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# Narrating illegal logging across the globe: between green protectionism and sustainable resource use

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## SUMMARY

In the last decade illegal logging has triggered the attention of policy makers and scholars of international forest governance. The issue is multifaceted, involving aspects of social and environmental sustainability, development, trade, access to markets and competitiveness. A vivid academic debate has resulted, exploring the nexus between markets and trade on one hand, and environmental and social sustainability on the other. The purpose of this paper is systematically assess the international policy discourse on illegal logging and legality verification policies in different regions of the world, drawing on the concept of policy narratives. Specifically, we analyse and compare policy narratives in Australia, Cambodia, China, the EU, Indonesia, Peru and the US. Our analysis is grounded on a rich empirical basis consisting of 260 interviews conducted by various researchers, numerous conversations with practitioners, policy documents and a media analysis. We find striking differences across the globe in narratives about illegal logging and legality verification and conclude that these need to be considered when assessing the support for, and the current and potential effects of, the emerging legality verification regime.

Keywords: global forest governance, legality verification, narratives, illegal logging, forest policy

## Etat de la coupe de bois illégale à travers le monde: entre le protectorat vert et une utilisation durable des ressources

G. WINKEL, S. LEIPOLD, K. BUHMANN, B. CASHORE, W. DE JONG, I. NATHAN, M. SOTIROV et M. STONE

La coupe de bois illégale a attiré l'attention des créateurs de politique et des érudits de la gestion forestière internationale durant cette dernière décennie. La question comporte plusieurs facettes, incluant des aspects de durabilité sociale et environnementale, le commerce, le développement l'accès aux marchés et la compétitivité. Un débat académique vigoureux en a résulté, explorant d'une part les liens entre les marchés et le commerce et la durabilité environnementale et sociale d'autre part. Le dessein de ce papier est d'évaluer systématiquement le discours de politique internationale sur la coupe de bois illégale et les politiques de vérification légale dans diverses régions du monde, en s'inspirant du concept de narration politique. Nous analysons et comparons spécifiquement les narrations politiques en Australie, au Cambodge, en Chine, aux Etats-Unis, en Indonésie, au Pérou et dans l'Union Européenne. Notre analyse est ancrée sur une riche base empirique, consistant de 260 interviews conduites par divers chercheurs, de nombreuses conversations avec les acteurs, de documents de politique et d'analyse médiatique. Nous découvrons des différences marquées dans les narrations de la coupe de bois illégale et de la vérification légale à travers le globe et en concluons qu'elles doivent être prises en compte dans l'évaluation du soutien accordé au régime de vérification légale émergeant ainsi que dans l'observation de ses effets potentiels et actuels.

## Narrando la tala ilegal a través el mundo: entre proteccionismo verde y el uso sostenible de recursos

G. WINKEL, S. LEIPOLD, K. BUHMANN, B. CASHORE, W. DE JONG, I. NATHAN, M. SOTIROV y M. STONE

La tala ilegal ha sido desde la última década un tema de preocupación para políticos y académicos de gobernanza forestal internacional. El tema es complejo y toca aspectos de sostenibilidad social y ambiental, desarrollo económico, comercio, acceso a mercados y competitividad. A raíz

de eso, se ha generado un intenso debate académico. El propósito de este artículo es de evaluar sistemáticamente el discurso en la política internacional de la tala ilegal y las políticas de verificación de legalidad de la madera en diferentes regiones del mundo, usando el concepto de narrativas políticas. Específicamente, analizamos y comparamos narrativas de verificación de la legalidad de la madera de Australia, Cambodia, China, la Unión Europea, Indonesia, Perú y los EEUU. Nuestro análisis se basa en fuentes empíricas que incluyen 260 entrevistas a investigadores, conversaciones con actores del sector, documentos de políticas y un análisis de los medios de comunicación. Encontramos diferencias sorprendentes en las narrativas sobre tala ilegal y verificación de la legalidad de la madera en diferentes regiones del mundo. Concluimos que se debería tomar en cuenta estas diferencias, cuando se evaluara el apoyo a, y los efectos del emergente régimen de la verificación de legalidad de la madera.

## INTRODUCTION

Illegal logging is a major issue debated in both environment and development discourses. While it is in the nature of the issue that accurate statistics are lacking, the overall dimension is seen as being significant (with shares of more than 50% of overall logging activities being estimated to be illegal in several important forest countries, cf. Gan *et al.* 2016). Illegal logging is connected with environmental challenges such as tropical deforestation and sustainable forest management, as well as crucial development issues such as free trade, national sovereignty over natural resources and good forest governance (Cashore and Stone 2012, McDermott *et al.* 2014).

For a long time international political initiatives tackling illegal logging targeted countries seen as major producers of illegal wood (so-called “producer countries”, e.g. Indonesia or Ghana, cf. Wiersum and Ekands 2013). Policy schemes such as the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan (FLEGT) of the European Union (EU) promote measures to support these countries to enforce their own forest laws and thereby advance their economic development as well as social and environmental stewardship in the forest- and land-use sector (cf. Van Heeswijk and Turnhout 2013).

This approach has changed remarkably in the last ten years. A new generation of policies has emerged that target major wood-consuming markets in industrialized nations (so-called “consumer countries” – the dichotomy producer and consumer countries is widely used in the policy discourse, but neglects the importance of many ‘consumer’ countries as producers, and reversely ‘producer’ countries as consumers, see Leipold and Winkel 2016). This is done by prohibiting the import of timber harvested in contravention to the laws of the country of origin. The first of these policies was the 2008 amendment of the US Lacey Act through the Legal Timber Protection Act, which was quickly followed by the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) in 2010 and the Australian Illegal Logging Prohibition Act in 2012.

All three laws together are portrayed as forming a newly emerging global legality verification regime (cf. Bartley 2014, Overdevest and Zeitlin 2014). Together with the previous initiatives, which target ‘producer’ countries directly, this regime is viewed as holding the potential to globally promote development and environmental goals related to forest management and the whole forest product chain. However, the specific effects of the legality verification regime are subject to controversial debates. While some scholars expect an

enhanced promotion of “environmental and social stewardship in the forest sector” (Cashore and Stone 2012: 1), others point to possible adverse effects such as “disproportionate burdens on smallholders” (McDermott *et al.* 2014: 8) or even see incentives for “governments to weaken their laws” (Bartley 2014: 105, see also Cashore and Stone 2014).

