

Briefing

FLEGT VPAs and Nationally Determined Contributions

Understanding opportunities

Key messages

- INDCs outline the climate action that countries plan to take post-2020 to accomplish the emissions reduction goals set out in the Paris Agreement. INDCs will become Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as countries ratify the Paris Agreement.
- INDCs incorporate a broad range of sectors including energy, waste and transportation. They also formally recognise the important role of agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors in climate change mitigation. All VPA countries include these land-use sectors in their proposed mitigation and adaptation measures, outlined in their INDCs.
- As the key framework to guide national climate policy, NDCs offer a platform that could be used to raise the profile of forest governance in climate debates. This could promote recognition of VPAs and REDD+ as mechanisms to support national objectives. It could also bring more national understanding, visibility and support to land-use governance challenges.
- Few INDCs described how they will achieve their climate commitments. Information was lacking on plans and steps to operationalise commitments, national stakeholder involvement, and mechanisms for coordination. FLEGT VPA processes already have experience of establishing participatory national processes, increasing institutional clarity and accountability, and working on both supply and demand of timber. These experiences offer lessons that can help countries realistically and credibly achieve their NDC targets.

About this publication

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Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) tackle illegal logging by improving forest governance and promoting legal trade in timber. These goals align with countries' aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the land-use sector and address climate change challenges. Countries' climate commitments are spelt out in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), which were submitted in preparation for the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 21) that took place in Paris in December 2015. Once countries ratify the Paris Agreement, their intentions will become Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs.

The process by which countries will actually implement their NDCs introduces an opportunity to include forest governance challenges into national debate. This process will involve setting priorities and identifying realistic ways to achieve and monitor their climate commitments. It also offers a platform to share experiences from the land-use sector to inform implementation of NDCs.

Most forest loss and degradation of tropical forest is driven by increasing global demand for internationally traded commodities such as soy, beef, palm oil, tropical timber, and plantation-grown timber. Emissions from tropical deforestation are estimated to be responsible for approximately 10 percent of global GHG[1]. Addressing land-use change and improving land-use governance will therefore be critical.

The majority of tropical countries have integrated forests into their INDCs. Mechanisms such as VPAs and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) provide insights into the emerging challenges and offer practical experience to address them. These processes demonstrate that it takes consensus building, political support, multifaceted coordination and strong institutional capacities to address the challenges of land-use governance. In fact, it often requires governments to change the way they do business. It is important to capitalise on existing initiatives that bring visibility, support and competence to this area.

This brief aims to strengthen awareness among stakeholders involved in the implementation of VPAs and NDCs, and the donors that support them. The goal is to encourage dialogue and explore synergies to enable more effective land-use governance and climate action to occur.

INDCs – intended nationally determined contributions

INDCs are the main form of communication that national governments have used to inform the international community about the actions they intend to take to address climate change. Countries submitted their INDCs in the run-up to COP 21, outlining the actions they plan to take post-2020. A total of 162 INDCs[2] have been submitted, covering 189 countries and 98.8% of global greenhouse gas emissions[3].

How countries implement and improve their INDCs will determine the extent to which they collectively achieve the Paris Agreement goals, which include:

- Keeping global temperature rise well below 2°C and setting a path towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient future
- Achieving a balance between emissions and removals of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century

INDCs cover a wide range of sectors such as energy, waste, transportation and manufacturing. They also include agriculture, forestry and other land uses. Most tropical countries have included forests in their INDCs. Several include a description of forest sector activities at various stages of implementation with some detailing measurable forest mitigation targets.

All INDCs submitted by VPA countries referenced forestry activities, and four countries made reference to FLEGT and their VPA process. Few countries described, however, how they will implement their INDCs. Information was lacking on the institutions and stakeholders involved, and the systems and coordination mechanisms needed to monitor implementation and evaluate impact. In addition, few countries outlined how they will address the underlying forest governance challenges to achieve the intended mitigation and adaptation objectives.

NDCs – nationally determined contributions

INDCs will become NDCs as countries ratify the Paris Agreement and start taking action to achieve global climate objectives. To ensure that the actions proposed by signatories are followed up, countries will update their NDCs every five years and report publicly on progress towards their commitments. These reports will be submitted to the UNFCCC and reviewed by technical experts. This review will help countries to take stock and ensure continuous progress.

