% as good), as did most interview respondents. Discussions with respondents also highlighted the importance of keynote speakers at the FGFs, often made up of the EU Delegation and officials from a ministerial body (for example in the FGFs Ghana 2011, Cameroon 2011 and 2014, and Liberia 2013). One lesson to emerge here is that keynote speakers have greater pulling power for the forums; the presence of senior government officials arguably raised their profile, drew in greater participation and gave a boost to the forum’s credibility.

Importantly, respondents clarified that organisers must also be aware of the dangers of relying on the same speakers presenting at each forum, so as to prevent it from becoming an exclusive circle. One explanation provided by a project partner concerning the dilemma of attracting high quality speakers and participants is ‘convening power’⁹¹. Unlike Chatham House, which enjoys an international reputation and is therefore able to attract high-quality speakers and top-level participants, FGFs may not share the same level of reputational pull. Consequently, it was suggested that organisers could maximise their relative convening power in different contexts. For example, by employing more local networks and maximising partner resources, organisers can take advantage of the local partners’ connections.

This applied to the Cameroonian context in which FODER’s links to the ministry enabled greater government representation in the Yaoundé forum. Equally, in DRC, RRN had stronger ties with the Ministry of Forestry, which ensured greater official representation. (See Section 4.5.2 for further discussion on international and national SAFG partners’ roles in FGF organisation.)

4.4 FORMAT

Certain factors have been noted as conducive to creating a successful enabling learning environment for constructive exchanges. Many respondents perceived the format of the FGF, based on the Chatham House model, as encouraging openness and dialogue.

4.4.1 Chatham House Model: Free for All

The notion of a Chatham House model-based FGF was widely perceived as both unique and highly beneficial to the forums. Organisers said they kept the FGF as close as possible to the Chatham House format in terms of the structure (15-minute presentations) and keynote speakers. It also provided the opportunity for people to invoke the Chatham House rule of confidentiality. This was identified as a key factor in creating a ‘safe and secure’ space to air concerns; 75% of interview participants mentioned the Chatham House confidentiality rule as significant to the FGFs. More importantly, participants from neighbouring countries stressed that the forum provided a ‘safe space’ to ‘critique their own government efforts’ on issues relating to corruption and transparency⁹².

“People have heard about Chatham House before but have never had the opportunity to attend, so [FGFs] were a real high point as native speakers could attend.”
Participant, EFI

One Ghanaian government official declared that ‘the openness of the FGFs were due to the confidentiality rules; thought provoking issues came out, people could say what they want. I have never been to [a] Chatham style event where I can say what I want, but we need something like this in “our” countries’⁹³. Many felt empowered by the fact that they could invoke the Chatham House rule; they could challenge

⁹⁰ Interview (17): IDL – UK partner

⁹¹ Interview (2): GW – UK partner

⁹² Interview (13): CSO – Ghana

⁹³ Interview (20): Ghana – Government

government officials without fear of reprisals or repercussions. This was echoed by the Tropenbos Programme Director in Ghana who stated that **‘when you think of Chatham House, you think of not mentioning names, identifying people – this liberates people so they can express freely’**⁹⁴. However, at the same time there is a need to be sensitive to local culture. For some participants principles of confidentiality felt **‘alien’**⁹⁵, as they were not rooted in the local cultural context. Thus, participants did not feel confident in the rule. For this reason, some government officials still felt uncomfortable speaking out in public. Consequently, there is the need to empower local people with the rule of confidentiality.

BOX 6: THE CHATHAM HOUSE RULE

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. Meetings, events and discussions held at Chatham House are normally conducted **‘on the record’** with the Rule occasionally invoked at the speaker’s request. In cases where the Rule is not considered sufficiently strict, an event may be held **‘off the record’**. More details can be found at <http://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule>.

4.4.2 Transnational Dimension

In addition to the comments regarding the Chatham House model, many respondents suggested that it was not just the structure which worked well, but that also having a transnational dimension to the FGF model had a clear benefit in reinforcing learning and the sharing of experiences. Despite being a national forum, the FGFs had a strong

regional dimension with many regional and international participants and speakers. Partners emphasised how typically the flow of information tends to run from the North to the South and in contrast the **‘FGFs have been useful in promoting lines of communication from south to south’**⁹⁶, including between anglophone and francophone countries. Many respondents expressed their approval of this format and recommended that organisers in future forums should enhance regional participation and the regional focus. Such events were organised on a regional scale in Ghana 2012 (in partnership with the FAO), and the final FGF in Cameroon in October 2014, both FGFs drew in a lot of interest, which is reflected in the high attendance rate at these forums. At the Accra 2012 FGF there were 142 participants present, compared with 94 at the first FGF in Accra 2011.

Moreover, the use of French and English translators was viewed extremely well. For example at the Yaoundé 2014 forum, **‘it did not exclude those who could not speak English and therefore do not get the chance to attend international events’**⁹⁷. This enhanced cross-country learning and participants from French-speaking countries commented that organising forums in such a way allowed them to learn from English-speaking experts and participants, and vice versa. Consequently, the transnational dimension of the FGFs has been identified as a critical driver in promoting productive FGF discussions, and in building a basic shared understanding of the necessary requirements to tackle illegal timber logging.

