



COMMUNIQUÉ

ISSUED BY PARTICIPANTS AT THE NATIONAL FORESTRY FORUM AT FOREST HOTEL, DODOWA AND PRESENTED TO THE MINISTER OF LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCES, HON. NII OSAH MILLS

We, the participants from all sections of the forestry sector of Ghana, who gathered at the Forest Hotel Conference Hall, Dodowa for the National Forestry Forum on the theme, “Deepening Ghana’s Forestry Dialogue - Contributing to Sustainable Forest Management”, on the 7th of August 2014, recognize that government has exerted some efforts in the form of design, installation and implementation of strategies towards the building of a vibrant forestry sector. We further commend the Government of Ghana for their policy intention to involve communities and other stakeholders in the management of the country’s forest resources in the revised forest and wildlife policy. We believe this is a major step towards sustainable forest management.

However, the forestry sector in Ghana continues to be saddled with the issue of illegal logging and illegal mining (galamsey) operations in spite of the huge investments in the sector by development partners. These challenges emanating from weak forest governance continue to deplete and

degrade our fragmented forests. These weaknesses been caused partly by the ineffectiveness of the Forestry Commission to enforce forest laws and the prevailing constitutional conditions that tend to direct timber rights as well as revenues away from our poor farmers and forest fringe communities in favour of private interests.

This forum categorizes these challenges under the following themes:

Domestic Timber Market Reforms

- Unavailability of legally produced lumber continues to be a challenge that needs proper redress as part of reforms in the domestic lumber market.
- The structural complexity of the domestic market is a major contributor to the problem of legal lumber availability. This is partly because multiple and divergent interests exist in this sector and also the actual size of the market is not known.

- The status and content of the draft off-reserve LI is still unknown by a large segment of stakeholders and this we believe sends negative signals to all stakeholders on the commitment of government to make timber resources available to small scale/artisanal millers. This weakens the drive to halt illegal logging in our off-reserve forest areas.
- The influx of cattle ranching in our forest reserves is highlighted as a major challenge in the management of forest resources due to the destruction they cause.
- Understaffing of Range Supervisors and Forest Guards in the Forestry Commission.

Plantation Development in Ghana

Plantation establishment has been identified as the main strategy to restore the degraded areas across the country. It is however, saddled with the following setbacks:

FLEGT License Realization

- The consistent failure of government to convert concession leases to Timber Utilization Contracts (TUCs). The interpretation is that government is not ready to issue FLEGT license.
- Lack of preparedness and ignorance of timber industry players on the necessary documentation procedures and legality requirements.
- The unavailability of management plans for the majority of forest reserves which is a requirement for the issuance of the FLEGT license.

- Inadequate resourcing of the plantation development fund.
- Limited access to the plantation development fund by farmers.
- Untimely allocation of funds for plantation development programmes.
- Lack of security of tenure on trees tends to reinforce government's interest in short term economic values. Farmers still destroy naturally occurring trees on their farms because of the little value they attach to such trees. Farmers lack the assurance of access to future harvests.
- Farmers are not consulted during the development of some plantation programmes.
- Conversion of forest landscapes to rubber plantations in the Western Region.

Encroachment on Forest Lands

- Encroachment has been a major cause of deforestation, especially in areas with admitted settlements and farms. Admitted farms and settlements are being expanded with impunity whilst the Forestry Commission struggles to deal with it due to interference by politicians at the local and national levels. This problem has occurred as a result of unresolved boundary disputes on the original admitted farms and settlements. To cite few examples are Aboduabo and areas in the Sui River Forest reserve in the Western Region of Ghana.

As much as we want other stakeholders to take collective action to resolve the afore-mentioned challenges, we consider the legitimate interest of our government and responsible regulatory agencies to be a mix of varying interests of the entire

Ghanaian society. This Forum therefore calls upon the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR) and the Forestry Commission to take proactive action on the following:

1. Make known the status and content of the off-reserve Legislative Instrument to all relevant stakeholders to get buy ins that will fairly reflect interests of relevant and affected stakeholders. The LI must favour allocation of timber to small scale/artisanal millers to meet the domestic market demand for timber.
2. Finalize, approve and start implementation of the domestic timber procurement policy.
3. Implement strategies to train and technically support local forest based enterprises to make them competitive on the domestic market.
4. Strengthen the coordination among stakeholders of the domestic market sector and ensure that all of them are well informed and trained.
5. Create avenues for the small scale enterprises in the timber sub sector to have equitable access to raw materials.
6. Resolve the issue of timber rights fee payment and thereby fast track the conversion of concession leases to TUCs.
7. Lead the revision of revision of guidelines governing the administration and implementation of SRAs to ensure that, communities become the sole beneficiaries of the SRAs and not just a hand full of local elites.
8. Commit resources to development management plans for all forest reserves.
9. Institute a long term programme to integrate admitted settlements into sustainable forest management.
10. Commit resources to facilitate the process of demarcating admitted farms and settlements.
11. Ensure that funds and resources for plantations development are given high priority and provided on timely basis.
12. As a matter of urgency, conclude and deliver all Modified Taungya System Agreements with farmers.
13. Prioritize the issue of cattle herdsmen in our forests and find lasting solution to the menace.
14. Involve local and grassroots stakeholders in the development of plantation programmes
15. Put a stop to the conversion of Subri Forest to rubber and oil palm plantations, considering the hidden values of the forest.
16. Forestry Commission staff must be effective in the delivery their supervisory duties in areas of our forests where encroachment and conversion are still occurring.
17. Based on the competing value interest in the forests, the Forum further calls for a more effective inter-sectoral coordination to ensure that forest related decisions by other state agencies (e.g. Divestiture Implementation Committee in the case of Subri FR) are sanctioned by the FC in consultation with other stakeholders.
18. Aside the national FLEGT initiative, government must promote intensive rehabilitation of degraded forest reserves in the southern belt and landscape restoration programme to halt the fast spreading desertification in the three Northern regions.

This communiqué is published with support from Friends of the Earth-Ghana under the FOE/EU-CiSoPFLEG Project.

Friends of the Earth-Ghana (FoE-Gh) is an environmental advocacy group committed to creating and sustaining constructive and learning dialogue platforms for discussing forest governance issues. FoE-Gh's interest in supporting forest forums in Ghana hinges on our philosophy of promoting balanced participation among economic, social, political and environmental actors in a more inclusive and comprehensive way to promote justice and to strengthen the sustainability of our forests for the generations unborn.

The CiSoPFLEG Project is funded by the European Union with co-funding from other Friends of the Earth International groups and implemented in Ghana, Cameroon, DRC and Cote d'Ivoire.

