



OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

**FACILITATING STAKEHOLDER STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES FOR
VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (VPA) IMPLEMENTATION IN
GHANA**

FAO/ACP

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Contents

Purpose of the Guidelines	5
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Structure of the Guidelines.....	7
SECTION 2: STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS: NATURE OF STRUCTURE, CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPOSITION.....	8
2.1 Definition of Stakeholders	8
2.2 Stakeholder Analysis	8
2.3 Existing, Synergies and Opportunities	11
2.4 Legitimization of Stakeholders (Basis for Legal Recognition)	12
SECTION 3: STAKEHOLDER WORKING MODALITIES	14
3.1 Principles, Guidelines / Rules and Codes of Conduct	14
3.1.1 Terms of Office.....	14
3.1.2 Code of Conduct	15
3.2 Plan of Action	15
3.3 Peer Review / Conflict Management and Feedback.....	16
3.4 Documentation and Reporting Processes.....	16
SECTION 4: CAPACITY BUILDING AND MOTIVATION	17
4.1 Capacity Needs Assessment of Stakeholders	17
SECTION 5: SUSTAINABILITY.....	18
5.1 Sustainability Plan	18
5.2 Development of Sustainable funding.....	18
5.3 Exit Strategy	18
REFERENCES.....	19

Acronyms

CBAGs	Community Biodiversity Advisory Groups
CBOs	Community Based Organization
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CFC	Community Forest Committees
CRMCs	Community Resource Management Committees
CRM	Community Resource Management
DA	District Assembly
EU	European Union
FC	Forestry Commission
FLEGT	Forest Laws Enforcement, Governance and Trade
FSD	Forest Services Division
GTA.	Ghana Timber Association
GTMO	Ghana Timber Millers Organization
NFF-G	National Forestry Forum-Ghana
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
SRA	Social Responsibility Agreement
TUC	Timber Utilization Contract
TVC	Timber Validation Committee
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

Purpose of the Guidelines

The guidelines for facilitating stakeholder structures and processes for the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) implementation in Ghana is aimed at providing information on how to initiate, organize, strengthen and manage stakeholder structures or institutions and processes to enable them to contribute to implementation and monitoring of VPA. It will contribute towards enhancing participation in community based interventions associated with forest management and overall timber harvesting processes. the guidelines also provide information on structures to facilitate stakeholder participation in decision-making processes.

Within the guidelines, stakeholder analysis, working modalities on how frameworks governing tenure of office, code of conduct, plan of action, and documentation have been explained to provide a basis for managing stakeholder structures. It also provides measures on capacity building and means for promoting sustainability of the structures.

The guidelines are to be applied by foresters, practitioners of community forestry, civil societies, non-governmental organizations, local authorities and communities involved in implementation of forest projects including VPA processes.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This section provides a general background emphasizing the need for institutions and stakeholder structures in the implementation of forest projects and describes the purpose for the guidelines.

1.1 Background

In Ghana, the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) implementation process requires involvement of stakeholders and associated structures in the process, appropriate institutions must to be established and clarification of myriad of functions to improve sustainable forest management. VPA implementation presents an innovative approach to institutionalize stakeholder involvement in forestry processes and to ensure effective involvement and participation of key parties in stated goals and objectives. Many formal and informal actors are involved in the VPA implementation processes at the community, regional and national levels. These represent different constituencies and have different needs. Through VPA ACP – FLEGT supported project’s best practices and lessons have been acquired in Ghana. Stakeholder structures, institutions, processes and dialogue platforms have proven to be effective in ensuring participation and sustainability of benefits. The multi-stakeholder processes that have been put in place for designing and implementing these agreements are one aspect of these governance efforts undertaken in timber producer countries. The conscious and active involvement of forest fringe communities and other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in forest resource management in Ghana takes root from the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Policy following which the concept of Collaborative Resource Management (CRM) was established in Ghana.