4.5 MAXIMISING/LEVERAGING RESOURCES

A central finding highlighted in discussions with respondents was the benefit of collaborating with local and international organisations to maximise resources. In several cases, organisers collaborated with other forest governance event organisers, which not only enhanced value (in terms

⁹⁴ Interview (21): Ghana – Tropenbos

⁹⁵ Interview (22): CSO – Ghana

⁹⁶ Interview (23): CIDT – UK partner

⁹⁷ Interview (24): FAO – Italy

of resource availability), but also raised the profile of the FGF. For example, in DRC in 2011, the FGF organisers (IDL) collaborated with Transparency International for the launch of the Africa Corruption Paper. Similarly, in the Ghana 2012 FGF collaborated with FAO, EFI, and Tropenbos for the launch of a book. In addition to collaborating with external organisations, many respondents found some of the side events taking place alongside the FGF extremely valuable. For example during the Yaoundé 2014 forum, EFI organised a side event on Timber Legality Assurance Systems a day prior to the forum, encouraging speakers and participants to attend both. A TLAS expert at EFI stressed that the FGF provided the context for the side event to take place. Thus, in terms of value, the FGFs were able to go a step further and engage with external actors to **'do more with less'** in terms of financial resources.



“Forum provided a “useful context for additional events and topics” it allowed EFI to organise a ‘side event whilst using speakers/participants already present in Cameroon who are attending the FGF.”
FGF participant, EFI

4.5.2 Building Effective Partnership

A recurring theme prominent in international development narratives is the need to build effective partnerships for development, particularly with local organisations. Initially, local partners commented that effective partnership between different organisations, particularly international organisations, was challenging due to different approaches and cultures. For this reason, some local partners felt that there was some initial difficulty incorporating their efforts and understanding how local partners could contribute to the successful implementation of the FGFs: but this gradually changed during the course of the process, as international partners have recognised the benefits of increased partnership working. Increased partnership working has also produced a notable impact on the FGFs in terms of the quality of participation and debate; through utilising local partner connections and maximising **'convening power'**, the forums were able to draw in a much broader audience and engage with higher-level speakers than would have been possible otherwise. For example, in both DRC and Cameroon, local partners engaged in numerous discussions and meetings with Forestry Officials and ministers to secure their participation at the FGF. Moreover, in some instances increased partnership working has produced a **'ripple effect'** as the resources and funding given to local partners enables them to widen their **'target'** base, and provide information to a wider range of people in the local area than the IDL group alone could have reached.

Such collaboration also provides a base to leverage others' resources and stimulate innovation both in terms of implementation and approaches to modes of forest governance. Nonetheless, several factors have been identified as being conducive to building an effective partnership. First, it requires common understanding across partners of the process and challenges of collaborating; this helps to ensure a collaborative mind-set. Secondly, it calls for effective and consistent communication

between local and international partners; the lack of internet connectivity in certain areas means that communication may be limited, somewhat inhibiting working partnerships. Thirdly, local partners must feel ownership over the process, as this ensures a smoother implementation process.

4.5 DOCUMENTATION AND WRITTEN OUTPUTS

Given the information exchange element of the FGFs, it is critical to ensure information exchange is sustained through effective documentation and written outputs. Respondents felt there could be more continuous documentation of the achievements and challenges of the FGFs. An official **'record of minutes'** was also mentioned to demonstrate concrete evidence of issues discussed at the forums. Such documentation would help participants from external countries to remain involved in the FGF process. The organisers sought to facilitate this by producing a report at the end of every forum, outlining the key issues covered, presentations and outcomes. These reports were posted on the FGF website, making it available to anyone anywhere. The most positively viewed and widely mentioned report was the Ghana 2012 report, which was produced and published (and hard copies also distributed) in collaboration with the FAO. Respondents highlighted the reporting style, format, and extensive information given in the report, suggesting that future reports should attempt to adhere to this style. In addition to written outputs, the organisers produced a number of short films available online and a documentary specifically focusing on the FGFs has been produced. The key objective of the documentary is to highlight the key achievements and challenges of the FGFs. The documentary is based largely on footage from the final FGF in Cameroon in October 2014 and covers a number of interviews from the FGF participants, speakers, organisers and donors.

4.6 REFLECTIONS

Several valuable lessons have emerged from the findings on the organisation of the FGFs. A participatory agenda planning process helps to ensure that the FGF agenda remains linked to national objectives. Such participation can also help to reduce the cost and effort of producing new forest governance platforms, as participants expressed their desire to see investment in existing initiatives.

Consequently, involving officials allows them to take responsibility and ownership over the process, but this should not come at the expense of excluding the interests of CSOs and the community. Another lesson is that convening power is very important to attract high-quality speakers and can influence the quality of participation.

The key is to maximise this convening power by involving all relevant partners in the organisation of the FGF meetings. Finally, successful FGF implementation requires an effective communication strategy, in terms of both publicity of the forums and written outputs. Greater publicity and systematic reporting and documentation will help to keep participants and stakeholders engaged in the issues highlighted during the FGFs.



SECTION 5

Building Capacity for Active Citizenship and Good Governance



5.1 OVERVIEW

“Now, government actors know that if they act irresponsibly or they do not adhere to promises, when it comes to the forum, they will be publicly criticised so it means that they have changed their behaviour and they are more responsible and proactive”
FGF participant, DRC

FLEGT-VPA aim to promote policy and legal reforms for good governance, capacity building and transparency. During the course of this lesson learning study, a range of views have been expressed on how FGFs are helping the countries implementing and negotiating VPAs to build governance capacity in terms of active citizenship, greater transparency and accountability. In the words of one respondent, **‘active citizenship is key to combatting corruption and illegal forest activities’**⁹⁸. **‘Active citizenship’** generally refers to the involvement of citizens in public life on a local, national and international level. In this context, it applies especially at the local level to citizens who have become actively engaged in the public/political life of their communities, tackling problems and bringing about change.