In this paper we assume that the effects of the global legality verification regime will crucially depend on its interpretation (and resulting practices) across different regions of the world, including ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’ countries (note that we will use this politically established dichotomy throughout this paper, however we will critically reflect on it at the end, based on our findings). A key to understanding this regime and its possible effects on societies, economies and the world’s forests is the analysis of the *narratives* connected to the regime’s emergence and implementation.

In the literature up to now, narratives on illegal logging and the emerging global legality verification regime have only been analysed in ‘consumer’ countries, i.e. the US, the EU and Australia (Leipold *et al.* 2016, Leipold and Winkel 2016, Sotirov *et al.* 2017). This research shows that the development of the regime – specifically the development of the three laws that mainly constitute the regime – required a significant shift in the narratives on illegal logging that re-interpreted environment and development discourses, resulting in a shift of global responsibilities connected to illegal logging. Narratives on illegal logging and the emerging global legality verification regime in ‘producer’ countries have yet to be systematically analysed. An analysis of these narratives is crucial as the emerging regime is meant to influence global wood trade flows and the connected forest policy and management practices in both the ‘Global North’ and the ‘Global South’.

Against this background, this paper aims to identify and contrast major narratives on illegal logging and the emerging legality verification regime in ‘consumer’ (specifically in the US, the EU, Australia) and ‘producer’ (specifically in China, Indonesia, Cambodia and Peru) countries. The US, the EU and Australia were selected because their new legislations built the cornerstone of the legality regime (see above); also, they are crucial wood product consumers (and producers) in the global market. China and Indonesia were selected as they are two powerhouses in the global wood product market (with China being the biggest producer and consumer) and are both very much involved in the global debates on the legality verification regime. Cambodia and Peru were selected as they represent two developing nations with a high share of illegal

logging activities and a limited formal participation in global wood (products) trade. Moreover, Cambodia is a potentially significant exporter of illegally harvested wood in the region (Global Forestry Services *et al.* 2014), and in Peru, illegal logging has in recent years repeatedly reached an extraordinary level of political attention which has resulted in intense political debates about the issue there (Sears and Pinedo 2011). While these countries and regions remain a selection from a much larger set of possible countries and regions (e.g., Africa is not represented), we believe that this selection is representative enough to allow for insightful findings. Hence, based on the portrayal of narratives in these regions across the globe, we then identify and discuss consequences for the impact and relevance of global forest governance.

## ANALYZING POLICY NARRATIVES

Narratives can be understood as consistent political stories about an issue. The analysis of narratives is tightly connected to the argumentative (or interpretive) turn in the political sciences (Forester 1993), which emphasizes that political problems and solutions are not just there, but need to be manufactured through processes of truth production. In such processes, narratives (or “stories”, cf. Bevir and Rhodes 2002, McBeth *et al.* 2005, Roe 1994) are the “lifeblood of politics” (McBeth *et al.* 2007: 88). They are the thread “by which policy makers explore social and physical factors and events in order to organize complexity and render it governable by constructing intervention logics via problematizations, offering governance arrangements and assigning responsibilities” (Winkel 2014: 87; referring to Stone 2002, Gottweis 2003).

Narratives are “both the visible outcome of differences in policy beliefs (McBeth *et al.* 2005) and the equally visible outcome of political strategizing” (McBeth *et al.* 2007: 88). They are hence the result of stakeholders’ perceptions and entail a strategic element by representing a certain perception of truth in policy making. In this way, narratives “create a fine web of stories that circulate in a policy arena, connect to superordinate discourses, and either stabilize or destabilize given policy arrangements by providing legitimacy, or orchestrating paradoxes, crisis, and need for change” (Winkel 2014: 87).

Narratives involve the identification and description of the problem (i.e., what is seen as problem – we refer to this in the following as “problematization”), problem solutions, actors and their subject positions (the actor’s different roles and responsibilities), as well as perceived implications, threats and opportunities within and across these stories. These very dimensions make them accessible to analysis, and will be explored in the following by bringing together the extensive research data of the participating research groups.

## METHODS

Table 1 provides an overview of the social science data used in this paper to represent the narratives in illegal logging and the legality verification regime.

In view of identifying narratives, the data analysis has been guided by the same set of jointly developed analytical questions for each case, focussing on national policy discourses (or supranational in the case of the EU). These questions are:

1. Who is debating illegal logging and related politics in the respective countries/regions? Can major discourse coalitions (i.e. authors sharing a specific narrative) be identified and who is engaged in these coalitions?
2. What are the most important narratives on illegal logging and the emerging legality verification regime in different parts of the world? Specifically,
  - a. what issues are presented as major problems related to illegal logging and illegal logging policies?
  - b. who is presented as having the responsibility to act on illegal logging and what does the preferred policy solution look like?
  - c. what major rhetoric figures (e.g. key terms, metaphors and dichotomies) are reproduced in the narratives (e.g. “developed North” vs. “less developed South”; environment vs. development; legality vs. sustainability etc.)?
  - d. which issues/aspects are excluded?
  - e. how are the implications (e.g. on forests, forest management and forest-related livelihoods) of the different laws making up the regime perceived in the analysed countries?

In the following, the most prominent narratives are presented for each of the case study regions. Subsequently, we compare narratives across the cases, highlighting similar patterns and notable differences, also with regard to the coalitions producing these narratives in different parts of the world. Finally, we draw conclusions on the potential implications of different ways the global legality verification regime is framed for its further evolution and impact.

## COUNTRY STUDIES

### Narrating illegal logging in ‘consumer’ countries

#### *United States*

The policy discourse in the US coalesced in relation to amendments to, and implementation of, the Lacey Act in 2008 through the Legal timber Protection Act – which were aimed at stopping illegal timber from accessing the US domestic market. Two major discourse coalitions emerged during these domestic debates, which developed opposing narratives. The first coalition included ENGOS, particularly the Environmental Investigation Agency, and to a lesser extent WWF and Greenpeace, alongside the US domestic timber industry, mainly represented by the American Forest and Paper Association. This industry-environmentalist coalition developed a narrative that problematized illegal logging in two related ways: a) as an environmental challenge related to deforestation in ‘producer’ countries mostly in the Global South and;

