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Viet Nam Discusses International Market Demands for Verified Legal Wood Products

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On April 18, a roundtable Meeting on Market Demands for Legal and Sustainable Wood Products in Ha Noi provided examples of initiatives from the private sector and civil society groups in Viet Nam of mechanisms to promote the use of verified legal timber.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and the European Commission (EC) with programmatic support of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) hosted the Meeting.

The Meeting was coordinated in response to changes in the international timber market. European consumers have a heightened awareness of the social and environmental impacts caused by their consumption habits and increasingly are choosing to purchase ethically produced goods.

In relation to the timber industry, European consumers are demanding wood products made from legal and sustainable timber sources. These purchasing choices are part of an effort to halt illegal logging that causes biodiversity loss, diminishes carbon sequestration capacity, and greatly reduces livelihood resources for forest-dependent communities. North American and Japanese consumers are expected to exhibit similar consumption choices in the near future.

This shift in consumer demand is forecasted to have a significant impact on Viet Nam. There is concern that increased global demand for legally sourced wood products could pose a serious risk to the profitability of Viet Nam's timber industry, which is a major component of Viet Nam's economy.

However, this global context also provides a great opportunity and a driving force to improve forest governance and enhance forest law enforcement in Viet Nam. The European Union's (EU) Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan is a policy tool that can help provide guidance to the Government of Viet Nam to adapt to the changes in market demands.

FLEGT aims to combat illegal logging through forest governance reform, improved transparency and information exchange, and capacity building. A key element of the Plan is the development of a licensing system for legally produced timber. This system is established through a series of Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) between the EU and major timber producing countries in which each party sets out the commitments and actions needed to tackle illegal logging.

The Meeting on Market Demands for Legal and Sustainable Wood Products provided a forum for initial dialogue between key government officials, the timber industry, and civil society representatives to learn about the changing market trends, their implications, and to explore policy approaches to meeting demands for legal and sustainable timber products, such as FLEGT. It also provided ideas on how to address the opportunities and threats that Viet Nam is facing in the midst of changing

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Mr. Willy Vandenberghe, Head of Development and Cooperation at EC delegation in Viet Nam, made a welcome remarks at the meeting
Photo: IUCN

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global timber market.

The Meeting concluded that a critical mass of knowledge about governance, feasible mechanisms to improve law enforcement, as well as political support for FLEGT are needed in Viet Nam. Technical issues, such as solidifying the legal definition of timber in Viet Nam, determining how to sustainably produce legal timber, and how to structure and negotiate a VPA for Viet Nam, must also be addressed.

IUCN will continue to work in partnership with MARD and the EC in Viet Nam to tackle these issues and support the Government of Viet Nam to consider establishing a VPA with the EU.

To learn more about the FLEGT process in Viet Nam, contact/consult;

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