Active citizens develop skills, knowledge and understanding to enable them to make informed decisions about their communities; and people are empowered to play a part in the decisions and processes that affect them. 75% of interview respondents found that FGFs promoted active citizenship by building their capacity with engaging in forest debates, enhancing their forestry knowledge and aiding their personal development.

5.2 ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP FOR FOREST GOVERNANCE

Respondents spoke of how they felt empowered because of access to information, especially regarding timber legality and legal reforms. One Cameroonian postgraduate student remarked, **‘I used all this information to complete my thesis, for which I gained a top mark, as well as in my work since completing my Masters’**⁹⁹. Similarly, a Ghanaian participant stated, **‘I even wrote two articles on FLEGT-VPA after this workshop’**¹⁰⁰.

Such findings strongly demonstrate not only that the FGFs have successfully achieved an enabling learning environment, but that they have promoted research outputs, feeding into greater awareness of the VPA process. DRC participants have also expressed that the FGFs have helped to keep the momentum for VPA processes in their country: one participant from the DRC stated that, **‘I can take ideas away from the forums and meet with stakeholders back in my country, to pressure them to move forward with the VPA’**¹⁰¹. In consequence, the FGFs have increased the ability of individuals and groups to influence issues that affect them and their communities. This process allows participants to become true architects of their future.

“Before we came here we were ignorant about the laws that exist but since we came here we have been reading books and textbooks and this has helped us tremendously.”
Community leader, Cameroon

Multi-stakeholder platforms such as the FGFs have also strengthened capacity building by enabling stakeholders to organise themselves and develop negotiating positions. One consequence of this has been increased confidence and engagement in forestry debates and forums (see Box 7). Importantly,

⁹⁸ Interview (39): FODER – Cameroon partner

⁹⁹ Interview (15): Postgraduate student – Cameroon

¹⁰⁰ Survey respondent

¹⁰¹ Interview (11): CSO – DRC

the FGFs have strengthened stakeholder capacity to participate in transnational exchanges, and this builds their skillset and cultural awareness of communicating with participants from other countries. As one participant notes, **‘the FGFs allow participants to cross language barriers’**¹⁰².

BOX 7: CASE STUDY ON CAPACITY BUILDING

‘I am able to participate in dialogues on forest governance at the regional level due to the knowledge I have gained at the forums. The government of CAR is currently undergoing a process of drafting the new national constitution. My organisation is taking the lead amongst CSOs to ensure that the process is truly participatory and inclusive where it concerns forest governance. They have made several recommendations to the government and they are in regular discussion with them. I feel much more confident to do this work thanks to my participation at the forums as I have engaged with other actors and now know more about participatory governance of forests.’ (FGF participant, CAR)

5.2.1 Building Organisational Capacity

Developing organisational capacity alongside individual capacity is recognised as critical to building national capacity for forest governance reform and for successful implementation of the VPA. One participant from DRC noted that **‘since 2011, our organisation CIBD organises training sessions on this issue of forest governance and this training allows me to have elements of information that is pertinent to teach other member organisations of civil society, students and independent researchers’**¹⁰³. More knowledge on the issues facing the forest sector has enabled

local organisations to act as an advocate for the FLEGT-VPA process. A consultant from FODER stressed how working with partners on the FGFs has strengthened their organisational capacity in advocacy and campaigning: **‘It has helped to increase local partners’ profile on a national, regional and international scale’**¹⁰⁴. A consultant from Civic Response asserted similarly that **‘through the FGFs they have developed a marketing plan with posters being created and strategically distributed’**¹⁰⁵.

BOX 8: CASE STUDY ON CAPACITY BUILDING

‘The fact that I gave a presentation at the first forum I attended meant that I was often invited to share experiences within my country and elsewhere. It raised my profile and that of my organisation so that I became more actively involved in forest governance dialogues within the region. Also, the fact that I have been able to make contacts at each forum has been of real value to me. This is particularly with other civil society actors; for example in Cameroon, but also with actors from the government administration as well as from research institutes such as CIFOR. This means that I now regularly receive information about research, trainings etc.’ (CSO participant, Congo Brazzaville)

Another positive effect of collaborative efforts during the FGF process is that it has built capacity between local partners working with a larger international organisation. This is regarded as a valuable development which can support future partnership work. One international partner claimed that working with local partners allows them to work **‘more strategically’**¹⁰⁶ to meet their goals. A concrete example is given by one respondent: **‘For FODER there is definitely a capacity building element as it’s the first**

¹⁰² Interview (34): Independent consultant – UK

¹⁰³ Survey respondent

¹⁰⁴ Interview (27): FODER – Cameroon partner

¹⁰⁵ Interview (32): Civic Response – Ghana partner

¹⁰⁶ Interview (24): FAO – Italy

time FODER has been heavily involved in forestry events and has organised a 200-person event. So FODER have gained more skills and confidence, and will be able to use this for future events'¹⁰⁷. Thus, the FGFs strengthened capacity through intimate access to knowledge and training on organising and chairing of stakeholder meetings, negotiating (practical elements such as venues, catering, speakers, and technical equipment), and supporting communication activities (publicity and information sharing). Such activities encourage organisations to ask themselves if they have effective systems and processes in place to promote forest governance, for example effective communication strategies and participatory processes (see Box 8). Equipped with accurate information, skills in event planning, increased awareness of debates in the forest sector, and more sensitivity to the needs of other stakeholders, CSOs' capabilities to influence or change forest governance have been strengthened by their involvement in FGFs (see Box 8). By strengthening the capacity of participating organisations, FGFs have helped to strengthen the watchdog function of CSOs in monitoring forest governance and in pressuring duty-bearers into action. However, building capacity of CSOs should not come at the expense of diminishing state power¹⁰⁸. Some respondents have noted the danger of overlooking and ignoring state and private sector mechanisms in favour of CSOs. This can also place unrealistic expectations on CSOs and subject

