# Mission to identify, inform, and integrate civil society organizations from the Woleu-Ntem province into the engaged civil society platform for the implementation of the elements of the action plan

Mission d’identification, d’information et d’intégration des organisations de la société civile de la province du Woleu-Ntem à la Plateforme société civile engagée pour la mise en œuvre des éléments du plan d’action

report on the identification, information, and integration mission of civil society organizations in the Woleu-Ntem province to the engaged civil society platform for the implementation of the elements of the FLEGT action plan in Gabon from January 19 to 22, 2010 Brainforest: Quartier Ancienne Sobraga, Rue Multipress BP: 23 749 Libreville Tel: 44 53 52 Gabon January 2010 This report was prepared for the program related to the application of forest regulations, governance, and trade exchanges for countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP-FLEGT Support Program - GCP/INT/064/EC)

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Context of the mission Gabonese civil society has benefited from technical support from the FAO's ACP-FLEGT program to support its preparation and capacity-building activities in its participation with other stakeholders in the implementation process of the elements of the FLEGT action plan in Gabon; with a view to signing a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union (EU). The ACP-FLEGT program aims, among other goals, to provide the aforementioned categories of stakeholders with the necessary tools for efficient participation in national efforts to improve forest governance and combat illegal exploitation of forest resources. In order to capitalize on this contribution, the civil society organizations platform defined a program of activities that included three awareness missions on the issues of FLEGT and the VPA, targeting rural communities in logging areas. After the first two information missions that took place in the Nyanga provinces in the south of the country and in Estuaire, Woleu-Ntem was from January 19 to 22, 2011, the last stage of awareness and information on FLEGT and the issue of reducing illegal exploitation of timber resources. This mission report provides an overview of the current level of organization of civil society in this province. It addresses the issue of forest governance and the synergies that some stakeholders have agreed upon to enhance participation in the effort to improve the forestry sector. Finally, the report also provides an overview of the communication points used for the awareness and information message on the FLEGT mechanism. Report on the identification, information, and integration mission of civil society organizations in the Woleu-Ntem province to the engaged civil society platform for the implementation of the elements of the FLEGT action plan in Gabon from January 19 to 22, 2010 5

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I. Mission Objectives The objectives of this mission were to identify local civil society organizations operating in the environmental field. To engage in discussions with rural actors involved in artisanal wood cutting activities to understand their motivations. To establish solid foundations for relaying the objectives of FLEGT in this forest region of Gabon. In this perspective, three (3) localities in the province were visited, and this report provides a comprehensive view of the available local civil society structures, as well as clarifying their level of institutional structuring. II. Implementation Methodology To facilitate the work, the civil society platform relied on resource persons to organize the information and awareness meetings in the localities where the mission took place, namely: – The Ntem department in Bitam – The Woleu department in Oyem – And the Okano department in Mitzick The resource persons were mostly residents of the localities or members of NGOs based in Libreville but operating in these areas. Among the resource persons and their respective organizations were: – The NGO Ariga, a structure based in Libreville but with representatives available in the Woleu-Ntem province, specifically in Mitzic in the Okano department. – The dynamic Mitzic NGO – Lambert ALLOGHO NDONG, member of the departmental council of Ntem in Bitam – Daniel NDOUMOU, President of the departmental council of Woleu in Oyem. program related to the application of forest regulations, governance, and trade exchanges for countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP-FLEGT Support Program - GCP/INT/064/EC) 6

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The resource persons and their respective organizations were to facilitate the meetings with community members through prior groundwork preparation. To this end, contacts were made, and the dates and locations of the work, as well as all administrative and logistical arrangements for the information and awareness meetings on the FLEGT process, were settled in advance. III. Results Two types of results were obtained during the information and awareness mission in Woleu-Ntem. III.1. The level of institutional organization of civil society in Woleu-Ntem Several

community organizations were identified in the localities that received the mission team. These are generally village associations whose central goals focus on mutual aid or the promotion of cultural heritage. A common characteristic of all these associations is their institutional weakness and lack of technical capacity to address more complex themes. Almost all do not even have founding documents (statutes and internal regulations) and have a mode of operation (periodic meetings) that does not align with the missions and roles that civil society wants to play in processes like FLEGT. Notwithstanding the aforementioned limitations, local organizations were invited to work under the guidance of the NGOs that are members of the civil society platform signatories to the memorandum of understanding and active in supporting FLEGT, REDD, and CDM. In this perspective, and particularly for the Mitzic region, the dynamic Mitzic NGO was tasked with ensuring this guidance and relay mission. III.2. Involvement in forest governance: The Okano department is home to one of the most exploited forest areas in the Woleu-Ntem province. Large companies with European capital, small national operators holding wood cutting permits under the Temporary Permits (PGG), artisanal sawyers, and illegal cutters are active there. The issue of governance was addressed to see how civil society in such a context, despite its observed lack of experience, can contribute alone or in synergy with other actors to curb the phenomenon of illegal exploitation of the resource. Open discussions on this question led to the idea that the program related to the application of forest regulations, governance, and trade exchanges for countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP-FLEGT Support Program - GCP/INT/064/EC) 8