To deliver on their NDCs, countries are required to turn their general pledges into targeted, implementable policies, measures, programmes and financial investment plans. This process will shape national-level climate strategies by selecting policy options and priorities to achieve national and sectoral goals. Such operational plans need to include detailed information about:

- Policies, measures and enabling actions, regulations and fiscal incentives
- Mechanisms for coordination with other initiatives such as VPAs and REDD+, as well as the Forest Investment Program (FIP), forest-friendly supply chain initiatives, Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Green Climate Fund (GCF) and UN-REDD
- Details of national and international public and private financing

Nations Unies

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NDC discussions on priorities and strategies therefore offer opportunities to encourage relevant and feasible approaches to improve land use governance, create consensus, and contribute to climate mitigation. They should create a framework that is inclusive and promotes intersectoral coordination in order for it to be credible and legitimate. In view of this and the importance of NDCs in countries' climate agendas, VPA processes and partners should understand and interact with the discussions. VPA partners could contribute insights to national NDC objectives, strategies and plans, and to the processes supporting their development and implementation.

These processes could help advance national forest governance objectives through:

Increased visibility: All VPA countries recognised the role of forests and/or agriculture in their mitigation and adaptation contributions. NDCs could offer VPA and REDD+ activities greater national visibility, and promote dialogue around forest governance challenges. The high-level international visibility of NDCs could also remind decision-makers that, while the land-use sector can be a major emitter of greenhouse gases, it also contributes to the creation of innovative and measurable solutions for climate adaptation and mitigation.

Integrating forest governance into national strategies: VPAs focus on the forest sector; NDCs are much broader and include sectors such as transportation, agriculture, waste, energy, industrial processes and product use. These sectors offer different opportunities and expose a broader range of national actors to the challenges in the land-use sector. Through discussions with these sectors, synergies may be identified that present opportunities to address land-use challenges across sectors. NDC development and implementation may offer a means to introduce forest governance challenges and VPA objectives into national plans and strategies. These larger strategies could provide different implementation mechanisms and funding opportunities.



Plenary session at COP21 for the adoption of the Paris Agreement

Source: COP21

FLEGT VPA – valuable experience for NDC implementation

VPAs between the European Union and timber-exporting countries are among the measures of the EU FLEGT Action Plan, which aims to tackle illegal logging by improving forest governance and promoting trade in legal timber products. FLEGT VPA processes offer experiences and lessons that could be useful for countries developing and implementing their climate commitments. In particular:

Stakeholder engagement: FLEGT VPA processes have a rich experience of participatory approaches. Stakeholder participation ensures that the views of different interest groups are heard, strengthens country ownership of policies and measures, and increases government accountability and transparency. VPA processes have demonstrated how the inclusion of different interest groups, their involvement in framing forest policy, can strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of solutions. One of the core strengths and greatest achievements of most FLEGT VPA processes is the robust stakeholder dialogue that has emerged to frame forest decision-making. VPA multi stakeholder processes have engaged government, private sector, civil society and forest community representatives to achieve legal and more sustainable production and trade. Stakeholders have learned through these processes to address potential conflicts collaboratively. Those involved in VPA processes therefore have experience in establishing and maintaining participatory approaches, understanding the challenges that come with such processes. Such experiences could be useful for cross-sectoral NDC dialogue.

Knowledge and understanding of the land-use sector: FLEGT VPA and REDD+ processes have improved national stakeholders' understanding of the land-use sector. Both of these initiatives offer country-specific information about forest governance challenges, drivers of deforestation, spatial data, legal frameworks, land-use sector stakeholders, and government roles and responsibilities, as well as political economy and trade flow analyses. This knowledge can inform the design, quantification, verification and implementation of the NDCs. REDD+ initiatives have also generated land-use information through their initial assessments and monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) systems.

Focus on legal frameworks: FLEGT VPAs focus on the enforcement of existing or revised legal frameworks that regulate forest and land-use decisions. They support the development of effective, accountable and transparent processes and institutions. Legal frameworks in forest countries are often already well-developed and contain some principles of sustainability. A focus on legality and law enforcement therefore brings major gains in terms of climate change mitigation. The importance of legality and law enforcement as a step towards low-carbon sustainable development is often overlooked in NDCs. This is despite the fact that a number of NDCs mention the revision of legal frameworks as a priority for action.