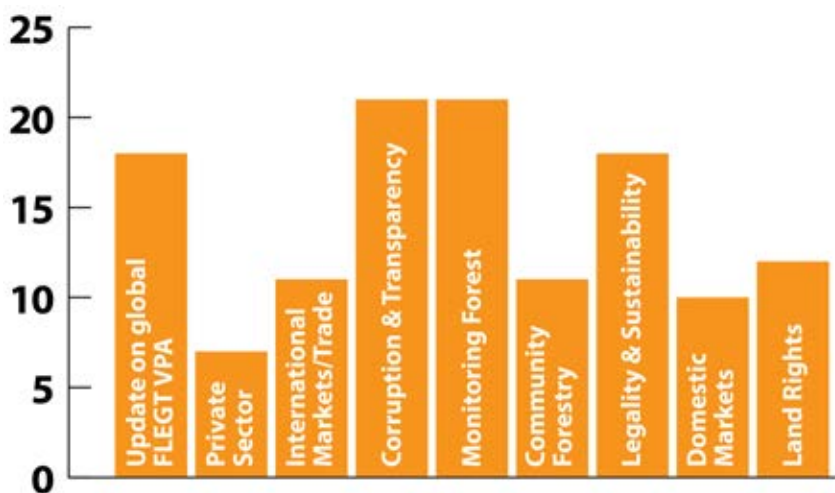
them to greater political interference, which they may not have the capacity or resources to control.

5.3 SUPPORTING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY AND FIGHTING CORRUPTION

Central to the VPA process is the need to make governments, companies and individuals accountable for their actions. This does not pertain to the forest sector alone. There is often a lack of adequate checks and balances across government. Discussions with respondents highlight that resolving corruption and promoting accountability are still very much at the forefront of the struggle against illegal logging.

This is reflected in the survey findings. The majority of participants rated the presentations on corruption and forest governance monitoring as the most relevant to them (see Figure 10). For example, participants from DRC explained how the Congolese forestry sector is characterised by the blatant abuse of artisanal logging permits, lack of access to information and poor practice. Of particular importance was the fact that in most of the participants' countries, stakeholders stressed that they have limited space, opportunity and capacity to question government officials and challenge them on forest governance issues.

Figure 10. Topics that represent the most interest to participants (survey respondents)



¹⁰⁷ Interview (27): FODER – Cameroon partner

¹⁰⁸ Interview (5): Private sector – UK

5.3.1 Creating ‘Venues of Accountability’



“Being an opportunity for civil society to speak out is the single most important aspect to FGFs – it’s rare and increasingly necessary to have the confidence to do that.”
FGF participant

FGFs have successfully created and enhanced existing ‘venues of accountability’¹⁰⁹ in the project countries and beyond. FGFs have contributed to improving accountability in the following ways: first, by supporting multi-stakeholder participation and dialogue. As identified previously, respondents stressed that the way in which the FGFs provided a safe and secure space was conducive to promoting openness and giving participants opportunities to voice their concerns. This in turn strengthens their confidence to participate in stakeholder negotiations and reforms. Importantly, community stakeholders pointed out that the open nature of the forums has given them a credible and effective independent channel for airing grievances.

One community participant voiced how the FGFs gave them space to ‘talk about how illegal logging is affecting my community and to bring more attention to this matter’¹¹⁰. This is important, given the weak rule of law in the project countries. It provides critical space for participants such as indigenous communities, who may lack the means to be legally represented, to present their case.

More broadly, the presence and the increasing engagement and dialogue between CSOs, industry and government at the FGFs testify that such platforms are crucial to mitigating conflict between sectors and building trust.

BOX 9: CASE STUDY ON ACCOUNTABILITY

‘I was inspired by the case of Liberia at the first forum I attended. The Liberian civil society representatives had a very frank debate with the government about a certain aspect of forest governance. They contradicted what the government representative was saying and really demonstrated that they had done their research and knew what they were talking about. This really inspired me as I recognised that civil society plays a very important role and that it can hold the government to account so it motivated me to do the same in forest governance processes in CAR e.g. in FLEGT-VPA, and issues around land tenure reform.’ (FGF participant, CAR)

Similarly, vertical accountability was identified by many respondents as a significant outcome of the FGF initiative. Vertical accountability essentially refers to citizen power over the state¹¹¹. FGFs have strengthened citizen power in several ways. One Global Witness campaigner argued that the FGFs were a useful tool in building the confidence of local stakeholders, citing an example of where

¹⁰⁹ Interview (2): GW – UK partner

¹¹⁰ Interview (2): GW – UK partner

¹¹¹ See www.transparency-initiative.org/about/definitions

Global Witness sponsored six CSO members from other countries to participate at the Ghana FGF in 2011. Working with these participants, Global Witness helped to build their capacity, so that they **‘could stand up, ask direct and difficult questions, and challenge officials and the logging sector donor community at the forum – to push them in public, to make commitments, to make statements and to reassert that they are committed to reforming forest governance and not just tinkering with the easy bits’**¹¹². Thus, FGFs have given participants a platform to demand answers and rectification, and officials the opportunity to respond (see Box 9).

