

**Project "Supporting small business holders comply with the legality definition requirements in order to effectively participate in national and global timber supply chains"**

# **MANUAL ON ESTABLISHING THE NETWORK OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS TO MONITOR AND SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VNTLAS AND OCS**



**Implementing agencies:**

**Centre for Rural Development in Central Vietnam (CRD)  
Center for People and Environment of the Central Highlands (COPE)**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Purpose of the document.....	1
1.3 Users of the document.....	2
1.4 Structure of the document.....	2
2. Vision and goals of the network.....	2
2.1 Vision.....	2
2.2 Goals.....	2
3. Roles and functions of VPAL.....	3
3.1 Providing and sharing information about VPA/FLEGT.....	3
3.2 Supporting enterprises and individual household businesses in the wood industry.....	3
3.3 Monitoring the implementation of VNTLAS and OCS.....	4
4. Organizational structure of VPAL network.....	4
4.1 Organizational structure.....	4
4.2 Criteria for network member selection.....	6
5. Operation of the VPAL network.....	6
5.1 Regular management activities of VPAL.....	6
5.2 VPAL's activities to support enterprises/IHBs.....	7
6. Provide detailed instructions for some management tasks.....	7
6.1 Operational regulations of the network.....	7
6.2 Operating principles.....	7
6.3 Developing management plan.....	8
6.4 Organize periodical monitoring meetings.....	8
6.5 Evaluation of annual plan implementation.....	9
7. Network establishment process.....	9
Annex. Organizations with potential to participate in VPAL from Dong Nai and Quang Tri provinces.....	11

## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

CED:	Center for Education and Development
COPE:	Center for People and Environment of the Central Highlands
CRD:	Centre for Rural Development in Central Vietnam
CSOs:	Civil Society Organizations
EU:	European Union
FAO:	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FLEGT:	Forest Law, Enforcement, Governance and Trade
FPSD:	Forest Protection Sub-Department
IHBs:	Individual Household Businesses
LD:	Legality Definition
OCS:	Organisation Classification System
SMEs:	Small and Medium Enterprises
VCCI:	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry
VNTLAS:	Vietnam Timber Legality Assurance System
VNGO-FLEGT:	Vietnamese Non-Government Organizations on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
VPA:	Voluntary Partnership Agreement
VPAL:	VPA Local network

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (VPA/FLEGT) between Vietnam and the European Union (EU) was signed in October 2018. To support the preparation for the implementation of the Agreement, the Centre for Rural Development in Central Vietnam (CRD) in association with the Center for Education and Development (CED) and the Center for People and Environment of the Central Highlands (COPE) implement the Project *"Supporting small business holders comply with the legality definition requirements in order to effectively participate in national and global legal timber supply chains"* sponsored by the EU-FAO FLEGT programme through the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

One of the activities of the project is to develop a manual to provide guidelines for establishing a network to support enterprises in the two provinces of Dong Nai and Quang Tri. This activity was conducted to support the establishment of an independent network to support and monitor the implementation of VNTLAS/OCS at local level. The network's role is to provide information and technical support to help enterprises better comply with timber legality requirements under VPA/FLEGT and the organization classification system in the coming time.

Article 15 of the VPA/FLEGT Agreement emphasizes stakeholders' participation in the implementation and monitoring of the VPA/FLEGT Agreement. It is highlighted that "Vietnam ensures that the implementation and monitoring of this Agreement shall be carried out in a transparent manner with the participation of stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, forestry associations, enterprises, trade unions, local communities and people living in forest areas". In addition, once the Agreement is implemented, a series of regulations will be enforced by the Vietnam Timber Legality Assurance System (VNTLAS) to ensure and verify the legality of exported timber products for consumption not only in the EU but also in other markets including the domestic market (Article 13 of the Agreement). This means that the Agreement has significant impact, not only on export enterprises but also on all actors in the supply chain, especially small enterprises and individual household businesses (IHB). Meanwhile, recent surveys<sup>1</sup> showed that there is a significant gap between SMEs and IHB in the wood industry in meeting the requirements of the Agreement. The surveys also showed that many related organizations and agencies were aware of this situation and expressed their interest, enthusiasm and willingness to coordinate with responsible parties to provide technical support to enterprises, to help them adapt to VNTLAS and the Organization Classification System (OCS).

