Gateway to international timber trade

A recently launched website serves as a one-stop information platform supporting legal timber trade

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Squared off: Squared poles of basralocus (*Dicorynia guianensis*) in Suriname, one of the countries for which a profile has been published on the Gateway to International Timber Trade. *Photo: Form international*

With support from ITTO as part of its Biennial Work Programme and the European Sustainable Tropical Timber Coalition, the European Timber Trade Federation recently launched a website to promote well-informed and legal timber trade. The "Gateway to International Timber Trade" at www.timbertradeportal.com is a "one-stop" information point providing international timber traders and other users with information on the forest industries and legality requirements in timber-producing countries. This is the first time that information on the tropical timber trade has been organized and centralized at such a large scale, and the expectation is that it will result in more transparency in the timber supply chain. Form international, a forest management and services company, is in charge of coordinating and implementing the project.

Facilitating trade

One of the biggest hurdles facing prospective buyers in new and emerging markets is obtaining reliable information with which to assess and create trading opportunities. Few producer countries have dedicated timber promotion agencies that can provide one-stop sites for information on all aspects of forest production, sustainable forest management, legality, certification, forest products and trade contacts.

Moreover, timber importers face new and challenging terms of trade in certain markets, in particular due to the need to verify the legality of their wood products under the European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR), the United States' Lacey Act amendments, and the Australian Illegal Logging Prohibition Act, among others. To satisfy the due-diligence requirements of these regulations, importers must obtain documentary evidence to demonstrate that the risk is low that their suppliers are not operating in accordance with national laws and regulations. The first step in obtaining such evidence is accurate information on the source of the timber and applicable laws and regulations, and how legislation is translated into operational procedures and documents.

The Gateway

With its two pillars of industry and legality profiles, the Gateway to International Timber Trade fulfils the need for factual information on legal and transparent timber trade. The goals are to facilitate trade, support importers in their illegality risk assessments and due-diligence and due-care procedures under the new rules applying in some importer countries, and help create a level playing field among small and large companies. The website is also a versatile business tool, including up-to-date industry data, contacts for relevant businesses, industry associations and government agencies, and links to further information.

Under the EUTR, timber licensed under the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) initiative and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) are considered "green lanes" (i.e. fast-track systems for delivering timber legality assurance without additional administrative burdens); country profiles, therefore, pay special attention to FLEGT and CITES requirements. To date, no FLEGT-licensed timber has been shipped to the European Union, but the CITES-permitting of listed timber species is an ongoing process. Therefore, information on the CITES listings of timber species is an important component of the country profiles.

> **A trader's point of view**
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> "The web portal … is a welcome tool for importers/operators in the wood sector. It will make life easier for timber producers and importers/operators as well as for monitoring organizations, since the requirements in terms of due diligence on legal timbers are clearly defined, which benefits all parties. … This web portal provides a good tool in exercising due diligence."
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> *Mr Wim Hup, Wijma*

The website contains full profiles of the following countries: Brazil, Cameroon, China, the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Guyana, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Suriname, Ukraine and Viet Nam. Basic profiles are available for the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Honduras, Liberia, Papua New Guinea and Peru. The profiles of other countries will be added over time.

Thousands of visitors worldwide have used the website since its launch in January 2016. Local experts reviewed the profiles before publication, and a network of experts, sources and traders will ensure that the information stays up to date and increases over time. The website and the network behind it are growing. Readers are invited to join the network and to contribute to it by using the review button on the country profiles or by contacting the authors of this article directly.

Visit the Gateway to International Timber Trade at www.timbertradeportal.com.