Integral to this outcome – vertical accountability – is the promotion of social accountability mechanisms: the process by which citizens, CSOs and public bodies’ exact accountability. By providing a **‘venue’** of accountability, FGFs support social accountability strategies such as civil society mobilisation. On a number of occasions respondents noted that the FGFs have helped to empower CSOs and individuals, as the **‘participation of civil society in [the] forest sector process has improved significantly at a national level’**¹¹³.

“It was really important for people coming out of Cameroon to have an arena to express something they couldn’t say in their country.”
Participant, Spain

This is particularly true in the case of Ghana. Respondents suggested that the increasing presence of CSOs and their involvement in FGFs has allowed **‘them to serve on forest governance platforms and get involved with high-level actors’**¹¹⁴. This also indicates that there is a level of prestige attached to attending FGFs, as by challenging government in the FGFs it **‘gives them recognition’**¹¹⁵. By bringing together stakeholders, particularly CSOs, the forums lay the foundation for

collective action and build capacity of both individuals and CSOs to demand accountability. Besides CSOs, respondents in some cases have asserted that the presence of different agencies and departments can encourage a **‘system of monitoring’**¹¹⁶. This suggests that FGFs can potentially contribute to horizontal accountability – the capacity of the state to check abuse of powers by public bodies and departments within the government. Typically, this happens between line ministries and the legislative bodies that oversee them, or with the functions of an auditor general or commission for administrative justice. It also happens when branches of government such as the departments of agriculture, natural resources, communications and education monitor each other to ensure a mechanism of checks and balances within internal structures. For this reason, a key lesson to emerge was to ensure the presence of as many parliamentarians, public bodies and departments beyond the forest sector at future forums.



“It is a taboo subject in our country and it is very difficult to approach in the presence of government decision makers. The forums helped achieve this. Well done!”
Survey respondent

¹¹² Interview (2): GW – UK partner

¹¹³ Interview (20): Government – Ghana

¹¹⁴ Interview (24): FAO – Italy

¹¹⁵ Interview (2): Partner – UK

¹¹⁶ Interview (20): Government – Ghana

By encouraging widespread participation on a regional and international scale, the FGFs have clearly supported venues of accountability for participants beyond the project countries. One DRC respondent articulated the dangers associated with standing up to government in some countries, including his own, particularly in cases of corruption. Importantly, it may not be possible in some countries even for government officials to openly discuss forest governance and express opinions or flaws in government processes. As one governance expert at the Yaoundé 2014 forum declared: **‘I remember quite well someone from the Congolese administration that was upset about the [VPA] process that it was not turning well in his country; he was really unable to express this in his country’**. At the FGF, however, **‘he did that quite well and clearly’**¹¹⁷.

Overall, FGFs support a broader developmental outcome: greater awareness, civic engagement, and participation not only allow sectors to have greater knowledge of government actions, but also encourage political accountability. This has important implications on government practices, as officials note that **‘it is not just local people that will be watching, but the international community as well; this pushes the government to do something’**¹¹⁸.

5.3.2 Improving Transparency

Promoting accountability is not possible without advancing transparency processes in VPA countries. Transparency requires all stakeholders to be able to access information on the laws, policies, procedures and decisions that affect them. In the forest sector, it is also essential to ensure access for affected communities to forest management plans, production quotas and yields, and social responsibility agreements. Issues of transparency tie in closely with supporting good governance and tackling corruption, which are the two critical challenges facing countries implementing VPAs. The vast majority of respondents mentioned that lack of transparency is a persistent issue in the

forestry sector, particularly at the top level. However, the FGFs have helped to promote transparency in several ways. Respondents pointed out that the forums have reinforced the importance for countries to promote transparency in the forestry sector. Legal clarity was identified as important to reducing corruption and advancing transparency. Respondents have stressed the importance of information on EU Timber Regulation, the US Lacey Act, and changes in international markets, monitoring indicators, independent auditing and discussions on VPA verification protocol.

BOX 10: CASE STUDY ON TRANSPARENCY

‘Prior to attending the forums, I had thought that the only effective means of improving transparency in the timber industry was to certify the wood with a scheme such as FSC. I knew a bit about FLEGT-VPA, I saw it as somewhat limiting with all the legislation, but the forum enabled me to understand more about the whole process linked to FLEGT-VPA and particularly about the benefits it will bring about in terms of reducing illegal activity and all the negatives aspects associated with this.’ (FGF participant, Cameroon)

Such knowledge has empowered participants and organisations, including industry, to check if timber meets the legality definition. Civil society participants in particular have benefited from this. As part of their monitoring role, CSOs are now aware that they have the right to demand access to forestry documents and demand information be made public. In the same vein, information exchanges have encouraged institutional clarity: FGFs have provided participants with a clear definition of roles and responsibilities of key sectors and stakeholders in the VPA process, and this can increase accountability.

¹¹⁷ Interview (33): EFI – Spain

¹¹⁸ Interview (26): CSO – Cameroon

5.4 FROM FOREST GOVERNANCE TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

Although not a prominent theme in the study, some participants indicated that FGFs were not just about tackling forestry-related issues, but have also helped stakeholders to engage in discussions on governance in general. For example, the participation of various stakeholders (community, CSOs, private sector and government actors) at the forums has enabled the development of a healthy and effective interaction between government and citizens. Public participation fosters democratic principles. This has the potential to produce significant governance benefits; it strengthens checks and balances, it fosters direct civic engagement, and it helps to **'mobilise political will'**¹¹⁹. Through dialogue, actors are able to strengthen cooperation and collaborate on efforts.

