Report of the joint workshop on informing the populations of the Estuary department about the progress of the APV/ FLEGT negotiations (Cocobeach)

Rapport de l'atelier conjoint relatif à l'information des populations du département de l'estuaire de l'avancée des négociations APV/ FLEGT (Cocobeach)

Project: "Assimilation and dissemination of the elements of the FLEGT action plan by Gabonese civil society, for its qualitative participation in the negotiations and implementation of the APV" Awareness, information, exchange, collection of contributions and training of populations on the APV/FLEGT, in the forest basin of the Gabon estuary REPORT: from the joint workshop to inform the populations of the estuary department about the progress of the APV/FLEGT negotiations; Collect their observations and contributions on aspects related to the legality grid and the construction of the SVL (COCOBEACH) Report produced by Hubert Aimé KOUMBA (Project Manager, AGNU/ESF © July 2012

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PROJECT: "Assimilation and dissemination of the elements of the action plan FLEGT by Gabonese civil society, for its qualitative participation in the negotiations and implementation of the APV" REPORT: from the joint workshop to inform the populations of the NOYA department about the progress of the APV/FLEGT negotiations; Collect their observations and contributions on aspects related to the legality grid and the construction of the SVL (COCCOBEACH) COCOBEACH, April 7, 2012

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REPORT: from the joint workshop to inform the populations of the NOYA department about the

progress of the APV/FLEGT negotiations; Collect their observations and contributions on aspects related to the legality grid and the construction of the SVL (cocobeach)
_____ FIRST PART GENERALITIES

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The issue of natural resource governance has increased more in our century, particularly through the coexistence on common lands of several actors with objectives and interests that are not always convergent. Indeed, while some appropriate the forest space for economic needs, others consider it primarily as their main habitat, the place where they extract the elements necessary for their survival. In Gabon, particularly in the forest basin of the estuary, which has undergone several logging phases, the start of the APV/FLEGT negotiations should further stimulate this debate by clearly raising the question of reconciling the rights of communities with the needs of natural resource exploitation by forestry companies. In light of the above, the European Union wished to have contributions from Gabonese civil society, particularly those linked to the forest massifs. This includes, through various discussions, training, and information, mechanisms for community participation in discussions on the management of these spaces. This specifically involves: – information on the APV/FLEGT; – advances in discussions between the colleges and the European Union; – dissemination of laws and forestry codes; – customary usage rights (Article 14 Forestry Code); – Community forests (Article 156 Forestry Code); – the contribution of forestry operators to the realization of social works in villages (Article 251 Forestry Code);

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Still in this perspective, the State initiated the Sectoral Program for Forest Environment, one of the many merits of which was not only to foresee the participation of communities in the management of forest resources but also to equip Gabon with a Development Plan for Indigenous Peoples. It is within the framework of these various projects that on April 7, 2012, an information workshop was organized in Cocobeach for the target groups of the project to inform the populations of the estuary department about the progress of the APV/FLEGT negotiations; Collect their observations and contributions on aspects related to the legality grid, the construction of the SVL, and independent observation. In addition to the restitution of the work of the technical coordination committee and the technical sessions, the Cocobeach workshop served as a framework for exchange among participants who thus initiated a frank dialogue and unanimously decided on the necessity of adopting a new mode of resource management that takes into account the interests of the parties involved. Not without recalling the current shortcomings, this multi-actor workshop allowed for a crucial recommendation from the communities: "We wish that information related to the continuation of discussions always reaches us on time." While summarizing the work and the recommendations that emerged from it, this report will revisit the approach employed and the objectives pursued in the context of these exchanges. Through the organization and facilitation of this multi-actor meeting, AGNU aims to contribute and facilitate the establishment of a framework for information and training on new approaches to collaborative forest management that takes into account the rights of local and indigenous communities living in the forest massif of the NOYA department. Specifically, this workshop aimed at the above objectives: – To provide a restitution of the work of the colleges and technical sessions involved in the APV/FLEGT – To facilitate dialogue among the various actors involved in the management of forests in the NOYA on the current system of natural resource management and the changes on the horizon; – To inform about the consideration of community rights in local forest management processes; – To allow stakeholders to exchange on the contributions and comments they wish to make to the ongoing

discussions in the technical sessions between Gabon and the European Union.

