



# Interaction between the FLEGT-VPA and REDD+ in Ghana: Recommendations for interaction management<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Deforestation and forest degradation remain high worldwide, and one of the dominant underlying causes for this forest loss is illegal logging. Numerous international policies have been developed aimed at addressing these issues. This article studies two of these regimes, the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan and its Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with Ghana, and the climate mitigation policy of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). The interactions between these two international policies at the national level, namely in Ghana, are analyzed. The research shows numerous current and anticipated interactions between the two regimes. Most of these interactions potentially have a positive influence, but much depends on the future implementation of both regimes. The article makes recommendations on how to manage the interactions in order to improve the synergies and enhance effectiveness, including institutionalizing information sharing and learning, jurisdictional delimitation, and improving collaboration.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past decades, deforestation and forest degradation have remained high (FAO, 2010; MEA, 2005). This continued deforestation exacerbates biodiversity loss and desertification, and significantly contributes to climate change, all of which are major contemporary environmental challenges (CBD, 2009; IPCC, 2007). In addition, forests provide a source of livelihood for close to 2 billion people around the world and the forestry sector employs around 10 million people globally (FAO, 2010). Continued deforestation and forest degradation therefore pose a major threat to the livelihood of the many communities dependent on forests, and to the economies of countries where forests and related resources are significant contributors to socio-economic development, as is the case in many developing countries.

In response, over the last two decades, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, and governments have debated the development of a binding international regime for the governance of the world's forests. While agreement on a legally binding global forest regime has remained elusive, there are today a large number of non-legally binding forest regimes including the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, and market-based instruments such as the Forest Stewardship

Council (FSC), among many others (Humphreys, 2006; Karsenty et al., 2008; Rayner et al., 2010; Visseren-Hamakers and Glasbergen, 2007). Recently, two new forest regimes have emerged: the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan, and 'Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries' (REDD+) within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

In spite of the large number of international forest (and forest related) regimes, deforestation and forest degradation continue, raising questions regarding their effectiveness in promoting conservation and sustainable forest management. The proliferation of such a large number of forest regimes also raises questions regarding this rising density and the interactions between the different regimes, and calls for mechanisms for harmonizing their aims and objectives (Smouts, 2008). This harmonization is particularly necessary given the multi-level nature of the forest regimes, the lack of communication among them, and the fact that the provisions of the different regimes may be contradictory and thus confuse implementation, especially at the national level (Humphreys, 2006; Smouts, 2008; Stokke, 2001).

However, before one is able to develop robust mechanisms for harmonizing the aims, objectives, and implementation of international regimes and developing synergies between them – in other words manage the interactions (Oberthür and Stokke, 2011) – understanding how they interact is necessary (Gehring and Oberthür, 2009). While

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several studies have analyzed interactions between international regimes, such analyses have mostly been concentrated at the international level with little, if any, at the national level. Furthermore, there is no analysis that has particularly examined interactions between international forest (and forest related) regimes at the national level. To fill this gap, this article examines how international forest regimes influence each other's development and performance at the national level. It specifically focuses on the interactions between the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) of FLEGT and REDD+ processes in Ghana, conscious of the fact that both regimes are still evolving and are yet to see any real implementation. Apart from examining the interactions of international regimes at the *national* level, our contribution is significant for another reason. In exploring the interactions between the two regimes, we go beyond just examining whether the interactions are positive or negative, and also identify ways of managing the interactions in a manner that enhances synergies between the regimes.

The article is structured as follows. Below, [Section 2](#) puts the FLEGT-VPA and REDD+ processes in Ghana into perspective. [Section 3](#) describes the concept of regime interaction that serves as our analytical framework. [Section 4](#) details existing and anticipated interactions between FLEGT-VPA and REDD+ in Ghana. [Section 5](#) discusses the interactions and recommends ways of managing the interactions in a manner that enhances synergies between them, and concludes the article. The analysis is based on the results of two MSc theses that analyze the participation and communication processes of the FLEGT-VPA process ([Owusu, 2009](#)) and the REDD+ process ([Ochieng, 2010](#)) in Ghana. Both studies were based on semi-structured interviews with purposefully selected respondents that had been actively engaged in the processes. This information was supplemented by further document analysis and literature review, four in-depth interviews with representatives involved in the two processes, and personal experience and knowledge from involvement of one of the authors in both processes in Ghana. The research covers the period 2009–2010.