FGFs create a framework for citizens to participate actively in political processes and to integrate their concerns into governance structures. By providing a platform to air concerns about insecure community and indigenous peoples' rights, for example, the FGFs can potentially enable the integration of marginalised and underrepresented groups into the political framework. As one community member reports **'the FGF encouraged me to be more aware of the political situation, be aware of my rights, and has helped sensitise me on the laws and policies on forest governance'**¹²⁰. Thus, issues of inclusion, accountability and transparency are not isolated to the forestry sector. Implementing forest governance policies can potentially feed into other governance areas.

5.5 REFLECTIONS

Increased confidence and knowledge of legality issues demonstrates that FGFs are a crucial part of making CSOs and community participants aware of policies and procedures to ensure timber legality. There is a body of



key information should be readily available, and if it is not, FGFs have the capacity to demand it to be public. In addition, open spaces for multi-stakeholders are vital to fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.

The FGFs have given different stakeholder groups – including government officials – the confidence to be active and engage constructively in resolving forest governance issues collectively. The exchanges and participatory processes that are characteristic of FGFs have also been crucial for building organisation and individual capacity. Finally, FGFs have encouraged the recognition of broader governance issues such as the inclusion of marginalised groups in the political process, building political will and strengthening interactions between civil society, government and other key groups. Consequently, FGFs have proved to be a valuable vehicle driving forward broader debates on good governance.

¹¹⁹ Interview (33): EFI – Spain

¹²⁰ Interview (54): Community – Cameroon



SECTION 6

Networking



6.1 OVERVIEW

Perhaps one of the most beneficial aspects of the FGFs has been their ability to provide an environment for participants to network. In countries where high-level multi-stakeholder meetings are limited, due to lack of funding and other resources, finding and maintaining allies in the forest sector proves a continuing challenge. All of the FGF study respondents identified networking as an effective and a useful feature of the forums. As a result, participants mentioned several benefits arising from their new and strengthened connections with other organisations.

“FGFs allowed me to develop a network of partners, a network of friends and a network of collaborators at the national and international level. Nationally, because people know that I have attended these big forums, I am often asked to share my experiences and this helps sector to really push things forward politically in my country. It helps me to bring issues to the table and to mobilise the stakeholders.”
FGF participant, CAR

6.1.2 Making Allies: Not what you know, but who you know

Participants stressed the opportunity that the forum has provided for making important connections with key stakeholders. One concrete example is given by a Cameroon community leader who declared that as a result of the forum, he was able to secure a meeting with the **‘Secretary General of the Ministry of Forests; we will go to him and raise our problems – he will understand that we have tangible problems that merit the attention of the government’**¹²¹. This was a major advantage of the FGF, as it opened

the door to talk to highly influential people that some stakeholders would not otherwise have the opportunity to meet.

Additionally, many participants – including those from neighbouring countries – have taken advantage of the presence of donor representatives, such as the EU, FAO and other international organisations. One CSO member from Cameroon noted that during the DRC 2013 forum he was able to meet with potential donors and discuss the lack of donor money coming into his country for forest governance. Consequently, he was able to **‘build productive relationship’** to increase the possibility of obtaining funding. This highlights how networking at the FGF is an effective way for stakeholders to tap into advice and expertise on relevant issues (see Box 11).

BOX 11: CASE STUDY ON NETWORKING

‘The forum gave me an opportunity to expand my network. If I need some information now about a particular topic, I have a range of people I can turn to. I stayed in contact with the moderator of the forum. I also met the Tax Manager of the Congo Basin Forest Fund and they exchanged information about the different projects going on in the Congo Basin. I also met someone who had completed a PhD who he found very useful as the exchanged information on indigenous populations and taxes from the forest sector and the fight against poaching. I used all this information to complete my thesis, for which I gained a top mark, as well as in my work since completing my Masters.’ (FGF participant, Cameroon)

As one project partner notes, **‘the FGFs provide a space to push these actors closer with the same goals together, it**

¹²¹ Interview (54): Community – Cameroon

produces interconnections which allow for more effective and faster flow of information. CSOs will now have links to other organisations and groups, and can exchange and request information from them¹²². Consequently, FGFs provide participants with space to make these important connections and potential avenues and networks that can increase momentum, break down barriers, and improve access to forest governance-related information (see 2.2.2 for more on information networks).

6.1.3 Face-to-Face Interactions

One primary reason put forward by a majority of the participants for attending the FGF was the element of face-to-face interaction. One participant emphasised how important social interaction is in African culture and that it **'was very important to get to know people working in the same field [rather] than just see a name or email'**¹²³. Personal social relationships are highly valued and in most cases are seen as a prerequisite to creating a working relationship. FGFs provided a platform for participants to get to know important stakeholders and make these meaningful relationships (see Box 11). As one donor comments, participants can hold **'important corridor discussions, people coming from Congo, from Cameroon and from other countries can have discussions on opportunities for change. They don't usually get this chance to speak to each other, so it is very good to have this'**¹²⁴. For one participant, this is particularly **'relevant for countries where the internet is not as same as in Europe'**¹²⁵, as networking through social media may not be as effective. Therefore, more emphasis is placed on face-to-face meetings. Consequently, one lesson learnt here is the immense value placed on face-to-face interaction in building effective working relationships.

