



DIEGO M. GARCÉS / WWF

GROUNDBREAKING TIMBER INITIATIVE TAKES ROOT

In December 2014, the joint collaboration between TRAFFIC, WWF Colombia and IUCN-South America, concluded the three-year project titled “Supporting the implementation of the EU FLEGT Action Plan¹ in South America: Catalysing initiatives to control and verify the origin of timber in trade and support related improvements in forest governance” (hereafter the “FLEGT Project”).

The FLEGT Project, funded by the European Commission, aimed to create an enabling environment and increase capacity in South America for developing initiatives that reduce illegal logging and bring timber trade in line with EU FLEGT objectives, with a particular focus on trade to the EU from Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (see *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 25(2)). Along with this overarching goal, the FLEGT Project had the following specific objectives:

- to ensure that key stakeholder groups within four selected countries have a clear understanding of the intent and content of the EU-FLEGT Action Plan, the opportunities it provides, and pathways for its implementation;
- to foster a clear understanding in key European forest stakeholders on the complexity of forest governance in South America; and
- to establish a benchmark against which to measure changes in forest governance, including levels of illegal logging and trade, catalysed by FLEGT and other initiatives, in the target countries.

The FLEGT Project targeted a wide range of actors, in particular, State actors represented by government departments and agencies in the project countries, EU trade associations, timber traders, and competent authorities; and non-State actors including forest dependent peoples’ organizations and civil society organizations concerned with forest governance and trade.

In order to achieve these objectives, several key activities were undertaken. Baseline information was collected relating both to the understanding of all project stakeholders of the elements that make up FLEGT, and to the understanding of the current situation in the four South American countries as to the status of trade and management of timber and timber products. This baseline further provided a starting point from which related changes could be measured during the project period and beyond.

Baseline information was collected through structured research—questionnaires and interviews to assess knowledge on governance-related issues, as well as literature and data analysis to review management and trade. Several outputs were produced including “scoping studies” of national management and trade operations, and timber product trade from the target countries to the EU. These documents provide a basis for the public sector to define improvements to existing management systems and processes; for the private sector to streamline company processes and, in the EU, to have greater clarity on processes and trade dynamics that inform “Due Diligence” requirements; and for indigenous groups to have improved understanding of systems that impact forest governance.

Building on this initial information, activities were developed to identify synergies between FLEGT and other forest-related policies being implemented in the four countries. The identification of current synergies allow targeted efforts to be made where related policies or practices can add value to improve the effectiveness of initiatives rather than duplicate or, worse, conflict. This process was strengthened through a multi-stakeholder meeting of regional experts that identified areas of common ground between FLEGT and related initiatives that would benefit from closer mutual engagement.

Baseline information was also used to establish a suite of indicators that could be used to measure changes in forest governance. Also through a multi-stakeholder process, a framework was developed that used existing models for assessing changes in forest governance, based predominantly on the World Bank PROFOR/FAO model, adapted to regional conditions. Indicators common to all countries, as well as national specific indicators, were further identified by national and regional experts, and initial measurements taken. The results of the work set the basis for a repeatable methodology for measuring changes in forest governance in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Forest experts in these countries expressed interest in furthering the implementation of a forest governance methodology, and follow-on work in Peru has already been initiated.

¹EU Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade Action Plan. See <http://www.euflegt.efi.int/flegt-action-plan/>; ²See <http://gfm.panda.org/resources/tools/?202483/Framework-for-Assessing-Legality-of-Forestry-Operations-Timber-Processing-and-Trade>

Another particular focus was to work with indigenous groups to develop an online e-learning course, aimed particularly at indigenous Amazonian representatives. The course emphasizes the potential of FLEGT to reward improvements in forest governance, increase the competitiveness of timber coming from areas applying FLEGT principles, and to support national management efforts, which should result in benefits of reduced trade in illegally sourced timber. Representatives were trained in the use of the course in order to train members of their own communities about opportunities to improve forest governance at the local level. The e-learning tool was showcased at the project-hosted conference on “Governance, Legality Verification Systems and Competitiveness in the Latin American Forest Sector” held in Quito (see below) and received a very positive reception, with interest and recommendations from many participants to adapt the tool to various forest governance scenarios in non-Amazonian areas of Latin America.

To complement the supply side of the project, work was conducted to support the demand side of the FLEGT Action Plan. This was undertaken in the EU, focusing mainly on Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. Work here focused on providing support to the private and public sectors, particularly to support implementation and enforcement efforts related to the EU Timber Regulation “Due Diligence” requirements, focusing on timber trade from South America. This support was provided through the development of briefing documents based on the project outputs from South America in combination with workshops aimed at providing the private sector

“Operators” with tools with which to implement “Due Diligence” when placing timber from South America, and elsewhere, on the EU market. These tools include the use of the TRAFFIC/GFTN (WWF Global Forest & Trade Network) legality frameworks and definitions² which are increasingly being used as reference material by both public and private sector actors for conducting relevant checks on the legal harvesting and trade of timber products.

A preliminary external evaluation of the project has suggested that the project has met the three stated objectives. These objectives were reached through a holistic approach, with activities complementing each other and adding value to the overall project goal—a good example of the whole project being greater than the sum of its parts. The key approach for all these activities was through effective and inclusive communication. Where appropriate, multi-stakeholder dialogues were implemented to allow a range of opinions and thoughts to be expressed and taken into account, particularly those not commonly heard, such as indigenous groups.

This was demonstrated most effectively at the conference on “Governance, Legality Verification Systems and Competitiveness in the Latin American Forest Sector” which engaged 140 regional stakeholders, as well as public and private sector representatives from 10 Latin America countries and from demand side markets such as the EU and the USA. The conference, which aimed at an exchange of experiences and lessons learnt, pulled together the different strands of FLEGT-related activities, resulting in a policy brief that intends to form the basis for future collaboration and action for eliminating the trade in illegal timber and ensuring the sustainable management of forests and their resources. Such was the success of the conference that calls were made by participants for further conferences to be convened biennially to continue the discussions and dialogue established at the Quito Conference, and push forward with the agenda for improved forest governance in Latin America.

TRAFFIC would like to acknowledge the valuable and substantial inputs by implementing partners on the project, WWF Colombia and IUCN-South America. Financial support to the project was provided by the European Commission DG DEVCO, with further support provided by GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) (Synergies work) and the British Embassy, Quito (Conference proceedings). TRAFFIC would also like to acknowledge conference implementing partners for their financial and technical support: FAO FLEGT Programme, the European Forestry Institute EU FLEGT Facility, IUCN-Central America, World Resources Institute, Ministry of Environment, Ecuador, and the Corporation of Sustainable Forest Management. And finally, acknowledgements are due to all public, private, indigenous and other civil society groups and individuals that participated in the project.



Lorena Tapia (left), at the time Minister of Environment for Ecuador, speaking at the opening of the inaugural forestry forum “Governance, Legality Verification Systems, and Competitiveness in the Latin American Forest Sector”, October 2014.



Logs waiting to be processed at Botrosa hardwood plywood mill, Ecuador.

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