TABLE 1 *Data per country/region*

Country/Region	Interviews	Documents and other data	Detailed publication of the case data (insofar existent)
Australia	8 (with various stakeholders including industry, NGOs and government) conducted 2014 and 2015	38 policy documents	Leipold <i>et al.</i> , 2016
Cambodia	20 (with various stakeholders including government staff, representatives of development agencies and industry, local leaders and local people) conducted 2011	28 newspaper articles, 5 NGO reports, 5 policy documents	
China	107 (43 with various stakeholders including policy makers, civil society leaders and business officials; 64 with forest users and local forest officials) conducted 2011 and 2012		Cashore and Stone, 2014
European Union	45 (with various stakeholders including forest owners, forest industry, environmental NGOs, national governments and EU institutions) conducted 2013 and 2014	31 policy documents	Sotirov <i>et al.</i> , 2017
Indonesia	49 (with various stakeholders including policy makers, civil society leaders and industry officials) conducted 2011 and 2012		Cashore and Stone, 2014
Peru	Email exchanges with 3 key forestry experts; multiple informal interviews with forestry experts over a period of over 20 years and participation in multiple forestry forums conducted in 2015	Several reports produced for policy makers, national and international audiences, and research papers; Assessment of news stories, and videos produced by public media that are accessible through the Internet database provided by Mejia <i>et al.</i> (2015) Recently completed country-wide study on the country's timber sector, which included legality compliance	Caillaux and Chirinos, 2003; Cornejo-Arana, 2007; EIA, 2012; Mejia <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Sears and Pinedo, 2011
United States	31 (with various stakeholders including industry, NGOs and government) conducted in 2013 and 2014.	19 informal conversations, 103 policy documents	Leipold & Winkel, 2016

b) as an issue of unfair competition from importers who outcompete responsible American producers by importing much cheaper, but illegal, wood. The policy solution offered by this coalition was to require every company along the supply chain to exercise due care to avoid importing illegal timber, and to develop penalties for non-compliance. Key rhetorical figures include reference to criminals and to American values of fairness and patriotism (protecting US producers against dubious foreign competitors). Notably, the environmental and industry partners in the coalition purposefully agreed to exclude any mention of sustainability in the debate and instead focused on legality (as the first would have redirected the focus from forest management practices in other countries to possibly also include the US, an idea that was strictly opposed by the industry). Moreover, while the link between illegal logging and deforestation was emphasized, the potentially more significant contribution of legal land conversion from forest to agricultural lands (to meet rising

consumption) was excluded from this narrative (Leipold and Winkel 2016).

A second distinct narrative in the US policy debate on illegal logging was voiced by a coalition formed of importing wholesalers, and later, building and large retailing companies, including musical instrument retailers whose products often include tropical wood. This coalition did not question the importance of illegal logging as a major environmental policy problem. Instead, they offered a narrative that promoted international voluntary measures to support producers in the Global South to improve their domestic forest governance. Moreover, they criticized the US law as a backdoor protectionist policy aimed at unfairly increasing rent for domestic wood producers, resulting in government overreach that could threaten innocent American manufacturers, retailers and consumers. While their rhetoric was rather muted before the legislative changes, this coalition has become more vocal over time, asserting that the Lacey Act amendments went far



beyond the good intentions connected to tackling illegal logging (Leipold and Winkel 2016).

In sum, the US debate on illegal logging predominately revolved in relation to the Legal Timber Protection Act (amending the Lacey Act) and its implementation, where two distinct policy narratives developed. While the problematic nature of illegal logging as an issue in the Global South was consensual in the US, deep disagreement about the preferable policy solution existed. Moreover, the connection of illegal logging to domestic competition within the US and related effects on competitiveness and US jobs was and is crucial in the US debate on illegal logging.

#### *European Union*

In the EU, the prominence of illegal logging and related trade as a topic culminated in the policy making process that resulted in the adoption of EU Timber Regulation (EUTR, adopted in 2010) (Sotirov 2014, Sotirov *et al.* 2017), and the debate continued throughout the implementation stage (Schwer and Sotirov 2014; Sotirov *et al.* 2015, Leipold 2017). The EUTR contains a formal prohibition on placing illegal timber on the EU market and obliges every economic operator who place timber products on the EU market for the first time to exercise due diligence.

The policy discourses surrounding the formulation of the EUTR were marked by heated debates, in particular focussing on a clause prohibiting the placing of illegal timber on the EU market, the relation between legality and sustainability (Sotirov *et al.* 2017), and the allocation of responsibilities (between ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’ countries) concerning illegal logging (Leipold *et al.* 2016). The topic of illegal logging rose on the European policy agenda in 2002 when the UK Government and British forest administrations, forest industry and NGOs jointly defined it as a priority issue and set the objective to prepare EU legislation in the matter. The UK became a focal point calling for common European rules for fair competition and sustainable markets (Sotirov 2014). This ultimately led to the adoption of the FLEGT Action Plan in 2003, which applies the logic of ‘consumer’ countries helping ‘producer’ countries through voluntary agreements. The European Commission announced later on that further legislative action was needed to complement and strengthen the FLEGT policies (Sotirov *et al.* 2017).

Following the passage of the US Lacey Act, the idea of closing off EU markets to wood generated from illegal logging increased in salience. Environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) presented European importers as beneficiaries of illegal logging crimes. As a consequence for the European timber importer industry, the protection of their image became a dominant policy priority, and they subsequently called on policy makers to introduce legislation banning illegally logged timber from entering the EU. A coalition pushing for European legislation was formed, made up of these economic groups including associations such as the EU and UK Timber Trade Federations and the Timber Retail Coalition representing leading European retailers, and NGOs. In terms of the intergovernmental negotiations, the EUTR was supported by member states who significantly

depend on timber imports and where the timber import based industry plays an important role (e.g. the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark) as well as by the European Parliament (Sotirov *et al.* 2017).

At the beginning ENGOS portrayed illegal logging as an issue of sustainability, but once allied with the timber importing industry, sustainability was no longer used and the focus was limited to legality and fair competition. A powerful narrative was developed combining the normative power of environmental moral values with legitimate economic arguments. Key rhetoric figures included presenting the EUTR as a legislation that aimed at prohibiting something illegal (a difficult argument to contradict), and linking illegal logging and deforestation impacts to the high-profile global discussions on climate change. In this way, ENGOS put substantial political pressure on governments and caused opponents to lose credibility when questioning the necessity of demand-side actions to curb illegal logging. Once illegal logging started to be debated as a deforestation and climate change issue, there was little legitimate possibility to stop the regulation from being adopted. Next to this environmental morality, industry and business groups further legitimized the discourse as an important trade and industry policy (for eliminating unfair competition on the market) (Sotirov *et al.* 2017).

