

Independent monitoring of forest activities by civil society and communities (IM-CSC)



Parking of log trucks carrying logs on the Lomié-Mindourou road (East-Cameroon).
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More than ten years of Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM) developed by GLOBAL WITNESS¹ and Independent Monitoring of Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (IM-FLEG), implemented by REM, Forest Monitor² and AGRECO-CEW³ were not sufficient to eradicate illegal logging or contain it below a tolerable level. It is now recognized that illegal logging and trade that is associated to it are only part of the visible side of the disastrous iceberg which is bad governance in the forest sector.

Improving forest governance has proven to be a more complex process than anticipated, and is very time and resources consuming, thus the question of the effectiveness and sustainability of traditional models of Independent Monitoring (IM). It is necessary to extend the scope of IM to dynamic processes of forest governance⁴.

With regard to the experience of the association Forests and Rural Development (FODER)⁵, Independent Monitoring by civil society and communities (IM-CSC) is a simple IM mechanism, which is more independent and involving local and indigenous communities in a responsible manner.

Considering development paths will enhance objectivity, credibility and sustainability.

¹<http://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/environment/forests/independent-monitoring>

² <http://www.observation-cameroun.info/>,
<http://www.observation-rdc.info/clarification.html>,
<http://www.observation-congo.info/clarification.html>
http://www.forestsmonitor.org/en/capacity_building_congo_ij

³<http://www.oicameroun.org/index.php>

⁴The scope of traditional models of IM is currently restricted to either the granting of licenses, the conformity of logging operations or monitoring of social aspects.

⁵FODER is a Cameroonian association specialized in independent monitoring of forest and environmental governance

What is IM–CSC?



IM-CSC, qualified as external monitoring, is not a sovereign activity, but is a completely independent monitoring of forest activities⁶ performed by a civil society organisation (CSO) or a community (local or indigenous)⁷, with the aim of collecting factual data and denouncing illegal practices. It is done through missions or observation visits which can be individual, in pairs, in group or mixed (between CSO and a community; a CSO and/or a community and the official independent monitor, a CSO and/or a community and the administration in charge of forest).



The relationship between IM-CSC and the government is a free and non-contractual collaboration, coming from participatory management policies, regional and international agreements, national laws and conventions ratified by the government. The realisation of monitoring missions/visits and the publication of observations are completely independent with the possibility for the CSOs concerned to carry out advocacy and lobbying. Therefore, IM-CSC is not only applied to the monitoring of forest activities. It is also interested in the monitoring of political and legal reforms that impact the forest sector, the monitoring of multi-actor processes (FLEGT and REDD), and the monitoring of governance.

Independent joint observation mission: an Independent Observer, a National Control Brigade controller and a Community Observer. © FODER 2012

The scope of IM-CSC can also extend, in addition to the monitoring of: governance processes, stakeholder involvement in these processes, transparency, respect of social specifications, use of forest revenues, and poaching. IM-CSC is applied to the mining sector, to intensive agriculture and to the monitoring public investment budget.

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement/FLEGT enabled the technical and methodological development of IM-CSC in Cameroon in 2010. First led by two organisations (FODER and CED), IM-CSC quickly spread and is now championed by about ten CSOs in the forest areas. Thanks to the partnership with FODER, CIEDD (the Centre for Environmental Information and Sustainable Development) positioned itself in CAR as pioneer of IM-CSC through “*the support project for the development of an independent monitoring strategy under the FLEGT regime in CAR*”. The concept is spreading progressively in the Congo Basin where it is settling as a means for governments and economic operators to be more responsible and accountable to the population and the public. Coordination efforts of IM-CSC activities from the national and sub regional levels are underway.

⁶ Forest activities: any human intervention in the forest for economic purposes.

⁷ Independent monitoring by communities and indigenous peoples is conducted by community forest monitors or community forest supervisor who are trained and provided with appropriate tools.

Lessons learnt from 2 years of IM-CSC



The success of the IM-CSC lies mainly in the increasing number of CSOs and communities mastering the use of independent monitoring tools to contribute to the fight against illegal forest activities and the reduction of deforestation.

Increasingly, governments are beginning to acknowledge the role of CSOs and communities in the improvement of governance: these permanent and dispersed actors throughout the national territory, both near the administration and forests contribute to the detection and the information of violations in forest activities. The support of an external independent monitoring network and an information system on forest and environmental illegalities shall make IM-CSC more efficient.

The establishment of good governance is subsequent to the effective involvement of all stakeholders. Information, awareness raising and training can strengthen the technical capacity of local actors to play their role, to defend their rights and exercise their duties as citizens with respect to the plunder of forest resources. IM-CSC is thus a means of strengthening local capacity.

Two years experience in IM-CSC helped to highlight the need for public information, strengthen ethics and cooperation (between different administrations, between the forest administration and other stakeholders) in the fight against illegal logging. Operational cooperation between forest administration, IM-FLEG and IM-CSC is possible, as illustrated by the many joint missions conducted in Cameroon in 2012 between MINFOF-AGRECO/CEW-FODER and community monitors. This cooperation is based on the clarity of IM-CSC objectives, CSO professionalism, credibility and relevance of observations, and a transparent, collaborative and constructive approach.

The close correlation observed during the two years between corruption and illegal logging reveals the importance of new approaches based on the connection between the ethical and the effectiveness of forest control on one hand, and the combination of preventive actions (transparency and integrity) to repressive actions (denunciation and control) on the other hand.

IM-CSC however, faces a number of constraints and challenges, particularly related to access to forest information (notwithstanding the provisions of the VPA), transmission of observation sheets, translation of facts alleged in repressive actions and short duration funding (one year).



Community forests monitor recording GPS data on an illegally harvested timber.
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A representative of BAKA indigenous peoples measuring an unmarked tree. © FODER 2012

Perspectives and IM–CSC development paths



The effectiveness of the IM-CSC could be improved by:

1. The consolidation of collaboration between the structures in charge of forest control, official independent monitor and civil society in order to achieve a participatory planning of control missions.
2. Further strengthening the technical capacity of local actors (not just CSOs and communities, but governments also).
3. The improvement of information technology and communications for the independent monitoring of forest activities through:
 - 1) creating a simple database and online for the transmission of information on forest and environmental illegalities to relevant structures (Control Brigade, IM-FLEG, Anti-Corruption Institutions, Public Ministry);
 - 2) the introduction of phones with GPS coupled with the establishment of a hotline for permanent reporting of cases observed;
 - 3) and the exploitation of the huge potential of social networks (Facebook and Twitter).
4. The increase in the frequency of verification missions by CSOs is also necessary to continuously improve the quality of denunciations.
5. The establishment of an IM-CSC network ranging from the local to the regional level and the establishment of a pact and a label of forestry integrity could significantly reduce corruption and improve the fight against illegality in the forest sector.



A joint monitoring mission by the official Independent monitor and FODER. © FODER 2012

Article revised and published as part of the “external and community monitoring of forests in the implementation of the VPA-FLEGT in Cameroon”, a project supported by the European Union. The content of this publication can in no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the views of the European Union.