At the current stage of the VPA implementation process whereby participation of state and non-state actors is imperative, it is prudent to have guidelines to serve as a framework for managing stakeholder structures and processes. Multi-stakeholder institutions such as Community Forest Committees (CFCs) and Community Biodiversity Advisory Groups (CBAGs) which form essential elements of dialogue platforms already exist in communities in Ghana but are structurally and functionally weak. The weakness stems from the fact that they are temporary (project driven), with no legal backing or official mandates. They lack the capacity to undertake forest management activities and there are no incentives to motivate

them. If these sub-structures are strengthened by formalizing and recognizing them as voluntary and civil societies which are backed by law, trained and resourced, they will be capable of participating effectively in forest management activities. These participatory and dialogue platforms have the potential to foster information sharing on reducing illegal logging and improving forest governance. Taking concrete steps to improve stakeholder participation is essential to ensure the successful implementation and enforcement of the VPA and related programmes. These guidelines describe the level of stakeholder participation (communities and civil society) at different stages of the VPA implementation.

1.2 Structure of the Guidelines

The guidelines have been organized into 5 sections. Section 1 gives a general background emphasizing the need for stakeholder structures in the VPA implementation processes. It includes objectives and purpose of the guidelines.

Section 2 provides more detailed information on the stakeholders. It defines the concept of stakeholders in relation to this document, their roles and responsibilities in the VPA process, the existing linkages, synergies and opportunities and the need for legitimization of the structures.

Section 3 outlines the working modalities for the structures indicating the governing principles, rules and code of conduct, plan of work, peer review, conflict management and feedback. Documentation and reporting processes; transparency, equity, efficiency and effectiveness of these structures are also highlighted.

Section 4 covers capacity building and motivation for stakeholders and highlights capacity needs assessment, training and provision of logistics, incentives and rewards.

Section 5 outlines sustainability of stakeholder participation in relation to planning, development of sustainable funding and exit strategies.

SECTION 2: STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS: NATURE OF STRUCTURE, CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPOSITION.

This section provides definition of stakeholders; identification of stakeholders; stakeholder analysis; roles and responsibilities; synergies and opportunities and legitimization of stakeholder institutions to enhance their effective participation in VPA implementation.

2.1 Definition of Stakeholders

The implementation of almost all forest programmes including the VPA requires the support of stakeholders and communities. For the purpose of this guideline, any individual, group or organisation with an interest, contributing to implementation or is affected by VPA is a 'stakeholder' in the process. These stakeholders include community members, CFCs, Traditional Authorities, CBOs, National Forest Forum-Ghana (NFF-G), Ghana Timber Millers Organization (GTMO) and Ghana Timber Association (GTA). A clear definition of the roles, rights and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in the VPA will lead to greater accountability, which is an essential element in improving forest governance.

2.2 Stakeholder Analysis

Understanding the relevance and how to conduct a stakeholder analysis helps to identify their relevant characteristic needs in a process. Given the range of potential stakeholders, it is important to know those who should be involved and why. In conducting a stakeholder analysis, the four steps which should be considered are as follows:

Step 1: Identification of the Stakeholders: Identifying relevant actors to take part in stakeholder structures and processes is always an important step to take. This will determine whether such a process will succeed or not. Stakeholders must be identified by their particular relevance based on need, benefit, interest, strength and influence. It is also important to bring on board actors who are likely to pose a threat to the outcomes and processes, as well as, those who are likely to feel threatened by a particular intervention or process. Also there is a need to find out whether there are in-built mechanisms to disaggregate groups in terms of categories such as: disadvantaged and advantaged; gender/status; duty bearers and right holders. This will indicate whether or not benefits and contributions were fairly distributed and the extent of losses or negative impacts experienced.

One effective way to identify relevant stakeholders is to use a SWOT Analysis. This will help in mapping out strengths of stakeholder groups, their weaknesses, opportunities they bring to the process and then, how they feel threatened or can threaten and destabilize the intervention. It is therefore important to identify relevant stakeholders at different implementation levels in order to have an effective structural process. The stakeholder population can be broad, so narrowing the field to key stakeholders is a main objective of conducting a stakeholder analysis. The identification stage could start with individuals who are familiar with current or potential stakeholders. Types of stakeholders can include beneficiaries, supporters, opponents, resource providers and vulnerable groups.