In opposition to this narrative, European domestic timber producers (public and private forest owners), (exporting) domestic forest industry, and several forest-rich EU member states (e.g. Austria, Germany, Finland and Sweden) opposed the regulatory changes that were suggested by ENGOS and the European Parliament. The narrative of this coalition emphasized illegal logging as a problem that originated abroad and would be better tackled at its source through policies in the ‘producer’ countries. Additionally, the regulation was portrayed as unworkable, with major challenges regarding its technical and practical implementation. Their narrative also built on concerns regarding compliance with WTO rules on non-discriminatory trade and proportionate costs and burdens. Since this group of European producers and countries could not be easily portrayed as unscrupulous beneficiaries of crimes in tropical countries (because they were producing in Europe) and were perceived as traditional voices in forestry policy, they were able to maintain considerable influence in the process. Nonetheless, they could not overcome the normative power of the discourse in favour of prohibiting illegal activities (Sotirov *et al.* 2017).

#### *Australia*

The Australian discourse on illegal logging became particularly prominent in the mid-2000s. The discourse accelerated when domestic industry groups like the softwood and hardwood producers (Australian Forest Products Association, AFPA) and the domestic furniture producing industry (Furnishing Industry of Australia Ltd (FIAA)) called for a measure to close off the Australian market to imports of illegal timber. These debates later resulted in the passage of the Illegal Logging Prohibition Act (ILPA 2012). The dominant narrative in this policy discourse framed illegal logging as a crucial cause of large-scale environmental and social

degradation, particularly in the Global South. It was not seen as solely caused by weak law enforcement and corruption in countries significantly affected by illegal logging, like Indonesia or Malaysia, two of Australia's major timber trading partners; it was also framed as being caused by Australian firms importing morally questionable goods. According to this framing – which stresses the responsibility of Australian importers and the Australian government – the most suitable solution was to close off the Australian market to illegally harvested or traded timber. This solution was presented as enabling Australia to meet its collective responsibility for the global environment (and particularly forests in the Global South) through the support of legal producers in countries struggling with high rates of illegal logging by granting them preferential market access while forcing out irresponsible or less accountable producers.

The two major groups supporting this narrative, the softwood and hardwood producers (the AFPA) and the domestic furniture producing industry (the FIAA), characterized themselves as honest and caring producers who were disadvantaged by foreign competitors selling assumedly illegal timber for unfairly low prices. This narrative was also supported from an early stage by the Australian Department of Agriculture. Some interviewees even characterized the department as the initiator of the legislative process towards the ILPA, because they commissioned a Jakko Pöyry Management Consulting Report in 2005, which assessed the impact of illegal forest products on the Australian market and predicted market gains for Australian producers if such a law was introduced.

Subsequently, NGOs like Greenpeace engaged in the ILPA policy-making process. Initially they campaigned against timber importing companies in Australia to move them to support the law. Later, they joined the domestic timber producing industry's story line and built a strategic alliance with them. The Australian NGOs' story line continued to portray illegal logging as an issue of sustainability even though they allied with the softwood and hardwood producers and the domestic furniture producing industry (cf. Greenpeace Australia Pacific 2011), which aimed to exclude sustainability from the debate. This can be explained by an extension of the strategic alliance to large retailers (understanding themselves as first movers regarding responsible sourcing) and Church groups (stressing wider moral questions like sustainability and proceeds of crime) in Australia (cf. Greenpeace *et al.* 2013). Australian NGOs and Church groups particularly promoted a solution strategy to tackle illegal logging by introducing legislation against money laundering; nevertheless, this solution strategy was excluded from the final policy solution, the ILPA (Leipold *et al.* 2016).

An essentially distinct narrative on illegal logging was promoted by the Australian Timber Importers Federation (ATIF). This narrative portrayed illegal logging as a problem of large exporters of tropical hardwood like Indonesia. As such, it was not seen as Australia's responsibility to develop a solution strategy but rather an issue of the international community, which was already supporting countries seen

as predominantly affected by illegal logging with voluntary measures like the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Initiative. This narrative argued for the logic of assisting 'producer' countries in their domestic efforts to "stop illegal logging where it's happening" (Australian industry representative) instead of tackling the international trade of illegal logs by closing off 'consumer' countries' markets. It portrayed the ILPA as government overreach, potentially impacting importers' competitiveness and thereby threatening Australia's position as an international market place for timber. Notably, this narrative did not succeed in overcoming the normative power of the idea to introduce a law against illegal activities. The domestic wood (products) industry did however actively approach the opposing timber importing industry so as to include the latter's considerations in the design of the ILPA, which was eventually also happening (Leipold *et al.* 2016).

### Narrating illegal logging in 'producer' countries

#### *China*

In China the discourse over illegal logging has changed substantially in the last 15 years as domestic officials shifted from strongly resisting to accepting legality verification. During this period there were three main narratives that circulated regarding the intentions and potential impacts of legality verification. Initial resistance was based on scepticism that illegal logging was a meaningful concern for Chinese consumers and was instead driven by a Western desire for protectionism. Two other narratives soon appeared, outlining reasons for Chinese support of legality verification. First, a narrative of business pragmatism supported legality verification as being important because international trading partners were demanding it. Second, the forestry management segment of the government determined that support for legality verification fits well into their existing policy initiatives and provides further reason to support their taxation efforts for the granting of timber transportation permits.

The business pragmatism narrative was important for securing the support of internationally oriented timber companies in China. It quickly became clear to the Chinese government that international corporations were committed to following the requirements set by both the EUTR and the US Legal Timber Protection Act. As a country heavily involved in wood processing and production, this meant they would need to follow the demands of these international customers. The Chinese government was reassured to find that the legality verification efforts were not aimed at undermining internal government policy or threatening national sovereignty. While international customers were interested in following rules set by EU and US officials, the main source of revenue for the Chinese wood product industry is the domestic Chinese market. By not destabilizing the domestic market, the illegal logging initiatives were far less concerning to Chinese officials. This ensured that even if most of the industry did not trust Western environmentalist concerns for illegal logging, only those who maintained international customers would be affected.

Internal bureaucratic power politics within the Chinese government favoured supporting this issue based on a narrative of strengthening state capacity. The Chinese State Forest Administration (SFA) had been granted authority under China's twelfth five-year plan to develop a new national certification scheme. Officials reasoned that they could fold legality verification efforts into this scheme to allow the SFA to have authority to regulate both domestic and international timber within their supply chains. The goal was to protect their existing mechanisms for taxing the transportation of timber. At this time other government departments were seeking to have SFA stripped of that authority in an attempt to lower the tax burden on Chinese businesses. By supporting national forest certification and legality verification, the SFA developed support for their standing taxation efforts.