The clarification of national legal frameworks through VPA processes has led to the inclusion of greater oversight and accountability measures. This has been a challenging process. It has involved the clarification of government roles and responsibilities, development of capacity to verify, enforce and comply with legislation, and the introduction of independent audit mechanisms. This combination of institutional clarity together with stronger control mechanisms helps to build credibility and confidence in the system. It would also, therefore, be valuable for NDC implementation. Understanding the problems, hurdles and political challenges that countries have confronted is important.

Trade and markets: Global commodity trade has a major impact on tropical forests. Both FLEGT VPA and REDD+ link demand-side and supply-side measures related to legal timber and zero-deforestation commodities. These efforts demonstrate that by influencing the demand side of the commodity chain, incentives are created that change purchasing decisions. In turn, this influences producer and exporter country behaviour. Trade has helped to engage the necessary political support to implement institutional reforms in producer countries. The power and influence of commodity trade and its impact on climate action is not sufficiently recognised in the NDCs. FLEGT VPA and REDD+ offer interesting learning opportunities.



◀ Independent monitoring in the Republic of the Congo

Source: FLEGT Facilitator

Monitoring progress: Systems to track the implementation of policies and measures outlined in the NDCs can benefit from the experiences of FLEGT VPAs and REDD+. VPA monitoring mechanisms include supply chain tracking, national verification approaches, annual reporting, independent audits, impact monitoring and independent forest observation by non-state actors. VPAs require that many of these efforts are regularly checked, and reported on publicly. They have also learned that these mechanisms need to be structured so that they can adapt and respond to emerging lessons. There is extensive, relevant MRV experience from REDD+ processes, both in relation to carbon and safeguard monitoring. Monitoring systems from VPA and REDD+ processes could be merged or cross-referenced. These include timber legality assurance systems, national forest monitoring systems, and information management systems. 'One Map' approaches could provide opportunities to strengthen monitoring capacities in the forest and land-use sector. Together these approaches could provide opportunities to advance implementation and evaluation of NDCs.

To achieve these monitoring commitments, many VPA countries have had to strengthen their oversight capacity. This has often taken the form of new national procedures, institutional re-organisation, and enhanced information management. NDC implementation may help strengthen these areas further.

Good processes take time: While reducing deforestation and climate change are urgent challenges, unrealistic time frames do not allow for (and could actually compromise) the development of effective policies. FLEGT VPA and REDD+ processes are time consuming because they touch upon the deep-rooted causes of illegal logging and deforestation. For NDCs to be properly designed and implemented, and to act upon the underlying governance challenges, a long-term perspective is required, together with significant political willingness, stakeholder ownership, capacity and an appropriate mix of incentives.

Recommendations for action

FLEGT VPA, REDD+ and NDC initiatives offer opportunities for the forest and land-use sectors to advance national objectives. By encouraging awareness and understanding between the initiatives, a country may be able to capitalise on well-informed stakeholders, lessons and experiences gained in advancing forest and land-use governance, and new mechanisms to create awareness and dialogue. Countries, donors and stakeholders should promote such exchange so that the knowledge, lessons and mechanisms achieved through FLEGT and REDD+ are not re-invented within a NDC context.

Endnotes

[1] http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/solutions/stop-deforestation/deforestation-global-warming-carbon-emissions.html#.WBDA2i19601

[2] Information on INDCs is available on the UNFCCC website <http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/indc/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>

[3] <http://cait.wri.org/indc/>

About the EU FLEGT Facility

The EU FLEGT Facility supports the implementation of the EU FLEGT Action Plan with a focus on Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs). The EU FLEGT Action Plan sets out a programme of actions that forms the EU's response to the problem of illegal logging and the trade in associated timber products. The Facility is hosted by the European Forest Institute (EFI), and was established in 2007.



About the EU REDD Facility

The EU REDD Facility supports partner countries in improving land use governance as part of their effort to slow, halt and reverse deforestation. The Facility also supports the overall EU effort to reduce its impact on deforestation in developing countries. The Facility is hosted by the European Forest Institute (EFI), and was established in 2010.

Disclaimer

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