Step 2: Profile of Stakeholders: This step creates a profile for each identified stakeholder. Typically, an illustration of stakeholder information is used to create the profile. Though this approach is efficient and provides a quick review of all stakeholders, completing a more detailed narrative profile is strongly encouraged. This will allow for a greater understanding of each stakeholder group and how to get each group involved. It is better to list the stakeholders and types of information you need to know about them in order to get them involved in planning and implementation of the process. By using the list of stakeholders identified, they are prioritized in order of relevance and/or influence on the process. In this stage it is important to also identify and clarify the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder under the VPA to promote any community-based interventions in the process.

Step 3: Creation of Relationship Model: The third step provides a picture of what the process will look like in terms of stakeholders and their relevance and influence. The relationship model addresses the following questions:

- What is the inter-relationship among stakeholders?
- Who influences whom?
- Who has control over whom?

Based on the stakeholder relationship model, the concept of ladder of participation can be used by the implementers to determine what type of participation is appropriate for various stakeholders. The ladder contains six levels as follows:

1. **Information sharing:** actors in the process should have access to information on VPA to enhance their knowledge and participation.
2. **Participation by consultation:** it is not enough to inform stakeholders. Stakeholders must be consulted for their views which are then incorporated into the project.
3. **Participation through material and intrinsic incentives:** Rewards are capable of motivating stakeholder participation in the VPA implementation process. Incentives may include cash, food, *equipment* fertile land, awards, recognition, etc.
4. **Functional participation/ Group formation:** Groups that are formed for projects and programmes are means of ensuring sustainability. The groups when motivated, informed and strengthened are capable of functioning effectively in achieving the goals of the VPA.
5. **Interactive participation/collaboration:** Collaboration between stakeholders in the VPA implementation is necessary for its success. Efforts must be made to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved to share ideas, dialogue and agree on processes.
6. **Self- actualization/empowerment:** stakeholders have control over decisions and resources and participate in lead roles for projects when they are empowered.

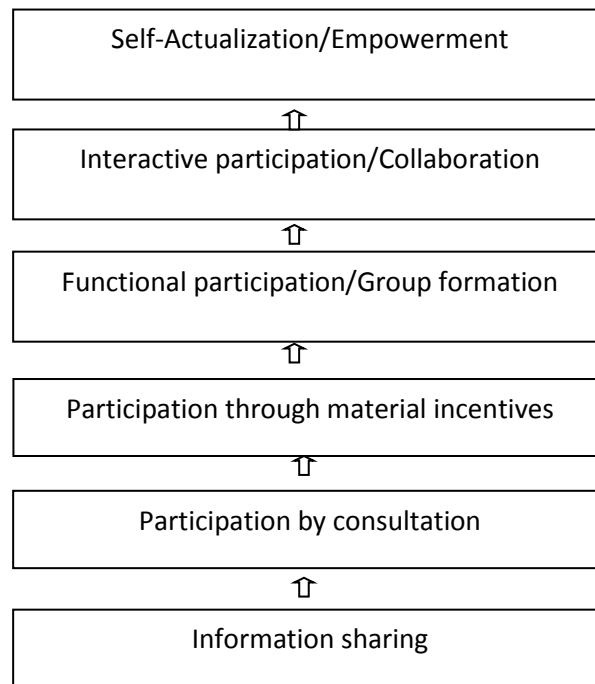


Figure 1: Ladder of participation to determine levels of participation for various stakeholders in the VPA process

Step 4: Establish Participation Categories and Methods: The final step of the stakeholder analysis contains two components:

- a. The first step is to link each stakeholder group with a level of participation. It is important to keep in mind that stakeholders may participate at different levels.
- b. The second step is after the varied levels of participation have been identified; there is the need to have strategies or methods that would encourage stakeholder participation. The need for inclusivity is felt strongly here as one need to find which groups are to be represented and at what level. Since chiefs and traditional authorities play key roles in community development. It is essential to identify their roles in this process. This can be done during the stakeholder analysis. Some examples of methods that have been used to encourage stakeholder participation include: workshops, questionnaires, interviews, dramas, role plays, brainstorming discussions, open-ended discussions, round robin discussions (i.e., everyone in the group shares one or more ideas), small group discussions and surveys.