6.1.4 COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS/JOINT VENTURES

A number of respondents provided concrete examples of instances where they had

capitalised on the presence of national, regional and international actors in order to find possible synergies on research projects and to start new forest initiatives. In addition, through networking and partnership, participants were able to obtain advice on proposal writing to secure funding. Collaborating on projects can also help to reduce duplicate processes occurring in the same context, as potentially communication between organisations will increase and therefore they can obtain knowledge of others' activities in the field (see 2.3.2 for more information on synergies and collaboration between stakeholders).

6.2 REFLECTIONS

One key lesson to emerge is the importance of networking and creating partnerships to build confidence. Many FGF participants suggested that the FGFs provided space to make connections that could positively contribute and increase their influence, reputation and credibility. Many local partners have reported that their involvement with the FGFs has significantly raised their profile in the forestry sector, meaning that they are now seen as trustworthy and reliable organisations. The importance of sustaining such key connections and finding new **'allies'** should not be underestimated. Cross-country linkages enable organisations to exert greater influence and reach wider audiences to tackle illegal logging and improve forest governance. The challenge now is to ensure that efforts invested to create these ties and connections are not wasted; opportunities for face-to-face networking should continue. Finally, despite the advantages of social networks, one must consider the context. In many of the participant and project countries, Internet access is often limited, and therefore there is much more emphasis on face-to-face networking. FGFs act to bridge this **'networking gap'** and provide space for potential networking venues.

¹²² Interview (23): Partner – UK

¹²³ Interview (43): CSO – Cameroon

¹²⁴ Interview (25): EU – Cameroon

¹²⁵ Interview (20): Government – Ghana



SECTION 7

Concluding Thoughts



7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNT

Figure 11. Key FGF achievements

Findings demonstrate that the FGFs have successfully strengthened participants' involvement in the forest sector by: 1) strengthening an enabling learning environment, 2) strengthening inclusion, 3) strengthening capacity, and 4) strengthening collaboration. These four interlinked factors collectively have improved awareness of the VPA processes and succeeded in establishing information exchange networks that can potentially go beyond tackling illegal logging and promote good governance.



Below is a summary of the lessons that have been discussed in this report on the four years of Forest Governance Forums in Cameroon, DRC, Ghana and Liberia:

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

1. Information sharing is critical; as a platform for knowledge transfer, findings illustrate that FGFs have been useful in filling gaps in knowledge on the FLEGT-VPA process and forest governance issues, suggesting that public access to information remains limited in project countries.

2. Information sharing amongst various groups and levels not only contributes to an effective learning environment, but can also lead to a realisation that forest governance cannot be conducted in isolation, but needs national, regional, international and multi-sectoral collaboration.

3. The creative value of transnational exchanges should not be underestimated. Aside from increased knowledge, transnational exchanges demonstrate a deepening level of trust and encourage a greater commitment from all stakeholders to improve forest governance.

4. Dialogue and cooperation at a regional level is essential to successfully develop uniform practices and strengthen responses to illegal logging.

REPRESENTATION

5. Perhaps the most notable finding from this study was the level of participation in all project countries. An average of 200 people attended each FGF. With two exceptions¹²⁶, no per diems or bursaries for travel expenses were offered (with the exception of all speakers and community representatives). Such a high level of participation reflects the strong motivation for stakeholder participation in forest governance initiatives.

6. Private sector representation proved challenging due to time and motivational constraints, and organisers of future events like FGFs must be innovative to ensure private sector participation, which remains problematic in all four project countries. There is a need for early engagement with the private sector, for example on agenda setting, to integrate them wholly within the FGF process. There is also a need to shift away from a one-dimensional understanding of the private sector as a homogenous group and to ensure that SMEs and non-formal loggers are represented on forest platforms.

7. Ensuring effective participation by communities in the FLEGT-VPA process

¹²⁶ Per diems were given to community members who were unable to afford transportation and accommodation costs in two cases, in Liberia in May 2012 and in Yaoundé in October 2014

will always be a challenge. Future FGFs could consider stronger efforts to support community participation at such events (including strengthening capacity building of local communities), or alternatively their wider programmes could include a role for national-level NGOs to hold local-level FGFs. This would help strengthen local accountability, by including local or provincial government representatives: something of particular relevance to a large country like the DRC.

ORGANISATION

8. Establishing a strong consultative process with forest sector stakeholders to discuss and provide continuous feedback on the agenda and implementation process ensured FGF objectives and outcomes align the national trajectory of the project country.

9. The belief that participants could invoke the Chatham House rules helped ensure that these FGF meetings were an open and safe space for constructive dialogue. It empowered them to voice their concerns and be frank in their exchanges. Maintaining a belief that Chatham House rules apply to the FGFs has proved to be effective in providing a fast-paced and intensive learning space for participants. Consequently, efforts need to be made to ensure this open, safe space is strengthened and sustained.

10. Maximising the convening power of different players and actors is critical in ensuring that these national high-level multi-stakeholder meetings attract the right speakers and participants. Moreover, participation of local partners should not be restricted by logistical aspects, as their involvement encourages active partnership and responsibility, as well as building organisational skills.

11. Multi-stakeholder platforms can help to build institutional and individual capacity, and the increasing participation of CSOs at the FGFs have encouraged their monitoring/watchdog role in the VPA implementation process.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP FOR FOREST GOVERNANCE

12. One of the biggest challenges in many forest countries is poor governance. FLEGT-VPA processes aim to promote policy and legal reforms, good governance, capacity building and transparency. During the course of the lesson learning study, a range of views have been expressed on how FGFs are helping the VPA negotiating and implementing countries to build governance capacity in terms of active citizenship, greater transparency and the enhancement of accountability.

