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Illegal chain sawn lumber accounts for more than half

From Samuel Owusu-Ansah, Kumasi

Minister of Lands and Forestry, Prof. Dominic Fobih, has disclosed that a recent study has shown that out of the 2.7 million cubic metres of timber, which is harvested annually from Ghana's Forests, illegal chain saw operations alone account for 1.5 million cubic metres.

The Minister who admitted that chain saw operations had assumed an alarming dimension, was addressing an expert consultation meeting on chain sawn lumber production for stakeholders in the timber industry organised by Tropenbos International, a Netherlands based NGO.

He said chainsaw operators have contributed to the depressed domestic prices, thus making it a disincentive for legitimate timber processors to deliver lumber and other wood products to the domestic market.

Professor Fobih added that there are negative environmental consequences, which often result from the operations of these illegal timber operations who harvest timber in areas reserved for biodiversity and other environmental purposes like the protection of watersheds and checking of soil erosion.

The Lands and Forestry Minister said chainsaw operations under its present form cannot be sustained or controlled within the limits of the Timber Resources Management Act, 1997 (Act 547) and the Timber Resource Management Regulation, 1998 (L.I.1649).

In the face of this, the minister said his outfit had decided to accommodate chainsaw operators under law.

In line with this he said that timber companies will be encouraged to employ some of the chainsaw operators to assist them in harvesting and cross cutting of timber in more difficult areas where

conventional logging equipment cannot be used for such harvesting operations.

He also disclosed that preference would be given to chainsaw operators who have the means to invest in the establishment of mobile mills in strategic locations in various localities in the country.

He revealed that his ministry had taken appropriate measures to ensure that adequate quantity of mill-sawn lumber and other wood products to meet the need of the domestic market are made available. Subsequently, the Forestry Commission has been requested to draw up a comprehensive programme to link up all wood dealers with the various sawmills where the stocks of timber are located to enable them source their lumber for sale to the public.

He pointed out that the ministry is working on appropriate benefit sharing mechanisms between chiefs, the government, forest fringe communities and local communities as one of the measures to ensure effective collaboration with all stakeholders in sustainable management of the country's forestry resources in order to find a lasting solution to illegal chain saw problems.

Tropenbos International aims to among other things improve tropical forest management for people, ensure conservation and sustainable development of its resources.

Among the missions of the NGO is the provision of a distinctive scientific input into sustainable management of Ghana's high forest resources through local and international cooperation.

Since its birth in Ghana some three years ago, it has pursued demand-driven basic and applied research within its research themes to generate knowledge and deepen insights for effective policy formulation and management of rain forest resources in Ghana.