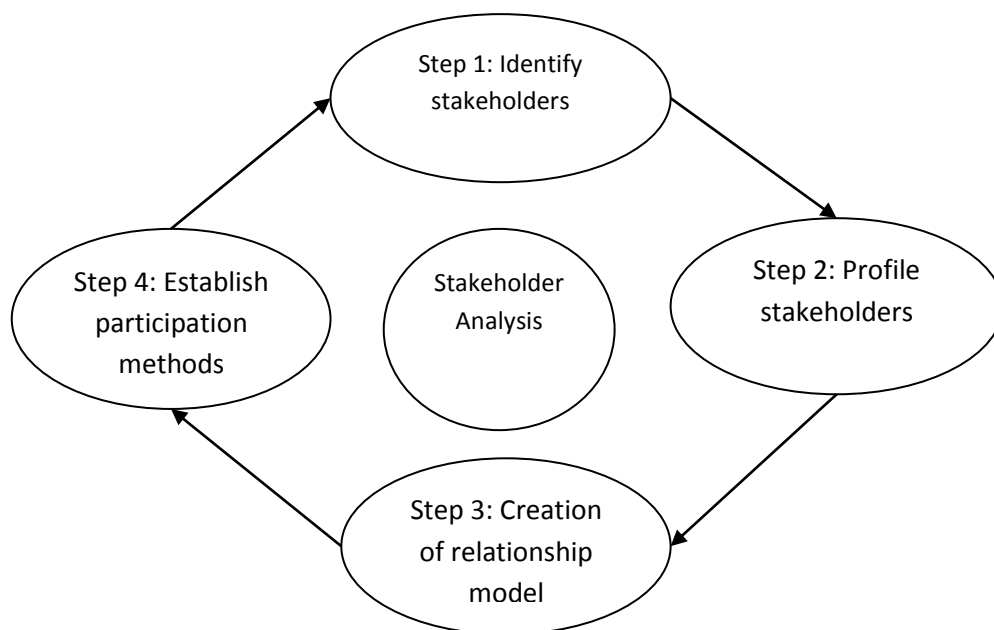


Figure 2: Steps for conducting a stakeholder analysis

2.3 Existing, Synergies and Opportunities

An effective stakeholder framework and accompanying process is usually a product of co-creation. Stakeholder structures/processes are more than just the collaboration between

different actors. The challenge is to ensure that each body contributes its quota towards the VPA implementation process or any other community intervention. Facilitators of such processes must therefore devise strategies to help identify existing stakeholder frameworks and processes operating in their communities. This will help in building effective institutional linkages and synergies as well as take advantage of emerging opportunities. In all forest fringe communities in Ghana, the Forestry Commission (FC) has facilitated broad-based stakeholder structures and processes which can serve as a useful guide to other stakeholders. Apart from the FC, it is also essential to take stock of what other CSOs have been doing. Due to the crucial role that stakeholders play in the VPA implementation, the FC or any other regulatory body needs to ensure that stakeholders are linked up in order to share ideas on relevant information and to set out the modalities for the co-ordination of relationships amongst stakeholder structures.

2.4 Legitimization of Stakeholders (Basis for Legal Recognition)

Stakeholder works, roles, responsibilities and participation in community forestry intervention programmes (including VPA) bring them in constant contact with duty bearers who often question their legitimacy and source of power to do what they do. Such tendencies have proven to discourage and undermine the effectiveness of stakeholders. A successful stakeholder process is one which deliberately seeks out all relevant duty bearers (Local authorities, statutory bodies and traditional rulers, etc), and dialogue for social and legal recognition. Such recognition should include publicity and provision of legitimization paraphernalia. In some cases, it will require preparing an advocacy plan to lobby local authorities to pass bye-laws to give the necessary legal recognition to the stakeholders. Some of the important paraphernalia that can be used include:

- Standardised Identity Cards endorsed by recognised authority
- Rules, agreements, MOUs between relevant stakeholder institutions and other partners.
- Certificates of attendance at workshops and seminars
- Relevant badges, Uniforms, Caps, etc. as may be appropriate.
- Finally, as part of the continuing educational programmes, stakeholders are to be supplied with copies of all the relevant laws and documents that would empower them to discharge their assignment. Some of these documents include forest reserve management plans, list of approved timber concessionaires, timber yield selected for harvesting, stock maps, etc.