Therefore, the establishment of a network of local civil society organizations (CSOs) is necessary for effective participation in the monitoring of VPA/FLEGT as well as support for wood enterprises/household businesses to gradually understand and meet the requirements, as well as minimize risks and impacts of VPA/FLEGT agreement.

### 1.2 Purpose of the document

This document proposes the process of establishing a network of local civil society organizations (VPA local network - VPAL), standard operating procedures to help related organizations perform their responsibilities thus effectively support local wood SMEs and IHBs during the

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<sup>1</sup> CRD-CED-COPE

implementation of VPA/FLEGT as well as maintaining a sustainable network. Specifically, this document helps:

- Determine the vision and goals of the network
- State the main functions and objectives
- Present the organizational structure of the network
- Specify criteria for participating organizations
- Present the organization and operation of network activities
- Present the process and steps to establish the network.

### **1.3 Users of the document**

This document is designed to help state agencies, organizations, civil society organizations and wood industry associations participate in VPA-FLEGT monitoring, establish and operate networks at local level to provide effective support to enterprises/household businesses in the wood industry. Organizations and individuals participating in the network shall directly support and monitor enterprises at local level and may use this document depending on their specific local conditions and contexts.

### **1.4 Structure of the document**

The document comprises of 7 parts. Part 1: Overall introduction, the necessity and purpose of the document; Part 2: The vision and goals of the VPA local network (VPAL); Part 3: Overview of functions and objectives of VPAL in during the preparation and implementation of VPA-FLEGT. Part 4: Standard structure of VPAL, roles and criteria for selecting network members; Part 5: Organization and operation of network activities in order to accomplish its set objectives; Part 6: Detailed guidelines on some of the network's tasks including developing regulations, action plans, agenda for monitoring, evaluation meetings, etc. Part 7: Steps to set up a network with a participatory process to promote the sustainability of VPAL.

## **2. Vision and goals of the network**

### **2.1 Vision**

All member organizations of the local VPAL agreed with the vision statement below as the ultimate goal of VPAL:

*“Local wood enterprises/household businesses have sufficient capacity to meet timber legality requirements in accordance with legal regulations as well as regulations of VPA/FLEGT agreement and effectively participate in the legal timber supply chain, actively contributing to sustainable management and use of forest resources”.*

### **2.2 Goals**

VPAL sets out the following six objectives to realize the strategic vision statement stated above:

- i. The VPAL network is established and operates effectively and stably by enhancing internal capacity, facilities, and finance.
- ii. The database of local enterprises/IHB participating in the timber supply chain is developed and updated serving as the base for supporting activities.

- iii. VPAL performs well as a focal point to help enterprises/IHB when necessary, as well as the agency to convey the opinions and opinions of local enterprises/IHB via communication activities and workshops.
- iv. VPAL provides timely support and advices to stakeholders, including authorities and wood industry associations on activities to be carried out in order to improve the capacity of enterprises/IHB in the wood industry including technical assistance or organization of activities in the locality such as trainings, workshops, etc.
- v. VPAL conducts effective local monitoring of VNTLAS-OCS implementation.
- vi. Search, receive, manage and effectively use financial support for activities of VPAL.

### **3. Roles and functions of VPAL**

VPAL is a provincial-level multi-stakeholder and multi-sector organization responsible for connecting and supporting local enterprises/IHB in the wood industry. VPAL has three main functions, including: i) Providing and sharing information about VPA/FLEGT; ii) Supporting enterprises/IHB in the timber supply chain to comply with regulations and minimize the impact of VPA/FLEGT; iii) Monitor the VPA/FLEGT implementation process, specifically, to ensure transparent and effective implementation of VNTLAS and OCS.

#### **3.1 Providing and sharing information about VPA/FLEGT**

During the development of the Agreement, state agencies as well as associations and civil society organizations conducted many consultations and provided information to stakeholders. However, at local level, organizations and individuals participating in the supply chain, especially small enterprises and IHBs have access to little information about VPA/FLEGT. Surveys on contents related to VPA/FLEGT, VNTLAS, OCS, showed that the level of understanding of related agencies (including some Forest Protection Sub-Department - FPSD) and people is very low. Apart from some officers from Forest Protection Sub-Departments, which directly manage the timber supply chain, and wood associations that have participated in workshops, trainings or have been updated with legal documents more regularly, other stakeholders do not have a clear understanding of VPA/FLEGT, VNTLAS, OCS, etc. This poses great risks to enterprises, especially small enterprises and IHBs, when the agreement comes into effect due to the lack of preparation.