Central to the Chinese approach to legality verification is a perception that some international environmental programs are designed to undermine the competitiveness of the Chinese wood product industry. This narrative dismissing environmental concerns as a subversive method to reduce developing countries' competitive advantages in timber trade saw legality verification as a program designed to protect faltering Western wood product companies. With time the Chinese government came to recognize that while legality verification has the potential to buttress faltering Western companies, it does not substantially impede the Chinese wood product industry. Rather, complying with legality verification created pressure to streamline existing fragmentation in the wood product supply chains throughout China. While there was some concern that the ultimate burden would fall on small- and medium-size industry, the industry itself is going through restructuring towards large-scale production due to increasing labour costs and competition from Southeast Asian nations. Furthermore, the limited enforcement of the EUTR and US Lacey Act amendment is seen as not having a significant direct impact on Chinese industry.

### *Indonesia*

The interest in legality verification within Indonesia has been substantial and this is evident in its progression in the FLEGT programs and negotiations. Indonesia was among the first countries to initiate international negotiations in an effort to halt illegal harvesting within their own borders and presently stands as one of only two to deliver any shipments of legally verified timber. The drivers for these efforts were both environmental and economic concerns. Indonesia faced rapid deforestation following its transition to democracy. While democracy was a welcome end to an oppressive authoritarian regime, the institutional decentralization that followed was associated with a large-scale boom in illegal logging and rapid deforestation as local officials created forest concession permits to enrich themselves (Purwanto 2005). This issue is an essential concern for the Indonesian central government forestry department. Timber concessions were struggling at the same time that large volumes of illegal timber were leaving the country, in part due to weak institutional controls. Accordingly, the Indonesian government saw legality verification efforts as a way to buttress their existing governance

efforts and to develop new pathways for enforcement. This effort to return control to the central government became a central narrative for government officials eager to reassert control over local officials. Despite the strong institutional reasons to support legality verification, they remained concerned that if they spent resources to develop certification without any market incentive to support these efforts then they would hurt their competitiveness nationally. For this reason the initial FLEGT negotiations faltered when the EU failed to enact legislation requiring the purchasing of legal timber. It was only after the US Lacey Act Amendment and the passage of the EUTR that the Indonesian government fully committed to developing legality certification nationally.

Indonesia developed a national timber-tracking program, *Sistem Verifikasi Legalitas Kayu* (SVLK). This was a substantial institutional change made by the government to address illegal logging, but this effort only impacted parts of the issue. Broadly, the industry was worried about low-stocking volume in concessions as well as the expansion of palm oil and mining interests, which were getting priority for land over timber. These pressures formed the basis of the second major supportive narrative, that legality verification would be a way to revitalize the industry and secure preferential trading relationships. Many in the Indonesian timber industry looked to legality verification as a potential form of salvation as they hoped that it would provide secure linkages to trade with the most lucrative markets and provide a price premium based on assurances of legal status. The SVLK sought to help the industry by improving their reputation and pushing the issue of overlapping concession rights to the fore. For instance, if a segment of land has both a mining concession and a timber concession on it, then conflicts over use will arise; the SVLK provides a forum for adjudicating these conflicts.

In this way, much of the policy narrative in Indonesia focuses on the role of streamlining efforts to address institutional confusion, to clarify rights, and to protect the timber industry from falling competitiveness. Indonesia seeks to reduce conflicts in rival industries, to clarify issues in informal ownership rights and to reduce intergovernmental competition. Legality verification provides a market incentive that encourages negotiation relating to these issues. While it has not solved any of these issues, the fact that these efforts have led to dialogue and some legal clarification is already progress. In the long term, the major issue is whether corruption, competition and weak governance will destabilize existing progress or if legality verification will provide sufficient incentives to combat these long standing issues.

### *Cambodia*

The discourse on illegal logging in Cambodia is highly fragmented. At the time of study, knowledge and awareness about legality verification was practically absent outside the national government agencies and the international community. The narrative of international organizations, donors, and NGOs was, and still is, that illegal logging is one of the main causes of forest loss in Cambodia made possible mainly because high-level government officers are involved and/or benefit (see e.g. Verver and Dahles 2015, Global Witness



2013). Internationally owned economic land concessions (ELC) and the military are also involved (e.g. Milne and Mahanty 2015, Global Witness 2013, 2009). According to this narrative, illegal logging causes biodiversity loss and has serious implications for rural poor people, a majority of who depends on forestland and forest products (Nathan and Boon 2012). Improved forest governance is a core element of most suggested solutions, ranging from national forest programs to community forestry and large-scale internationally funded programs such as REDD+ and legality verification (Nathan and Pasgaard 2017, RGC 2010, UN-REDD 2011).

The Royal Government of Cambodia has expressed interest in legality verification, but was, at the time of study, not very articulate about illegal logging or its implications, and the topic was sensitive. The Forest Administration (FA) pointed to official statistics showing that Cambodia hardly exported any timber at all. At the time of writing, Cambodia has still not entered actual VPA negotiations with the EU (EFI 2017). Newspapers in English regularly report that government agencies have seized loads of wood from illegal loggers meant for export, imposed fines on the loggers, and/or destroyed it (for instance, Pye and Titthara 2014a). Yet they also report that parts of the seized wood is resold and subsequently exported to China and Vietnam (Pye and Titthara 2014b). One of the few respondents from the FA that was familiar with legality verification considered these findings “no big issue.” Though he appreciated the prospects of EU funding for good governance, he did not expect it would be large enough to make a real difference. Yet he did expect legality verification to become beneficial for Cambodia’s planned future export of plantation wood.

The narrative according to local rangers in a national park under the Ministry of Environment was about “influential people” (not necessarily high level government officers) being behind illegal logging, by organizing local people and providing them with chainsaws. The rangers themselves felt they lacked the authority and capacity to deal with the magnitude of the problem. The only thing they could do was to collaborate with local community leaders and try to identify the chainsaw users. In their view, since illegal logs from the national park were sold mainly at local markets, they did not see international legality verification as a solution, at least not the way we presented it to them.

