

VPA Status: Signed 19 October 2018

At the time of the last update, the VPA had just been signed (October 2018) and in the period since then, further preparations for its implementation have been underway. As the process has moved from international negotiation and procedure to the practical realities of Vietnam's obligations under the agreement, there has been a focus on developing the specific mechanisms for how the VPA will be implemented and monitored.

The key mechanism for engagement between the government and other stakeholders within Vietnam has been the Multi-stakeholder Core Group. The fifth Multi-stakeholder Core Group Meeting was held in March 2019. It included a wide range of different interest parties such as government departments, international donors and national CSOs. This meeting represented the first formalised meeting of these groups since the signing of the agreement and therefore, the focus was largely on how the agreement would be put into place.

A key focus for VNFOREST at the moment is in creating the legal framework for the implementation of the Vietnam Timber Legality Assurance System (VNTLAS). The cornerstone of this framework will be a specific decree produced by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) on VNTLAS. However, the timeframes for this are quite challenging; the final decree needs to be submitted by December 2019. MARD has just released the document (at the end of May) for a period of consultation and feedback. This provides an opportunity for CSOs to work with the government as well as other stakeholders such as timber associations, SMEs to help shape legislation and identify any areas for strengthening.

The challenge of such consultation periods is the relatively short nature (closing at the end of August 2019) and so VNGO-FLEGT and its CSOs need to be ready, to coordinate wider view consultation and to provide good quality feedback quickly. Although suggestions are not binding for the government, these consultations do provide an excellent 'entry point' for those interested in the topic to provide input and also it shows an inclination to engage with society on the topic.

The second major area of development has been in the work to develop a framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the VPA within Vietnam. This work is somewhat in its infancy with further work planned. An initial outline has been developed alongside TORs for the recruitment of a number of consultants to develop the work further. The framework will attempt to lay out the different areas which will need to be reviewed on an ongoing basis. The aim is for the framework to cover various different elements of monitoring and evaluation related to VPA and is broader and more ambitious in its scope than any previous work in Vietnam on the topic.

The framework aims to detail in broad terms how stakeholders can avoid overlap and instead complement one another to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation can be undertaken in an efficient and effective manner. It is hoped that by mapping this out, a greater mutual understanding can be built by all parties on the topic. The initial outline for the framework has already been developed and a variety of different groups including CSO representative were consulted during this process. However, this is currently quite broad so it is not possible to understand what the eventual level of involvement for CSOs will be within this framework. Therefore, this could possibly be a very interesting development for CSOs and

allow for further engagement on the topic or it could present some difficulties to the monitoring of the VPA by CSOs.

In recent months, VNFOREST has also been able to secure over \$250,000 in funding from FAO to support a communication programme around VNTLAS. Rather than being a general public awareness campaign, this is designed to instead help VNFOREST fulfil its obligations under the public disclosure requirements of the VPA. At the Launching workshop, VNFOREST focused on communication activities than the issue of public information disclosure of data and information, e.g. illegal logging, deforestation and forest degradation, illegal imported timbers. In April, VNFOREST and FAO along with ITTO organised a workshop in Danang to help build capacity in regards to forest statistics which also helps to support the public disclosure obligations (available at <http://www.fao.org/forestry/statistics/80566@212059/en/>).

In some ways, the remainder of 2019 is likely to completely shape the implementation of the VPA within Vietnam. The process has between the EU and Vietnam has been ongoing for almost nine years now with negotiations beginning in 2010; however, it may prove to be the decisions which are made over the remainder of 2019 which will prove to ultimately define the long-term effects of the VPA in Vietnam. CSOs in the country will continue to seek to work with the government to help shape policy and represent vulnerable groups within Vietnam and promote responsible forestry.