Therefore, the function and also the first objective of VPAL is to provide and share information about VPA/FLEGT and relevant regulatory information to local enterprises/IHBs on a regular (eg. Hotlines, websites), periodical or extraordinary (meetings, workshops) basis, leaflets, etc.

#### **3.2 Supporting enterprises and individual household businesses in the wood industry**

VPAL network plays the focal role of supporting local enterprises/IHBs. Support for enterprises/IHBs in the wood industry aims to help enterprises/IHBs meet the requirements of VPA/FLEGT, specifically LD/VNTLAS, and to reduce the adverse impacts of VPA/FLEGT. Except for big or FDI enterprises, the majority of SMEs, especially IHBs, have not met the legal requirements in the production and trading of timber and timber products. The survey showed that, at present, enterprises do not comply well with such regulations as keeping sufficient information, records as proof of origin, supply chain control declaration and reporting (dynamic proof), as well as static proof, which includes environmental regulations (eg. Decision on approving environmental impact assessment report; environmental protection plan); compliance

with tax regulations, fire protection, labor contracts and insurance (social insurance and health insurance), etc.

Member organizations of VPAL study and improve their capacities, and then carry out necessary activities including organizing training and workshops to help enterprises/IHBs improve their business management skills (management system, information system, ...) improve, ensure the availability of static and dynamic proofs, implementation during the course of business.

Besides, VPAL conducts activities to minimize the impacts of VPA/FLEGT on enterprises/IHBs. Article 16 of the Agreement on Social safeguarding emphasizes the need to assess the impact of the Agreement on vulnerable groups and to take appropriate steps to mitigate any adverse impacts of the Agreement. VPAL may exchange information, carry out surveys to assess the impact of the Agreement on enterprises/IHBs and the local wood industry, make recommendations and communicate, send them to stakeholders via appropriate channels to come up with a plan to minimize adverse impacts and enhance positive impacts.

### **3.3 Monitoring the implementation of VNTLAS and OCS**

Independent monitoring and participatory monitoring are clearly stated in the Agreement (Article 15). Accordingly, the implementation and monitoring of the Agreement will be carried out in a transparent manner with participation of stakeholders. The participation of local organizations is clearly emphasized, including non-governmental organizations, forestry associations, enterprises, trade unions, local communities and people living in forest areas. Preliminary surveys showed that stakeholders in Dong Nai and Quang Tri supported the monitoring of VPA/FLEGT implementation, especially the organizations classification system (OCS) to ensure fairness, reduce the abuse of power and to facilitate FLEGT licensing. This gives VPAL an important tasks in monitoring activities. Specifically, VPAL needs to focus on such monitoring activities as the implementation of the agreement, the economic, social and environmental impacts of the Agreement with focus on SMEs and IHBs, and the responsive capacity of local enterprises/IHBs. In order to perform such tasks, VPAL needs to be trained, coordination regulations need to be established, and basic conditions must be prepared.

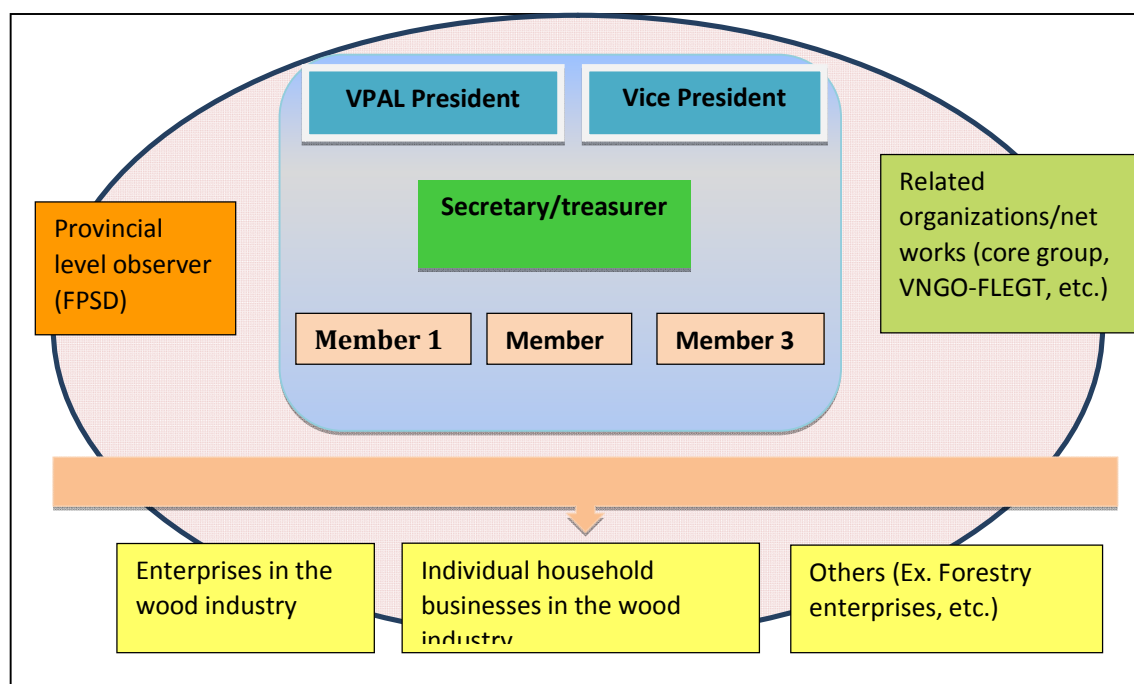
## **4. Organizational structure of VPAL**