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In the context of this workshop, we employed a dual working approach. The first consisted of bringing together all stakeholders concerned with forest management around a table, in order to stimulate debates, with the president of AGNU presenting his organization and the mandate to inform the populations of the estuary, within the framework of the APV/FLEGT. This presentation was complemented by presentations from the project team also focusing on these different expected results. The second approach consisted of making a number of presentations on the advances of the negotiations. It is also important to recall that in order to make the work interactive, the various presentations were followed by question-and-answer sessions, comments, and various contributions from stakeholders. SECOND PART WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

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As is customary in such circumstances, the initiation of this workshop on Friday, April 7, 2012, was to be done through various speeches planned for this purpose, the presentation of participants, and the outline of the day's program. Regarding the introductory speeches, the various participants were entitled to speeches from the Prefect of the NOYA department and Mr. Hubert Aimé KOUMBA, president of AGNU. The summary of these speeches (see Annexes) is provided below: While thanking the various participants for their presence at this multi-actor workshop, Mr. Hubert Aimé KOUMBA did not fail to revisit the beginning of AGNU's activities in the city of COCOBEACH and this through the project concerning the establishment of the COCOBEACH branch. Continuing his remarks on the missions of the structure he oversees and beyond the presentation of the objectives of the concerned projects, whose ultimate goal is the better management of our natural resources through the recognition of the rights of local communities in the management and control of forest resources, the AGNU Program Coordinator will emphasize the goal pursued by AGNU which, through this workshop, aims to contribute in its own way to the implementation of a framework for collaborative management of forest resources. For him, this contribution largely relies on approaches to contribute to the new legality grid of the wood trade activity in Gabon. From this speech, it will also be noted an invitation to the authorities to equip themselves with reliable information for good forest and ecological governance in our country. This is indeed the reason why he will insist on all the interest there is in valuing the Consultation conducted on the ground by AGNU. He will also emphasize the necessity of a consultation and frank collaboration among the various actors involved in the management of Gabon's forests.

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In conclusion, Mr. Hubert Aimé KOUMBA encouraged everyone to engage in an open debate, to share their different experiences, and to adopt conciliatory positions in order to arrive at proposals that will effectively improve the current system of forest resource management within the NOYA department. From this speech, we can retain the following key messages: – The government's commitment to information and awareness projects on APV/FLEGT; – The government's willingness to sustainably manage forests that constitute the habitat and nourishing lifeline of local and indigenous populations; – The encouragement of collaboration between the private and public sectors through a type of partnership that involves non-governmental organizations and public administration; – The important role that local populations and NGOs must play in decision-making regarding natural resource management; – The encouragement of all stakeholders to get involved in the discussion regarding the need for

the implementation of a concerted management framework for forest resources in the NOYA department. The continuation of activities was to proceed with the presentation of participants and the outline of the workshop program. Regarding the presentation of participants, it should be noted that its purpose was not only to allow those present to get to know each other but also to break down barriers, particularly between administrative authorities and participants who are not used to interacting with them daily and speaking in public. This presentation was also intended to show that almost all target groups were present. Indeed, the presence of local administrative authorities (Secretary General of the departmental council, the prefect, the first deputy mayor of the COCOBEACH municipality, President of the Departmental Council, the secretaries general of the town hall, prefecture, and departmental council), traditional authorities (village chiefs, neighborhood chiefs, and canton chiefs), service managers, representatives of national NGOs (Brainforest, ESF, AGNU, ASS CP, association la bonne équipe), and representatives of local and indigenous communities was noted. However, it is worth mentioning the significant absence of representatives from the workers of logging companies in the region. The presentation of the program aimed to ensure that those who did not have it in their possession became aware of it. This presentation was also meant to allow the proposed program to be adjusted to meet expectations and to be adopted by the entire assembly. After the various welcome and opening speeches were read, and the participants had made acquaintance, the work program was definitively established, and the COCOBEACH workshop was to continue with the presentation of the work from the various colleges and technical commissions of the APV/FLEGT. The presentation focused on the progress of the technical commissions. It included: - The definition of APV and FLEGT; - The letter of intent sent to the European Union and the start of negotiations; - The definition of legality; - Product coverage; - The construction of the legality grid; - The articles of the forestry code particularly interesting to rural populations; - The construction of the SVL. One of the first reactions concerned the contribution of logging companies operating in the department and the absence of obligations owed to the populations. Indeed, many community members, while pointing out the absence of these benefits, wanted to know why they were not contributing to the realization of development projects in their villages. In response to this concern, the prefect of the department shared with the assembly the various steps taken with the companies. Thus, he stated that these companies are fully aware of their obligations. Continuing his remarks, he revealed that not only does the company promise to contribute in terms of microprojects, but also in terms of hiring local labor. Regarding the legality grid, participants expressed concern about the implementation of such a large number of rules and how to enforce them. We informed participants that these rules are already in effect in the forestry sector. The last question was about product coverage, which some did not perceive as exhaustive. It was noted that the products already included in the negotiations were wood products that could be easily traced. This tool being one of the central elements of the independent forest auditor, we made sure to inform the populations about this approach and the possibility that some of them could be actors in this activity. The OI is particularly interested in: - The general overview of forest management in a given area; - Checking that the population is aware of exploitation activities in the locality; - Knowing if the population is aware of the terms of reference; - Knowing which obligations have been fulfilled or not; - Is the population satisfied; - The relationships of companies with the populations; - The trade union structures and staff representatives; - etc. IV- MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION Regarding the recommendations, it is important to specify that they were formulated taking into account the specificities, that is to say, the role and responsibilities of each category of actors. The following recommendations will be formulated: – Facilitate, as much as possible, the work of civil society organizations on the ground; – Expand further on the ground not only to inform communities but also to establish a genuine collaborative relationship with them, which are now recognized both legally and