13. FGFs can be effective in creating venues of accountability. In most of the participating countries, there is a lack of accountability and a reluctance of government officials to engage publicly in debate on the forest sector. In efforts to overcome this, FGFs have successfully enhanced vertical and political accountability by providing a secure arena for citizens to ask difficult questions to officials and hold them to account.

14. Greater visibility leads to a reduction in corruption, as governments become increasingly aware their actions are under scrutiny and subject to criticism. Given the participatory/public nature of the forums, FGFs have exposed the forestry sector in project countries to national and international attention and debate.

15. Through participation in the FGFs, participations have developed capacity in knowledge and confidence. Consequently, there is a notable domino effect as FGFs have helped maintain engagement in forestry debates and attendance in meetings.

NETWORKING

16. Building strategic alliances is critical in sustaining any efforts aimed at improving forest governance. FGFs offered a valuable networking opportunity to build alliances between government, civil society and the private sector, allowing stakeholders'

opportunities to collaborate with each other on subsequent projects, research, and analysis and policy reforms. This can help to strengthen the transfer of knowledge, facilitate horizontal and vertical information flows, and prevent duplication of initiatives, saving time, energy and resources.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. To maximise the benefits of such meetings it is essential to establish effective information management systems and strengthen information dissemination processes for all affected stakeholders and communities.

2. Open and secure spaces for multi-stakeholder engagement are a valued resource for civil society and the private sector. Efforts need to be made to ensure the continuation of such spaces, as active citizenship is needed to foster a culture of transparency and accountability.

3. Both civil society and governments need to support the design of mechanisms to ensure representation at the local level: communities and indigenous peoples.

4. Further consultation and engagement is needed with the private sector. The study has indicated that the private sector can be a useful actor with the potential for encouraging responsible behaviour, given their organisational capacity, resources and vested interest in a more positive perception of the forestry sector in general. Organisers must also ensure early engagement with the private sector as a means of obtaining feedback on the agenda, which is critical in motivating private sector participation: the private sector will engage in the process only if it is relevant to them and they can genuinely influence it.

5. FGFs can be an effective platform through which academic bodies and the media can be engaged in efforts to improve forest governance including FLEGT-VPA processes.

They remain an untapped resource for improving forest governance. Formalising and integrating academics and media institutions into the forums allows organisers to capitalise on the links and networks that they bring, in order to raise awareness of relevant issues to a much larger audience and potentially transform neutral actors into active supporters of the FLEGT process.

6. Further efforts are needed to ensure local ownership of the design and implementation of such initiatives. This enables such interventions to be adapted to the local context and gives legitimacy to the process. There is also a need to maximise convening power; drawing in all relevant local/international bodies into the FGF process allows us to draw into the forest governance framework the people whose participation is necessary but who are sometimes difficult to engage with, such as some private sector groups.



ANNEX 1: OVERVIEW OF FGF AND ITS ROLE IN SAFG

The overall objective of the Strengthening African Forest Governance project is to improve awareness on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade-Voluntary Partnership Agreements (FLEGT-VPAs) and other international initiatives to combat illegal logging, as well as the engagement of civil society, communities and the private sector in efforts to improve forest governance. The project is implemented in Cameroon, DRC, Ghana and Liberia, countries that are at various stages of VPA negotiation and implementation. The project also seeks to promote debate and freedom of expression on forest policies in these four countries.

Cameroon, DRC, Ghana and Liberia are all engaged in FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA) with the EU, aimed at eliminating illegal logging and improving forest governance. The project aims specifically to strengthen the engagement of civil society, indigenous communities and the private sector in multi stakeholder processes leading to successful VPA preparation, negotiation and implementation.

The project involves four key activities:

- carrying out capacity needs assessments for private sector, communities and civil society actors involved in FLEGT VPA negotiations and implementation;
- facilitating in-country capacity building events for private sector, communities and civil society actors involved in FLEGT VPA negotiations and implementation;
- delivering an annual UK-based training course on Improving Forest Governance for 'high' level civil society and private sector stakeholders involved in FLEGT VPA negotiations and implementation; and
- organising 'Chatham House style' illegal logging update meetings (Forest

Governance Forums) in each of the four countries.

The focus of the lesson learning study was on the final component of the project, the Forest Governance Forums (FGFs), and the In-country illegal logging up-date meetings for 'high' and 'mid' level stakeholders. The FGF activity was designed to foster open and transparent exchange of views and information on relevant national and international forest policy and interventions aimed towards improving forest governance and combating illegal logging. These forums explore issues which affect the forest sector, such as transparency and the rule of law. Within each country a two-day national Forest Governance Forum Meeting or stakeholder consultation meeting on reducing illegal logging and improving forest governance is organised and delivered. So far, two meetings have been held in each of held following: Cameroon, DRC, Ghana and Liberia. These meetings are modelled on the Illegal Logging Stakeholder Update meetings held bi-annually at Chatham House in London. Active stakeholders from the private sector, government, civil society, research institutes, the international communities and local communities are invited to attend and give presentations at these Forest Governance Forum meetings.

The structure of the FGFs usually comprises of a series of three 15-minute presentations followed by around an hour of questions and answers including open discussions and exchanges. The forums are designed to be free, inclusive and open to all. The presentations and reports are posted on a dedicated website, www.forestgovernanceforum.com, and a report for each meeting is compiled and published. The meetings are bi-lingual with simultaneous translation between French and English.



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