Where there are existing community structures functioning effectively, it is proper that steps are taken to give them formal legal recognition.

SECTION 3: STAKEHOLDER WORKING MODALITIES

This section outlines the modalities by which stakeholders could effectively carry out their assigned roles and responsibilities based on principles and codes of conduct; as outlined in the guidelines as well as plan of activity of the VPA and other programmes for peer review; documentation and reporting processes and transparency, efficiency and effectiveness. As with every new human institution, it is essential that whatever modalities prescribed, it is subjected to refinements following the necessary review processes to achieve improved workable modalities.

3.1 Principles, Guidelines / Rules and Codes of Conduct

Stakeholder structures and process need to be guided by agreed principles in order to stay focused. The stakeholder group can develop their own principles as deemed fit. The following are examples of principles to be followed:

- i. Democratic but strong leadership
- ii. Cohesion and relationship-management
- iii. Goal and process clarity
- iv. Knowledge and competence
- v. Credibility
- vi. Inclusiveness
- vii. Gender sensitivity
- viii. Ownership and commitment to agreed course of action
- ix. Delivery and outcome-orientation

3.1.1 Terms of Office

By way of tenure in office of executives, it is proposed that elected representatives should serve a determinable number of years after which they could be re-elected for a second term only. Stakeholder frameworks such as the one being described in these guidelines need to have a dynamic leadership that is democratically elected by its own members and recognized outside; imposition of leadership should not be allowed. The leaders act as spokespersons, provide strategic directions and lead the group to implement its decisions and plans of action. It is extremely essential for the elected representatives to have a clear tenure of office specifying the years and term a person can hold a position in the group. Tenures may differ from group to group and each group needs to set out its terms and conditions on tenures

which would work for them. Usually, however, the best practice is to have two terms of two years each. Although hierarchy, influence and power do play an important role in stakeholder structures or processes, there is often no direct disciplinary hierarchy in a stakeholder group thus no single leader has the final say in what needs to happen. Decisions should be based on consensus. Communities or interest groups have the prerogative to recommend the removal of their representative(s) if there is cause that they are not performing as expected based on pre-agreed provisions. The final authority to cause removal should rest on a majority decision by the respective groups. Where a group already has a constitution or some form of rules or regulations, these must be used as working documents to guide the conduct of the leaders and the general conduct of the entire group. In the absence of these, it is encouraged that the group develops one.

3.1.2 Code of Conduct

There is the need to have an acceptable code of conduct. The nature of the code of conduct will depend to a large extent on the nature of the stakeholder groups and the processes being followed. Having a code of conduct will limit abuse of power. A code of conduct will highlight issues of transparency, accountability, equity, efficiency and effectiveness for the group. The following in-exhaustive list is presented as a guide on good conduct to members of a group:

- Acting transparently in all dealings with their communities and outsiders
- Placing the interests of the communities above that of members and executives.
- Properly documenting all transactions and distributing copies to as wide an audience as possible promptly and on a regular basis.
- Boldly pointing out shortcomings of members and prescribing appropriate sanctions.
- Being accountable to the people they are serving by constantly holding meetings to keep them informed of all major developments.
- Declaring and rescinding from partaking in activities, which involve conflicts of interest

3.2 Plan of Action

To ensure effectiveness and efficiency of every activity, there is the need to develop a concrete plan of action. The plan must clearly identify the work to be done and assign roles and responsibilities with clear timelines. This plan can be reviewed as and when necessary,

depending on the circumstances. A normal duration is one year depending on the programme at stake.