### **4.1 Organizational structure**

The VPAL is a multi-stakeholder coordination organization that includes the following positions.

- President: The head, responsible for the overall operation of VPAL.
- Vice President: Advise and support the President, acts on behalf of the President when authorized.
- Secretary/treasurer: Assist the President, Vice President and support activities of the network in general. This position can concurrently serve as treasurer at the beginning.
- Members: Voice their opinions, make collective decisions, support, conduct activities when necessary.
- Observer: (Optional). Organization that acts as observer can comment on the network's activities when necessary but do not participate in the network's decisions. Observers may be representatives from FPSD or concerned state agencies.

VPAL positions are elected for a 1-year term. Diagram of VPAL network among stakeholders is shown below:



Members of the VPAL network may include many organizations and agencies in different related areas such as forestry, wood processing, and enterprise support management; organizations concerning the environment, civil society organizations concerning workers, etc. It would be best if organizations involved in VPAL are organizations that do not have state management functions and are civic organizations that work for the development of wood processing enterprises such as Wood Association, etc. From the surveys conducted in Dong Nai and Quang Tri, there were opinions that in order to provide effective support for enterprises, the network should be led by a state agency with leadership function such as the Trade Promotion Center or Forest Protection Sub-Department. However, this may cause conflicts of interest in some activities of the network such as monitoring the implementation of VNTLAS or OCS. Regardless, it is necessary that state agencies play the role of observers to provide inputs and support for VPAL network if necessary.

The surveys also indicated that many stakeholders showed their interest in supporting wood enterprises, and are willing to participate in VPA-FLEGT monitoring, including VNTLAS, OCS, as well as to support enterprises in adapting to this process. Among them, many organizations have the appropriate functions, capabilities and experiences to provide better support for wood enterprises. Organizations and agencies that can participate in VPAL network at local level include:

- Wood, handicraft association
- Cooperative alliances
- Center for forestry technology development and transfer
- Forestry club
- Center for wood processing technology development and transfer
- Members of Union of Science and Technology Associations working in the wood industry



- Association for Forest Products Processing and Export
- Association for Forest and Biodiversity Protection
- Association of Smallholder Forest Certification Groups
- Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry - VCCI
- Promotion and investment center
- Rubber Association

#### **4.2 Criteria for network member selection**

Since VPAL is a social and non-profit network with a view to facilitating production and operation of local enterprises and IHBs, the motivation for the participation of VPAL members are clearly not of material interests but contribution to society and community. However, other qualities are also necessary. Following are criteria for selecting VPAL members:

- Registered organizations or legal entities (eg. Wood associations, science and technology centers, etc.)
- Work in such industries as forestry, wood processing, trading of timber and timber products or related industries
- Interested in and are willing to support enterprises/IHBs in the wood industry
- Enthusiastic, responsible and participate voluntarily
- Have good reputation among enterprises/IHBs in the wood industry

Other useful criteria for VPAL networks:

- Have understanding of laws, particularly of VPA-FLEGT
- Capability of managing networks, fund raising
- Be able to operate the network, participate in activities, meetings, workshops