practically as essential actors in the sustainable management of our forest resources; – The equitable sharing of benefits derived from logging. – Regarding the companies, communities in particular recommended: – Organizing and participating in local meetings concerning forest resource management; – Developing an employment policy that includes the recruitment of local labor; – Still related to employment and the use of wood waste, communities wished that a good portion be allocated to them for firewood; – Communities also wished that companies comply with Article 251 of the Forestry Code, which speaks of the contribution by the logging operator to the realization of social works in the villages. – Communities wished that their presence and participation be taken into account in the implementation of the different phases of the program. – Communities also wished for a permanent collaboration to be strengthened between them. While encouraging them for the work carried out by these structures not only to document data concerning APV/FLEGT by the communities but also for holding this multi-actor meeting, the following recommendations will be made to them: – Develop with communities models of memoranda of understanding that will be validated by the administration; – Facilitate the establishment of a monitoring committee for the resolutions of the workshop; – Continue to inform communities about their rights and interests in the management of forest resources; – Maintain the dynamic of work initiated in the region around the issue of forest resource management. As can be seen, the COCOBEACH workshop served as a framework for presenting the work of the APV/FLEGT negotiations. Likewise, while highlighting the limiting factors of full community participation in forest management processes, this workshop allowed everyone to explain themselves and clearly identify the problems and various solutions to adopt in order to resolve them. As the second meeting of this kind to be held in the NOYA Department, the multi-actor workshop in COCOBEACH also helped to develop a dynamic around the contribution of communities in the NOYA forest massif. Now, it is up to everyone to capitalize on this pilot experience through the effective implementation of the various resolutions taken, in order to meet current challenges. Indeed, the success of the ongoing process largely depends on the willingness of stakeholders in the discussions of APV/FLEGT to carry out the formulated recommendations.

Mr. Prefect of the NOYA department; Mr. President of the NOYA departmental council; Mr. Deputy Mayor of the city of COCOBEACH; Gentlemen Secretaries General of the prefecture, town hall, and departmental council of the NOYA department; Ladies and gentlemen, members of civil society organizations; Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, It is my honor, as the host of this workshop, to speak first at the opening of a new workshop on information and training on APV/FLEGT and Independent Observation. I want to thank all participants for their presence at this multi-actor workshop. For several months, we have established a branch of AGNU in the NOYA department, starting a project for the planting of tree nurseries, to promote tree planting activities. Indeed, our NGO aims to promote activities aimed at reducing poverty, protecting the environment and indigenous peoples, through concrete projects whose ultimate goal is better management of our natural resources through the recognition of the rights of local communities in the management and control of forest resources. I also want to emphasize the goal pursued by AGNU, which through this workshop aims to contribute in its own way to the implementation of a concerted management framework for forest resources. For me, this contribution largely relies on approaches to contribute to the new legality grid of the wood trade activity in Gabon. Mr. Prefect of the NOYA department; Mr. President of the NOYA departmental council; Mr. Deputy Mayor of the city of COCOBEACH;

Gentlemen, the secretaries general of the prefecture, the town hall, and the departmental council of the NOYA department; I invite the authorities of our country to equip themselves with reliable information for good forest and ecological governance. This is indeed the reason why I

emphasize the importance of valuing the Consultation conducted on the ground by our NGO. Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the necessity of a frank consultation and collaboration among the various actors involved in the management of the forests of the department. In conclusion, I would like to encourage everyone to engage in an open debate, to share their different experiences, and to adopt conciliatory positions in order to arrive at proposals that will effectively improve the current system of forest resource management within the perimeter of the NOYA department and make a honorable contribution to the continuation of negotiations. Thank you for your kind attention.

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Address by the Prefect of the NOYA department On APRIL 07, 2012 (COCOBEACH) Mr. President of the NOYA departmental council Mr. Deputy Mayor of the municipality of Cocobeach Gentlemen, the secretaries general of the prefecture, the town hall, and the departmental council Gentlemen, the commanders of gendarmerie brigades and border police, Ladies and gentlemen, members of civil society, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It is my honor, as the highest authority of the department, to welcome our hosts and participants to this workshop. This morning's meeting is part of a participatory logic of the populations in the concerted management of forests. Some of us had the opportunity some time ago to have the first information regarding the APV/FLEGT. This workshop is therefore another moment of information and training for each participant. Moreover, given the significant progress made in the process, we will certainly have a report on the path traveled. Our contributions are undoubtedly expected in the recommendations of this workshop. I commend the NGOs that take the time to inform not only the populations but also the members of the administration. Your attention and contributions are therefore particularly sought during this day. I wish our work great success. Thank you.

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