In the 1990s private international forest companies dominated the forest sector in Cambodia (e.g. Billon 2000). In 2002 the government introduced a logging moratorium, and currently very few private timber companies are left in the country. Nevertheless, the Cambodian Timber Industry’s Association (CTIA) was still active at the time of research, lobbying for policy change. According to CTIA, illegal logging was not the problem; the problem was that the ELCs were often established in natural forests, but rarely made use of the wood they felled. This was because it was too expensive and difficult for them to get government permission to export, and because they lacked the relevant expertise. Instead, they burned the wood, primarily at night. Cambodia therefore not only loses forest but also huge amounts of revenues. According to CTIA, the government should allow the forest

companies back, allow exporting, and recognize legality verification as part of the solution.

At the local level, there is a rapidly growing rural population. There is also an increasing amount of community forest groups, initiated by NGOs and approved by government (e.g. Yeang 2012). When asked about the main causes of deforestation and forest degradation, local people and community forest groups mostly mentioned logging by “high ranking people”, the military and other outsiders. They also often mentioned encroachment by local people, including domestic immigrants, who need land for cultivation. The implication is that local people lose access to forest land, forest products, and livelihoods (Nathan and Pasgaard 2017). As part of the solution, the local people we interviewed called for increased government support and for more resources and authority for forest patrols.

### *Peru*

Concern over illegal logging in Peru intensified since about 2000, when the Peruvian forestry administration tried to promote the forest sector, including to international investors (Cornejo-Arana 2007). This concurred with the enactment of Forestry Law 27308 in 2000. This law changed forest exploitation as it abolished the small concessions of 1,000 ha, which had been created by the Forestry Law of 1974. Under the 1974 law, an informal system of forest exploitation operated parallel to the formally approved extraction and marketing of timber. At that time, all the actors in the forestry sector were aware that close to 100% of the extracted timber was illegal. It was expected that the reforms proposed under Law 27308 would improve legality compliance within the forest sector. In addition to the law, the state and ENGOs initiated a targeted crusade to eliminate illegal logging, forming the Multisectoral Commission to Combat Illegal Logging. Though this had no real impact, it made the issue newsworthy (Cornejo, personal communication).

The earliest reference to illegal logging in the media that we are aware of is from 2002. It concerns a report on illegal logging of mahogany in the Peru, Brazil and Bolivia border region (Caillaux and Chirinos 2003). Subsequently, an increasing number of reports on illegal logging emerged (e.g. Aidesep 2007, Cornejo 2007, IEA 2012). Previous analyses on Peru’s forest sector had pointed out the negative impact of logging on species and forests, the detrimental impact of debt peonage arrangements on forest communities, and the mismatch between areas authorized for logging and areas actually logged (Chirif 1983); but these were not yet characterized as illegal logging. During much of the 1980s and 1990s Peru was occupied with insurgent groups, who operated in the country’s forestry centres, like Pucallpa; as such, the forest sector was mostly dormant during those years. The late 1990s saw the beginning of a progressive national government supporting the revival of the industry.

The debate on illegal logging intensified in the mid-2000s. Especially during the early years, short news articles appeared regularly in specialized online periodicals, for instance *Servicio en Comunicacion Intercultural* (<http://servindi.org/nosotros>), and also in mainstream newspapers, for instance

*El Comercio*. A study on illegal logging in Peru (Mejia *et al.* 2015) tracked media reports related to illegal logging and other irregularities in forestry related articles; the study found 115 articles between 2006 and 2014 in *Ahora* and 34 in *Impetu*, two regional newspapers. Illegal logging was also addressed regularly on television.

Based on this latter analysis, a number of illegal logging narratives can be identified. They emerged to some extent sequentially. These narratives are: illegal logging destroys natural populations of valuable timber species like mahogany and tropical cedar; illegal logging has detrimental impacts on indigenous communities; illegal logging persists because it is condoned and supported by a corrupt forestry administration and it is costing the state important amounts of money; illegal logging is a threat for the Trade Promotion Agreement with the US.

The protagonists are slightly different for the distinct narratives. In the case of high-value timber species depletion, the primary protagonists are professional foresters. In the case of negative impacts for indigenous people, the narrative is especially supported by indigenous groups' organizations, which also take up the narrative of species extinction, likely because this also helps further the support for indigenous groups. A wide group of actors take up the narrative of illegal logging in regards to Peru's international relations; the international trade narrative is seen as a new opportunity to voice their disagreement with illegal logging by them. The narrative on illegal logging and corruption of government agencies and officials fits within the wider civil society concerns and opposition against similar practices especially within the realm of regional governments and is hence supported by ENGOs.

The framing of illegal logging as detrimental for indigenous people has evolved into a narrative of violent exchanges between illegal loggers and indigenous people, the latter have meanwhile begun taking active measures to stop illegal logging in their territories. In recent years, more reference is being made to how illegal logging in Peru is framed in the international discourse. This internationalization of Peru's illegal logging is reflected, for instance, by regular stories on Peru's illegal logging in the New York Times. These stories are subsequently reported as news in Peru's public media.

## Summary

Table 2 provides an overview of the narratives we have identified in the seven regions in this paper.

## DISCUSSION – COMPARING ILLEGAL LOGGING NARRATIVES ACROSS THE GLOBE

Our analysis has revealed a diversity of narratives across different regions relating to the issue of illegal logging and the global legality verification regime. Narratives differ greatly in terms of the overall problem perception, responsibilities, policy preferences and solution strategies.

Taking a closer look, however, reveals some similarities amongst regions. To begin, illegal logging policy narratives are similar amongst the three analysed 'consumer' countries/regions US, EU and Australia. In each region, one pro-legality-verification and one counter-legality-verification policy narrative were identified. While the former emphasizes the international responsibility of 'consumer' countries and supports regulatory policies foreclosing domestic markets for illegal timber (which have meanwhile been adopted in all three regions), the counter-narratives underline the responsibility of 'producer' countries and the importance of soft international governance approaches. Notably, both narratives depict the respective opposition in an unfavourable light – with the pro-narratives suspecting opportunistic or even criminal interests being responsible for the opposition against legality oriented legislation, and the counter-narratives surmising green protectionism and unfair competition as essential motivations of the supporting groups. With these main patterns being similar across the three regions, differences exist regarding the argumentative patterns and the strategic alliances and coalitions that share the respective narratives.

As for the 'producer' countries, the picture is more diverse. In China, the powerhouse of the global forest product market, the narrative emphasizing green protectionism as a major motivation behind Western 'consumer' countries' regulatory policy approaches mirrors the narrative of the critics of legality verification within these 'consumer' countries. At the same time, a pragmatist narrative considers legality verification as an opportunity for Chinese exporters. This mirrors the narrative of the export-oriented forest industry in Indonesia and Cambodia. A third narrative in China supports legality verification as a tool to strengthen state government in domestic forest governance, also to combat competition with other policy sectors. A similar narrative is also found in Indonesia, but in regards to (re-)centralizing forest governance.

