

VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS, WHY IT NEEDS TO CONTINUE

(PERSPECTIVES FROM A STAKEHOLDER IN PRODUCER COUNTRY)

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We can argue and find justifications as much as we want, but the fact still remains that in timber producing countries like Ghana, these reforms have taken place due to the nature and architecture of VPAs. Market access as a trade incentive has been pivotal to bring private sector onto the table.

Why are producer countries raising issues with the Fitness Check?

- VPAs are not perfect, but in countries such as Ghana and Liberia, VPAs have brought real transformational change to forest management and governance.
- Are there challenges with VPAs, YES, but all transformational programmes encounter challenges. HOWEVER, in light of the real tangible benefits that have been recorded in producer countries, it will be inimical for the EU to abandon FLEGT-VPAs midway.
- The “VPA process” has become the gold standard for similar programmes that require multi-stakeholder engagements, such as the sustainable cocoa dialogues
- In any event, even if the EU wants to undertake a fitness check there could have been more strategic ways of doing that without “spooking” stakeholders in producer countries who have invested time and undertaken irreversible legal and structural changes to their forest management and governance systems

Take away points:

- Progress to licensing is understandably slow, given the changes we are trying to bring about. At producer-country level, we remain committed to the process as we see significant reforms and greater legal compliance. We need to measure impact and results based on the process (milestones) and not just the outcome alone
- The EU also need to create a market for FLEGT license, and currently there is very little incentive for private sector to continue being committed to VPAs due to the shambolic public procurement systems in several EU member countries that treat FLEGT licensed timber as inferior to other licenses such as FSC and PEFC
- We recommend strengthened enforcement of the EUTR as we have realized its a clear driver of reform on the producer end, especially among private sector actors

Thank you

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