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### **Ghana Ready to Implement Legal Timber Agreement**

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BY: Mary Mensah



Ghana is now ready for the final assessment of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) that will ensure that timber and timber products exported to the European Union (EU) come from legal sources.

The implementation of the final assessment will enable Ghana to begin the issuance of the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) licence.

The Director of the Timber Validation Department of the Forestry Commission, Mr Chris Beeko, announced this at the Food and Agricultural Organisation FAO-EU FLEGT

programme on knowledge-sharing among three countries, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Laos People's Democratic Republic in Accra.

The programme, comprising a two-day conference, field trips and discussions on challenges which each country is facing in developing its VPA and timber legality assurance system (TLAS).

Both the DR Congo and the Laos People's Democratic Republic have sought support in moving forward with their own trade agreements with the EU and expressed interest in details of Ghana's experience.

#### Forestry commission

The programme was organised by the Forestry Commission with support from the FAO-EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) programme.

Ghana was the first country to sign onto the EU VPA 10 years ago to enable it export logs to the European market.

Mr Beeko said the VPA between the EU and a timber-producing country was a legally binding trade arrangement that enjoined timber-exporting countries and businesses to develop verification systems to demonstrate that legal processes were applied at every stage of the value chain.

He said that included timber harvesting, the transportation and storage of logs, and the processing and exporting of finished wood products.



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SENT TO LSU AGCENTER/LOUISIANA FOREST PRODUCTS DEVELOPMENT CENTER - FOREST SECTOR / FORESTY PRODUCTS INTEREST GROUP FLEGT Action Plan

Mr Beeko indicated that the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme was a part of a global network of actors supported by the EU to implement the FLEGT Action Plan, adopted in 2003 by EU member states in response to the global environmental, economic and social consequences of illegal timber trade.

He said the EU was a major donor for the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme, as well as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom.

The Action Plan, he said, outlines a series of supply and demand side measures to improve forest governance and legality in the forest sector and ultimately enable Sustainable Forest Management (SFM).

“In 2009, Ghana signed a VPA with the EU as part of the FLEGT programme. The VPA is designed to ensure that timber and timber products exported to the EU come from legal sources.”

According to the FAO Forestry Officer, Marc Vandehaute, “The multi-country approach to knowledge-sharing allows participating countries to widen their exposure to lessons and experiences from other regions while making it possible for the host country to meet various requests with a single event.”

For his part, Mr Joachin Kondi, Project and Focal Point Coordinator of the Forest Economy Ministry of Congo said Congo signed onto the agreement in 2010, but started full implementation in 2013.

He said although they were faced with numerous challenges, the FLEGT?VPA process is making significant progress and hoped to learn from the Ghana experience.

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Richard P. Vlosky, Ph.D.  
*Director, Louisiana Forest Products Development Center*  
*Crosby Land & Resources Endowed Professor of Forest Sector Business Development*  
Room 227, School of Renewable Natural Resources  
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
Phone (office): (225) 578-4527; Fax: (225) 578-4251; Mobile Phone: (225) 223-1931  
Web Site: [www.LFPDC.lsu.edu](http://www.LFPDC.lsu.edu)



**President, Forest Products Society; President, WoodEMA i.a.**