For the cases of the developing countries of Peru and Cambodia, the debate on illegal logging seems to be less structured and more fragmented. Several narratives related to illegal logging circulate amongst different societal groups, and the governments' position themselves much more cautiously when confronted with accusations of illegal activities in their territories. This guarded positioning goes together with the finding that in these countries, the knowledge related to legality verification is often limited to a narrow circle of internationally oriented NGOs, industry representatives and government officials, while many other forest experts do not consider the issue to be important, or even know about it.

One interesting finding from our review relates to the debatable distinction between 'producer' countries and 'consumer' countries (which, to recall, neglects the major importance of the 'consumer' countries as producers and vice versa): the degree of internationalization in the respective illegal logging debates differs significantly. In 'producer' countries, the debate focuses more on domestic issues (e.g. national competitiveness, sovereignty, indigenous people, conflicts between industries over concessions) than on global dependencies or global governance. This holds particularly

TABLE 2 *Illegal logging narratives across the globe*

Country	Narrative	Problematization	Policy Solution including responsibilities	Major rhetoric figures	Major exclusions	Impact of the global legality (verification) system	Main actors supporting the narrative
USA	Protect US producers and Southern forests	Illegal logging as environmental and social hazard, US importers as potentially criminal profiteers	Domestic Law effectively closing the US market for illegal timber	Fair competition, unfair/criminal US importers, illegal logging major global problem linked to deforestation	Sustainability (focus is only on legality), contribution of other factors to deforestation (e.g., consumption patterns)	Not specifically discussed, national law preferred solution which is believed to be effective globally	Domestic wood (products) industry and environmental NGOs
	Tackle illegal logging internationally and avoid green rent seeking	Illegal logging is a major problem, but outside the US, not US responsibility	Tackle illegal logging at its source in the Global South (through international voluntary measures)	Unfair rent seeking of US producers destroys competition; Lacey Act and its implementation is government overreach	Responsibility of US-based companies (as importers)	Voluntary and market based instruments are positive, regulation can result in trade distortion and unfair competition	Timber importers, music merchants, building companies, and retailers
European Union	Protect European industry and world forests	Illegal logging as a problem linked to deforestation, and climate change, with negative impacts on the image of EU timber industry	EU legislation prohibiting illegal logged timber from entering EU markets	Moral dimension of the EUTR (prohibiting what its illegal)/ fair competition vs. unfair competition/ links to deforestation and climate change	Sustainability (narrow focus on legality)	EU legislation is presented as the most efficient solution	ENGOS, EU timber importing industry, EU timber-importing member states, European Parliament
	Fight illegal logging where it occurs and avoid unfair competition	Illegal logging as problem abroad, fostering unfair competition within the EU	Illegal logging to be prevented through policies in the producing countries	Fair competition, unfair competition/ punishment of domestic industry with additional burdens/ challenges of technical implementation of the law and the practical assessment of legality	Responsibility of EU based companies	Voluntary instruments like FLEGT and market-based instruments are appropriate to tackle the problem; EU regulation results in trade distortion that can affect compliance with WTO rules	European domestic timber producers, domestic forest industry, forest-rich EU member states

TABLE 2 *Continued*

Country	Narrative	Problematization	Policy Solution including responsibilities	Major rhetoric figures	Major exclusions	Impact of the global legality (verification) system	Main actors supporting the narrative
Australia	Protect Australian industry and the world's forests	Illegal logging as a problem linked to deforestation and social problems abroad, Australian domestic producers as potentially disadvantaged	Domestic Law closing the Australian market for illegal timber	Fair competition, international efforts to prohibit illegal logging, normative power of prohibiting what is illegal, global deforestation and social problems/organized crime	International money laundering as mechanism of illegal timber trade, partly sustainability (focus is mostly on legality but recognition of sustainability certification schemes)	Australian legislation as complementing the US LTPA and the EUTR and, thus, closing off crucial consumer markets	Australian domestic softwood and hardwood producers, Australian domestic furniture producing industry, ENGOs like Greenpeace, Church groups, large retailers
	Tackle illegal logging through international initiatives and avoid domestic regulation	Illegal logging as a problem of 'producer' countries of the Global South	Illegal logging to be prevented through international policy initiatives tackling the problem at its source	Punishment of domestic industry with additional burdens, international competitiveness of Australian industry at risk	Responsibility of Australian companies (as importers)	Voluntary international initiatives supporting countries of the Global South as appropriate solution, more regulation is a burden to importers and risking Australia's position as international market place for timber	Australian timber importers
China	Legality verification as a tool to weaken Chinese firms competitiveness	Illegal logging is other countries' problems; Chinese government only buys legal timber, and all domestic timber is legal	Include legal status tracking in existing government programs related to forest certification, forest planning, and taxation of timber transportation, otherwise no action needed	Environmentalists and foreign firms seek to weaken Chinese competitiveness	China's involvement in extracting illegal timber in Russian Far East	No impact is seen	Small and medium sized timber companies and Chinese government officials
	China supports legality verification where customers demand it	International buyers have to comply with the EU and US law	Medium and large companies targeting international export markets improve their supply chain governance	Customer is always right	All consumption by Chinese domestic market	Little to no impact is seen on the Chinese market itself	Chinese timber industry that seeks to export wood products



