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Indigenous communities develop protocol to address forest monitoring

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Promoting sustainable forests

The Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) with funding from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) developed a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) protocol to monitor all activities conducted on their traditional lands. The project stemmed from prior engagement with communities, who asked for assistance to set up systems to monitor their own forests and the parts of the wood tracking system that were associated with their land and/or community. The APA received US\$70,000 from the FAO to execute the project “Supporting priority

actions for Amerindian Communities to participate in the Guyana VPA” and the process commenced in November 2016.

The primary objective of the project was to enable Amerindian villages in Guyana to design, develop and test approaches to community-based independent monitoring of legality compliance in timber supply chains under the European Union Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreement (EU-FLEGT VPA) initiative.

Following the consultation phase, the FPIC protocol was developed after it was decided that Bethany Village in Region Two (Pomeroon-Supenaam) would be used as the pilot village.

In presenting an overview of the project, Forest Policy Officer Michael McGarrell said that the project was necessary since there was a problem. He identified the problem as Amerindian communities still being unaware as it related to their land rights. He added that they have also discovered that the legal titles only covered a section or none of their traditional lands; hence, making it legal for outsiders to

derive benefits from those lands.

FPIC Protocol

Bethany resident Roel Wilson, while presenting an overview of the FPIC protocol said that it was understandable that certain Government or Private Sector projects may have good intentions behind them, but without full consultation, such initiatives could have unexpected negative impacts on the communities.

He said that they must be able to make their decisions freely – without any external or internal pressure, intimidation or bribery.

“Consultations must be held and FPIC obtained from our village in relation to any proposed activity, decision, project, legislation, policy and research that may affect our rights, interests, lands, territories, resources and livelihoods. This includes activities that may not take place directly on our lands, but that could have an indirect impact on our village immediately or in the future. Roads and forest concessions close to our land or mining concessions in the source of the rivers we



FAO's Country Representative, Reuben Robertson



Forest Policy Officer Michael McGarrell

depend on are examples of such activities,” he explained.

Wilson said that any outside organisation or individual with a proposition for the implementation of any project would be required to obtain an FPIC agreement. In order to obtain a FPIC agreement, one must write to the Toshao and Village Council seeking permission to consult with them, then the leaders would organise two General Village Meetings to inform of the project and seek consensus, after which the village representatives would meet with the project proponent; they would then conduct an impact assessment and if the need arises, technical and legal services from an outsider may be contracted.

After the impact assessment, the leaders would then schedule another general meeting where the decision would be made. If yes, then the agreement would be signed.

FAO's role

FAO's country representative, Reuben Robertson, said that the Organisation has established special ways to work with the Indigenous community.

He explained that the forests play a great role in alleviating poverty and to address this, the FAO has collaborated with the EU to establish the FLEGT programme. He said that the FAO has agreed to provide the technical and financial resources to allow for capacity building.

He stressed that the system to extract resources from the forest should be sustainable and transparent, adding that illegal extraction only hurt the community. “We want to ensure that we keep a forest sustained for now and for future generations. By achieving that goal, we have to stamp out forest illegality by reducing and totally eliminating illegal logging and that is what FAO is really all about,” Robertson added.

He also urged the communities to ensure that there is gender equality in their proposition since that is one of the core values of the FAO.

The next step for the APA is to approach the FAO for funding for round two of the process which would see the implementation and monitoring of the FPIC Protocol. The EU FLEGT system mandates countries to use the wood tracking system to tag logs and their stumps so that when they reach the point of export it could be traced back to the origin to ensure its legality. The system is not new to Guyana since they have been mandating loggers to tag their produce so they can track them to ensure it is within their licensed agreement.