3.3 Peer Review / Conflict Management and Feedback

It is important for all stakeholder processes to have their own internal review systems. Based on the plan of action, the group should set out specific times to reflect on its own work and processes. Every member should participate in this exercise with a set of clear guidelines. On the other hand, outsiders who are not part of this stakeholder process can be invited to evaluate and assess their performance based on set roles and responsibilities, code of conduct and set target. The implementation of VPA involves diverse stakeholder groups with divergent interests and concerns which can lead to conflicts if not addressed properly. It is therefore necessary to undertake conflict analysis and apply mechanisms to avert potential conflicts.

In all these, feedback is essential. A periodic review of the roles and responsibilities, code of conduct and set target allowing for feedback from an independent monitor will ensure the VPA process is reflecting the situation on the ground and also adapting to new challenges.

3.4 Documentation and Reporting Processes

In improving stakeholder participation, it is essential that one documents the processes as well as any improvements made. . Documentation and record keeping is important to ensure accountability and facilitate coordination between the stakeholders in the VPA implementation process. Documentation should be in a form that is friendly to the stakeholders' involved (hard or soft versions) and easily retrievable when stored. These documents act as the store of collective organizational knowledge regarding the processes and can be accessed by all when needed.

SECTION 4: CAPACITY BUILDING AND MOTIVATION

This section covers capacity building and motivation for stakeholders and highlights capacity needs assessment training and provision of logistics, incentives and rewards.

4.1 Capacity Needs Assessment of Stakeholders

It has been recognized that stakeholder structures and processes must be accompanied by provisions for developing capacities. Capacity needs assessment is therefore a requirement to be able to identify the capacity gaps. It is therefore, important to provide the required capacity building to empower and serve as incentive to stakeholder groups to contribute to VPA implementation.

4.2 Provision of Logistics / Incentives/Rewards

Local communities taking part in stakeholder processes need to be provided with incentives to motivate them. Some of the incentives suggested include:

- ✓ Empowering stakeholders with the needed legal backing and support
- ✓ Provision of cash or in-kind incentives
- ✓ Provision of alternative livelihood packages
- ✓ Recognition
- ✓ Awards certificates and rewards
- ✓ Material incentives
- ✓ Payment for any extensive work actually executed
- ✓ Invitation to meetings and workshops
- ✓ Study tours
- ✓ Paraphernalia

SECTION 5: SUSTAINABILITY

The section outlines sustainability of stakeholder participation in relation to planning, development of sustainable funding and exit strategies.

5.1 Sustainability Plan

Stakeholder structures once established must be sustained beyond project periods. Developing a sustainability plan is one such initiative to address sustainability problems. The sustainability plan will help in identifying outstanding tasks of the programme or process, and who must be responsible, resources required and overall ownership of the project. If it is well formulated and put into practice, stakeholder structures and processes are fundamental to sustainability and benefits gained through partnerships with stakeholder groups will be maintained.

5.2 Development of Sustainable funding

Based on the sustainability plan, there is the need to integrate livelihood interventions and/or development of a revolving fund concept into the stakeholder process to provide requisite income to sustain stakeholders' participation. The incomes from the alternative livelihood could be used to set up a membership-based revolving fund. The management of this fund is to be determined in consultation with beneficiary stakeholders, to ensure ownership of the investment and sustained commitment.

5.3 Exit Strategy

In order not to leave stakeholders disappointed, there is the need to prepare their minds towards the closure of projects. In this strategy, roles, responsibilities, management and leadership are clarified and determined. At this stage it is important to include an exit strategy in the sustainability plan. A resource plan is sometimes incorporated in the strategy to indicate where resources can be obtained beyond the project phase. If this is not done, the entire investment in the stakeholder process or particular intervention will be undermined.

Custodianship or remaining resources, information, documents, etc, must be predetermined before project close. Attempts should be made to link the structures to emerging programmes and opportunities. Possibilities of modifying the structure to take advantage of new innovation must be explored. No matter what, such structures should be sustained and must not be allowed to be dormant or collapse.

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