## 2. The FLEGT-VPA and REDD+ processes in Ghana

Over the last century, Ghana has lost 80% of its original forests ([Repetto, 1990](#)). The current annual deforestation rate (for the period 2000–2010) is estimated at 2.1% ([FAO, 2011](#)), and many forest reserves are heavily encroached and degraded, and the off-reserve resources are quickly being depleted ([Ghana R-PP, 2010b](#)). The underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation in Ghana include, among others, the high reliance on forests for subsistence by local communities, and illegal logging ([Appiah et al., 2007](#); [Blay et al., 2007](#); [Osei-Tutu et al., 2010](#)). Key drivers include agricultural expansion, wood harvesting, population and development pressures, and mineral exploitation and mining ([Ghana R-PP, 2010b](#)). It is estimated that around 70% of the timber harvest in Ghana is illegal and most of the illegal timber is sold on the domestic market. The illegal logging is focused on the commercially most valuable timber species, and is endangering the forest reserves ([Hansen and Treue, 2008](#)). Ghana is participating in two international regimes, the EU FLEGT-VPA and REDD+, to enable her to address this myriad of challenges facing her forest sector.

Preparations for the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between Ghana and the European Union (EU) started in 2005; the Agreement was finalized in 2009, when the two Parties agreed to control illegal logging and promote trade in legally produced timber ([Attah et al., 2009](#)). The VPA is an instrument of the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan, that aims to ensure that all timber traded in the EU is obtained from legally recognized sources ([EU, 2003](#)). The EU is a major market destination for Ghana's timber. In 2008, the EU accounted for over 40% of Ghana's total timber export by both volume and value ([Beeko and Adelle, 2009](#); [TIDD, 2010](#)). Ensuring that all timber imports from Ghana into the EU have been sourced from legally recognized sources as provided under the VPA therefore offers a promising strategy for controlling illegal logging

and trade in illegally produced timber. This promise is further reinforced by the fact that the scope of the VPA has now been expanded from covering only domestically traded and timber traded between Ghana and the EU, as initially planned, to also cover timber exported to other destinations ([Ghana-EU VPA, 2008](#)).

The Agreement introduces the Legal Assurance System (LAS). Under the LAS, a timber legality standard (a comprehensive definition of what constitutes legally produced timber and the laws that must be complied with in order to meet the legality standard) is formulated. A chain-of-custody system for tracking timber along the supply chain is also established. A Wood Tracking System (WTS) is to be introduced to effectuate the chain-of-custody system, which traces movement of wood from the forest, along the entire supply chain, up to the point of export and covers all types of wood including those imported into Ghana. A verification and validation system is developed to ensure that procedures for achieving timber legality and all administrative requirements are complied with, and a licensing system for issuance of FLEGT licenses upon fulfilling the requirements of the legality standard is also established. Lastly, an independent monitoring system to assure that the legality assurance system is working as planned is introduced ([Ghana-EU VPA, 2008](#)).

A number of organizations and stakeholders are involved in the VPA process ([Beeko and Arts, 2010](#); [Wiersum and Elands, 2013–this issue](#)). From the government, the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources and the statutory body in charge of forest management, the Forestry Commission of Ghana (FC), including four of its divisions, the Forest Services Division (FSD), Timber Industry Development Department (TIDD), Resource Management Support Centre (RMSC) and the Timber Validation Department (TVD), are involved in the VPA. A multi-stakeholder Steering Committee has been formed to oversee the VPA process. It was mandated to oversee preparatory work for the VPA and to collate the views of different stakeholders and guide the in-country negotiations for the VPA ([Owusu, 2009](#)). It was made up of representatives of other relevant government ministries/agencies, as well as a number of stakeholders including civil society, the timber industry (large, medium and small scale), community-based organizations, local communities and the traditional authorities (the chieftaincies). The VPA Secretariat, formed within the FC and later constituted into a department within the FC, performs the day-to-day administration of VPA affairs in the country and supports the VPA Steering Committee (VPA SC) ([Owusu, 2009](#)), that has been re-designated as the Multi-Stakeholder Implementation Committee (M-SIC) since the signing of the agreement. This multi-stakeholder approach to the VPA has supported the democratization of forestry policy in Ghana; stakeholders are not only consulted, but are proactively involved in policy development ([Attah et al., 2009](#); [Beeko and Arts, 2010](#); [Dooley and Ozinga, 2011](#)).

In 2009, Ghana entered the REDD+ programme of Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) of the World Bank to take opportunities provided by the Facility to enable her to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. REDD+ is currently on the top of the agenda on climate change mitigation of the UNFCCC, and has been debated by the convention since 2005 ([Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2011](#)). Deforestation and forest degradation contribute up to 20% of the global annual greenhouse gas emissions ([IPCC, 2007](#)). REDD+ is aimed at mitigating climate change by reducing deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, where the problem is widespread ([UNFCCC, 2007](#)). While the architecture of REDD+ within the UNFCCC is still under discussion, several REDD+ initiatives have been launched, including the FCPF of the World Bank and the United Nations Collaborative Programme in Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) that support developing countries to 'get ready' for REDD+ ([Visseren-Hamakers and Verkooijen, 2012](#)).

Ghana has identified national REDD+ strategy options through a consultative process. The options (discussed in the Ghana Readiness Preparation Proposal, R-PP) detail the activities that Ghana could

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