### **5 Operation of the VPAL network**

#### **5.1 Regular management activities of VPAL**

In order to fulfill its functions as mentioned in section 3, VPAL will perform the following specific management tasks or activities:

- i. Establish the network and elect VPAL network members,
- ii. Annually develop and/or revise its operational regulations
- iii. Formulate work plan and financial plan
- iv. Carry out planned or extraordinary activities

These activities may include organizing meetings, workshops, awareness raising programs for stakeholders; dissemination of information and education about VPA-FLEGT, VNTLAS, OCS, participation in related conferences and workshops in and out of the province, providing advice for concerned authorities (eg. FPSD), associations, organizations, and agencies when required, coordination and cooperation with member organizations as well as other organizations outside the province or at national level etc.

- v. Manage and use documents, assets and funding to operate the VPAL network
- vi. Perform monitoring and evaluation of network activities and prepare related reports.

## 5.2 VPAL's activities to support enterprises/IHBs

VPAL monitors VPA/FLEGT's implementation, compliance and impact on stakeholders and voice stakeholders' opinions. In addition, VPAL will be the focal point to coordinate, promote and implement activities to support enterprises and IHBs in the local wood industry. Therefore, VPAL can carry out activities, including but not limited to the following:

- i. Organize and implement capacity building activities for enterprises/IHBs in the wood industry such as trainings, instructions and technical assistance on issues related to VPA/FLEGT Agreement
- ii. Set up and manage the database of enterprises/IHBs.
- iii. Assist enterprises in conducting assessment and classification in accordance with the OCS system. Accordingly, OCS is the means for VPAL to provide support and to monitor the development of enterprises in the province.
- iv. Organize periodical activities such as communication and dissemination of information.
- v. Organize, possibly, a quarterly forum for stakeholders (such as Forest Protection Sub-Department, wood association, businesses, CSOs, local authorities) to discuss and resolve related issues during VPA implementation process.
- vi. Prepare plans with specific categories and indicators to monitor VPA-FLEGT implementation.
- vii. Connect local enterprises/IHBs with state management agencies in the province, organizations and agencies outside the province.
- viii. Mobilize and access local and external financial resources in order to improve the capacity of enterprises and IHBs to adapt to VPA-FLEGT and maintain operation of the network.

## 6 Provide detailed instructions for some management tasks

### 6.1 Operational regulations of the network

VPAL may base on this guideline to develop a more detailed operational regulations for the network. Suggested operational regulations should include:

- Legal bases
- Subject and scope of regulation
- General responsibilities and specific tasks of each position
- Standard operating procedures and coordination principles of the network
- Provisions on the regulation's validity and revision (revised annually)
- Implementation of the regulation

The VPAL's operational regulations does not require approval from competent authorities but requires acknowledgment and agreement from all stakeholders when participating in the network. Subsequent organizations that participate in the network have to agree and comply with the operational regulations as a prerequisite to become a member of the network.

### 6.2 Operating principles

There are two important principles that VPAL should consider during operation of the network:

- i. Adaptive management is an important operating principle of VPAL. This allows VPAL to learn and adapt to the changes and uncertainties in the context of business and laws, as well

as to the operational structure of the system. Based on that, VPAL management can make flexible decisions to adjust to such changes or uncertainties or make recommendations to decision makers.

- ii. The participatory approach and sustainability of VPAL. The sustainable development of VPAL is essential for the long-term development of enterprises/IHBs. To this end, it is important to ensure participatory management for VPAL. This will help enhance cooperation, coordination and strategy for VPAL activities as per actual needs. Thus, stakeholders and subjects such as SMEs/IHBs need to have their voice and be heard in VPAL's activities.

### **6.3 Developing management plan**

VPAL's annual management plan will be prepared and developed in the first quarter of the year. The VPAL secretary will arrange meetings with member organizations in a timely manner, prepare logistics and facilitate the meeting. VPAL member will work together to develop the plan according to the following process:

- i. Review ongoing and past year activities and last year's achievements.
- ii. Assess current conditions, changes or impacts
- iii. Review and analyze the latest national and provincial policies and regulations concerning enterprises/IHBs
- iv. Review the feasibility of the vision, goals, strategies, and approaches
- v. Set or revise the vision, goals, strategies, approaches if necessary based on the results of the above assessments
- vi. Identify the actions needed to i) achieve VPAL's vision and goals; ii) manage and maintain VPAL members, and iii) contribute to achieving the provincial government's development goals for the wood industry.
- vii. Estimate required funding
- viii. Schedule for implementation
- ix. Specify the roles and responsibilities of each member organizations
- x. Identify important milestones and output indicators for the plan
- xi. Develop a draft annual plan to summarize results of all the activities listed above and share the draft version with member organizations, consult with FPSD and other stakeholders.
- xii. Finalize the plan by revising the draft version based on suggestions and inputs from member organizations

### **6.4 Organize periodical monitoring meetings**

This periodical review meeting aims at promoting effectiveness of VPAL's coordination work. VPAL should monitor the implementation progress of the annual action plan, then revise and improve based on the lessons learned. VPAL needs to conduct periodical meetings as follows:

- a. Hold a plenary meeting with the participation of all member organizations each quarter. The secretary will make necessary arrangement such as sending invitations, preparing the venue.
- b. VPAL members will share and discuss the following topics at the meetings:
  - i. Progress of planned activities
  - ii. Challenges and problems encountered by the network or related organizations
  - iii. Necessary actions taken to resolve problems and overcome challenges

- iv. Lessons learned
- v. Changes needed to improve the activities

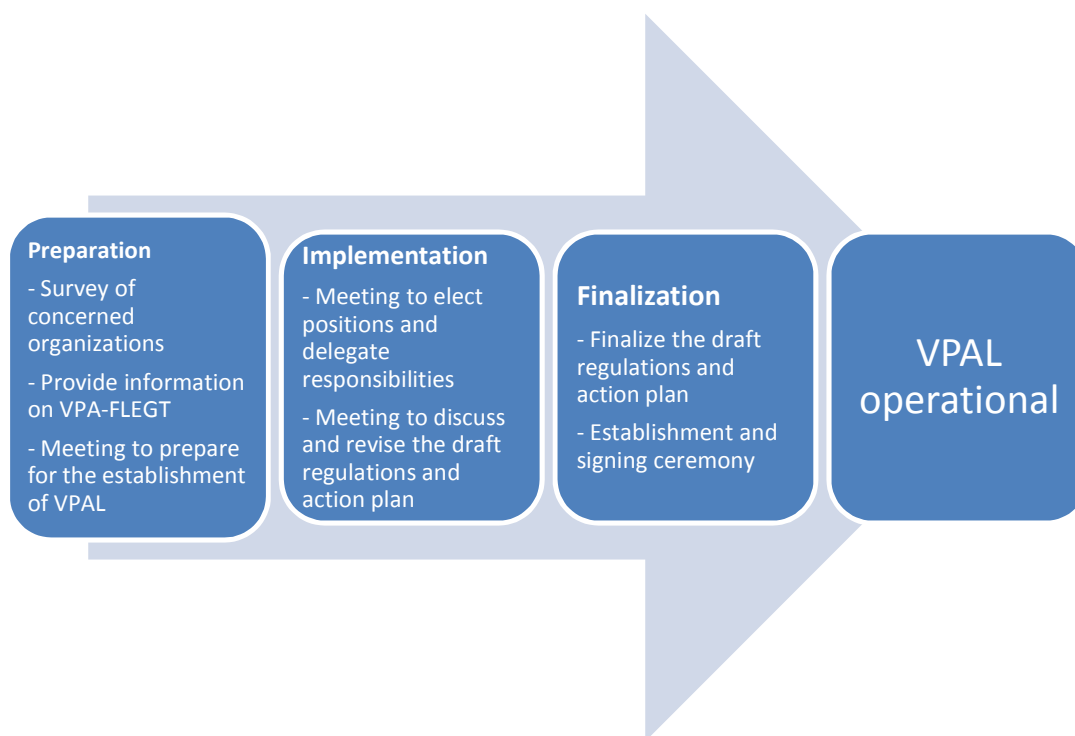
### 6.5 Evaluation of annual plan implementation

In addition to regular monitoring of VPAL activities, it is also necessary to assess the results of activities carried out according to the annual action plan. VPAL will arrange an annual review meeting as follows:

- a. Conduct a plenary meeting with the participation of all member organizations in December each year. The network's secretary will make necessary arrangements such as sending invitations, preparing the venue for the meeting among other things.
- b. The following details will be shared and discussed at the meeting:
  - i. Results achieved in the year
  - ii. Discuss the results of activities that have been carried out according to the annual action plan, compared with set milestones;
  - iii. Necessary arrangements and coordination need to be carried out by member organizations to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the network for enterprises/IHBs;
  - iv. Improvements, revisions and lessons will be considered in the preparation of the action plan for the following fiscal year
  - v. Prepare the action plan for the next year

### 7 Network establishment process

The VPAL network establishment process depends on the readiness of local concerned organizations. At present, the level of understanding of VPA-FLEGT in many provinces is limited, so preparations are necessary. In general, the establishment process of VPAL consists of three phases, including preparation, implementation and finalization as follows:



The preparation phase includes the following steps:

- i. Preliminary survey and identify needs for related provincial organizations and enterprises/IHBs.
- ii. Provide information about VPA-FLEGT, including VNTLAS, OCS to stakeholders. Central agencies and organizations outside the province can support this.
- iii. Meetings with local organizations to prepare for the establishment of VPAL network.

The implementation phase consists of two major meetings:

- iv. A meeting to elect positions in the VPAL network and to discuss delegate responsibilities. In this meeting, organizations also need to assign the task of preparing and sending the draft operational regulations and draft action plan.
- v. A meeting to discuss and revise the draft annual action plan, including the financial plan. This meeting is held within 1 to 2 weeks after the Draft operational regulations and the Draft action plan is sent to participating organizations.

The finalization phase includes the following

- vi. Incorporate inputs provided to get the final version. VPAL Secretary sends the revised draft operational regulations and draft action plan to stakeholders.
- vii. Organize the establishment ceremony of VPAL with the participation of related organizations in and outside the province. At this meeting, summary of the vision, goals, regulations, and action plans of the year will be presented. Participants may sign documents (eg. operational regulations) during this Ceremony.

## Annex. Organizations with potential to participate in VPAL from Dong Nai and Quang Tri provinces

No.	Name of Organization	Year of establishment	Represented by	Position	Phone number	Email	Business
<b>I</b>	<b>Dong Nai province</b>						
1	Center for scientific research and forestry technology transfer	2009	Tang Thi Kim Hong	Director	0909687928	tangkimhong@hcmuaf.edu.vn	Seedlings, silviculture, sustainable forest resource management, sustainable forest management certification
2	Vietnam Rubber Association	2004	Phan Tran Hong Van	Chief of Office	0918215319	hongvan@vra.com.vn	Providing support to people, organizations and enterprises working in the field of rubber processing and trading
3	Dong Nai Timber Association	1997	Phan Van Binh	President	0913623404	Binhphan55@yahoo.com;	Providing support for wood processing enterprises
4	Dong Nai Trade Promotion Center	2006	Nguyen Van Linh	Deputy Director	0982813372	linhngv@gmail.com	Promote trade, attracting investment capital; Provide support for associations, industries, enterprises
5	Branch of Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Ho Chi Minh city	2003	Nguyen Doan Thong	Head of Department of Membership and Training	0903857520	doanthong@vcci-hcm.org.vn	Provide support for SMEs in the South, including the target province of Dong Nai.
<b>II</b>	<b>Quang Tri province</b>						
1	Quang Tri Association of Smallholder Forest Certification Groups	2014	Doan Viet Cong	Vice chair of the standing committee	0915149268	congcclnqt@gmail.com	Provide support for the development of production forests with FSC sustainable forest management certification; Sustainable forest management and trade; Connect markets and advocate for planting production forests with FSC certification
2	Quang Tri Forestry Club	2009	Hoang Quang Ha	Science Officer	0904495291	ha.hoang1415@gmail.com	Plan forestry activities and forestry policies; Consult and answer on forestry issues
3	Center for Social Development and Enterprise Consultancy	2015	Le Ha	Director	0941008777	leha3011@gmail.com	Transfer science technology to enterprises; Provide consulting on enterprise management and support for enterprise's operation;
4	Quang Tri Science and Technology Association for Quality, Metrology and Consumer Protection	2006	Nguyen Van Hung	President	0913485503	hungatdc@gmail.com	Standardization, metrology, product quality and protection of consumer's rights

5	Center for Environmental and Agricultural Development Research	2014	Pham Van Thien	Deputy Director	0979039448	thienjob@gmail.com	Research and application in the field of agricultural science and technology and environmental protection; Capacity building for civic organizations and community organizations
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