Synergies are important and must be established between civil society and other stakeholders such as departmental councils in their capacity as local authorities, and actors in the private sector. The president of the departmental council of Okano, Mr. Daniel NDOU-MOU, pragmatically, will commit during the Mitzic stage to make a multipurpose room available to the collective of rural associations to carry out activities related to strengthening their capacities in order to participate in the improvement of forest governance. It should be noted that an umbilical link could indeed exist between the improvement of activities in the forestry sector in this administrative district (with increased tax revenues, creation of sustainable jobs, etc.) and the dynamization of the development process of the Okano department. In order to understand the motivating factors behind artisanal wood cutting, often informal and illegal, in which some members of rural communities are active, discussions were held on this issue during the mission. From the interviews, two dominant causes emerge: – Precariousness and the incidence of unemployment; – Lack of knowledge of the rules and procedures for accessing resources or sometimes administrative delays. Regarding the first source, it is important to note the negative prevalence of living conditions in rural areas, which are often difficult, inherent to the prevailing precariousness and lack of paid employment. Young unemployed individuals have no alternatives but to turn to the felling of marketable timber species in order to sell the processed products to meet their needs. As for the second motivating cause of the inflation of illegal practices, discussions revealed that the lack of knowledge of administrative procedures for accessing forest resources, as well as certain administrative "burdens," constitute aggravating factors for forest illegality. Mission report on the identification, information, and integration of civil society organizations in the Woleu-Ntem province into the civil society platform committed to implementing elements of the FLEGT action plan in Gabon from January 19 to 22, 2010 9



Iv. overview of communications The main communications focused on the following points:  FLEGT: What is it? This communication aimed to give community actors an idea of what FLEGT is.

In this regard, the mission team explained that the English acronym "FLEGT" stands for: Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade. This initiative constitutes the community's response to the issue of illegal logging and the associated trade. FLEGT translates into technical and financial assistance, and advice to timber-producing countries to implement reforms aimed at "improving policies and laws focused on the sustainable management of forest resources." To achieve its objectives, the EU supports programs aimed at ensuring support for initiatives working towards the implementation of elements of the FLEGT action plan. Mobilized to support the negotiation process of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between Gabon and the EU, the NGO Brainforest and the platform of Gabonese civil society organizations called "Environment Gabon" benefited in 2010 from technical support from the FAO's ACP-FLEGT Program for African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, and from technical and financial support from FERN, an organization based in Brussels that works to support European Union policies.  Importance of the VPA and the role of civil society The importance of FLEGT lies in the general and specific objectives it pursues. Indeed, designed to provide a coherent response to the issue of illegal logging, it focuses on the formalization of the program related to the enforcement of forest regulations, governance, and trade for African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries (ACP-FLEGT support program - GCP/INT/064/EC) 10

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of a legal environment capable of playing a regulatory role in the forestry sector. As a result, the negotiation and signing of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) constitutes an important articulation between European and Gabonese parties. The VPA, indeed, through its contractual content, will require the parties to respect their respective commitments. In this case, Gabon would need to enforce the agreed regulatory framework through discussions and the adoption of a legality grid, the operationalization of a Legality Verification System (LVS), the designation of an LVS Auditor, and an authority for issuing FLEGT licenses, as well as the institutionalization of an Independent Forest Observer (IFO). As for the European party, the agreement aims to improve the level of trade exchanges with Gabon in the area of imports by EU member states of timber products from this partner country. The importance of the process to be implemented, and especially its strategic interest in terms of opportunities to improve forest governance, has led the European process to advocate for a multi-stakeholder approach to address the issue of forest illegality. Mission report on the identification, information, and integration of civil society organizations in the Woleu-Ntem province into the civil society platform committed to implementing elements of the FLEGT action plan in Gabon from January 19 to 22, 2010 11

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v. mission team The mission team for the Woleu-Ntem province consisted of: • Arielle Dallia AZIZET: Head of mission/FLEGT focal point assistant for civil society; • GualbertPhal MEZUI NDONG: Communication officer for the civil society/FLEGT platform; • Frédéric ELLA: Representative of the NGO Ariga. vi. annex VI.1. local partners • ARIGA • DYNAMIQUE DE MITZIC program related to the enforcement of forest regulations, governance, and trade for African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries (ACP-FLEGT support program - GCP/INT/064/EC) 12

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Report of the Workshop on the Validation of the Analysis of the Legislative and Regulatory Framework of the Forest Sector organized on December 15, 2010, by the Gabonese civil society organizations platform committed to implementing elements of the FLEGT action plan. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the NGO Brainforest and cannot in any case be considered as reflecting the opinion of the European Union.

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