TABLE 2 Continued

Country	Narrative	Problematisation	Policy Solution including responsibilities	Major rhetoric figures	Major exclusions	Impact of the global legality (verification) system	Main actors supporting the narrative
China (cont.)	Legality verification enhances state authority over timber industry	Forestry department is losing control about timber production and trade	Develop legality verification as part of national certification and timber licensing program, strengthen control	Bureaucratic conflict internal to Chinese government	Opposition to taxes on timber trade in China	A technocratic approach is built into the world's largest timber processing country. Streamlines internal Chinese timber traffic to be more transparent	State Forestry Administration officials
Indonesia	Legality verification as a key tool to revitalize the forest industry	Faltering concessions elicited demand for new efforts to improve Indonesians competitiveness in forest products.	Utilize legality certification to generate a price premium or a preferential purchasing system.	Large concession holders saw their industry in shambles. Hope to secure preferential access to lucrative markets or price premiums.	Driver of illegal logging and deforestation was overcapacity in mills resulting from authoritarian governance.	Indonesia's progress under FLEGT serves as a model for other countries to potentially follow	Domestic timber companies and wood product exporters
	Legality verification as a tool to strengthen and (re-) centralize state government	Local officials and petty corruption drive resource grabs.	Reaching out to international level and developing new institutions can reduce the fragmentation of authority.	Centre versus periphery where decentralization is problematized by national officials	Corruption at national level	Legality verification requires clear procedures and authority. The central government needs to reassert control over chaotic on the ground practices	National forestry department officials
Cambodia	Illegal logging made possible by "bad" governance, govt. staff do illegal export	Illegal logging causes loss of valuable forests and livelihoods.	Government is the main actor responsible for the problems as well as for the solutions.	Corruption, land concessions, violence, eviction of poor people, forest loss	Fragmentation of government, pressure on land due to population increase	Legality verification is one of the options for improved forest governance	NGOs/development agencies/
	The problem of illegal logging is acknowledged but not openly debated	Illegal logging means loss of forests and forest revenues.	Increased control of transportation of wood.	Better state control	Government involvement, export of wood to Vietnam and China	Legality verification considered "just another program"	National level Forest Administration
	Inappropriate land concessions lead to the destruction of natural forest	Wood destroyed in land concessions means lost profits	Need to restore the reputation of forest companies who are the experts for forest management	Lost profits, lost opportunities, economic land concessions.	Forest companies' own role in deforestation in the 90s	Legality verification one of the options	Main organization of timber companies

TABLE 2 *Continued*

Country	Narrative	Problematization	Policy Solution including responsibilities	Major rhetoric figures	Major exclusions	Impact of the global legality (verification) system	Main actors supporting the narrative
Cambodia (cont.)	High level people organize illegal logging, people on the ground carry it out	Protected national parks are destroyed	Increased capacity of personnel on the ground	Chain saws, lack of staff and authority, local people versus outsiders	Own possible negative involvement, rent seeking behaviours mentioned by other stakeholders	Legality verification is not known. Most felling is for local/national use.	Local antennas of ministry of environment/local antennas of forest administration
	Illegal logging by high ranking people, the military and other outsiders. Local people encroach for agriculture	Local people lose access to forest land, forest products, and livelihoods	Support from outsiders, support from government	High ranking people, military, "what can we do?" forest patrols, need for support	Observation that villagers themselves do illegal logging	No knowledge about legality verification	Local people
Peru	Illegal logging destroys valuable timber species	Impact on scarce and protected species Corruption and poor public administration	Improved monitoring and DNA based timber tracking	Unscrupulous forest entrepreneurs destroy forest wealth owned by everybody	Legal logging of several species threatened with overharvesting	The impact is perceived as being small but increasing	Narrative is supported by some, but not all government agencies, and by environmental organizations
	Illegal logging is a threat to economic and social life of indigenous people	Impact on indigenous people	Empower and authorize communities to implement forest monitoring	Unprotected and defenceless forest dwellers are the victims	Indigenous communities also participate knowingly in illegal logging	The global legality regime has boosted the opportunity to defend indigenous rights	Indigenous people's organizations and support organizations; government agencies with a mandate to defend human rights
	Illegal logging relies on a corrupt forestry administration	Illegal actions of public officials	Monitoring of the sector through an agency that is under the presidency	Public officials are trying to enrich themselves by abusing authority	Corruption is widespread within public administration, and forestry officials feel little restraint	International community condones corruption and limits trade if there is proof of corruption	Private sector, civil society organizations, international development cooperation community
	Illegal logging undermines trade relations with the US	Negative effects on trade relations	Improved monitoring and DNA-based timber tracking	The greed of a few forest entrepreneurs threatens the economic progress of the majority of Peruvians	Illegal logging is condoned by some high level bureaucrats and by legislators who are in cahoots with entrepreneurs	The USA Peru Trade Promotion Agreement which was signed in 2006 pushed the importance of the issue	Mostly government and the public media

true for the two developing countries we have assessed, Peru and Cambodia. Illegal logging is here connected to a complex array of home-made problems. In line with this finding, these countries rarely discuss forest management practices in other countries, e.g. ‘consumer’ countries. In contrast, the domestic policy discourses of Australia, the EU and the US focus on forest management practices in the Southern ‘producer’ countries. While we would like to warn against too far reaching generalizing from these findings, specifically with regard to the diverse set of developing countries, which we have only selectively covered, our findings do indicate an imbalance in the global debate. This imbalance perpetuates the debatable distinction into the ‘producing Global South’ and the ‘consuming Global North’ on this issue, which has been established by the latter through the focus on legality instead of sustainability (Leipold and Winkel 2016). And indeed, when it comes to the larger issue of sustainability and how it relates to legality in forest management, the link between both is not strongly expressed in many of the policy narratives we have analysed. In China, Indonesia, Peru and Cambodia it is only partly discussed by NGOs and the social movement; and in Australia, the EU and the US it has been purposefully excluded in the policy discourses as a result of NGOs joining strategic coalitions with industry to enable anti-illegal logging legislation.

Finally, it is interesting to observe different perceptions across the analysed countries when it comes to the evaluation of the effectiveness of an emerging global legality verification regime. Narratives in the ‘consumer’ countries Australia, the EU and the US seem to largely assume the effectiveness of their domestic policies internationally. In these cases the debates on the positive or negative effects of legality verification is largely connected to the assumption of effective policies that will affect global trade, production and the competitiveness of their domestic industries. On the contrary, in the ‘producer’ countries China, Indonesia, Cambodia and Peru, the regime’s effectiveness is seen as rather limited. These perceptions are also related to the diverging assumptions of the causalities of illegal logging that are narrated in the respective regions, and to the respective exclusions of causalities such as international demand for timber (largely excluded in China, Indonesia, Peru and Cambodia) and complexity of domestic causal factors relating to illegal logging (largely excluded in Australia, the EU and the US).

## CONCLUSIONS

The rise of illegal logging as a top priority issue is connected to a variety of issues and developments in global forest governance, some of which have been discussed for a long time (e.g. concerns about tropical deforestation and debates about decentralization versus central state government), others relating to more recent changes (e.g. the rise of the emerging economies such as Indonesia and China as competitors on the global forest product market). In this paper, we have shown that illegal logging and the global legality verification regime

is narrated in very different ways across the globe. This diversity means challenges and, at the same time, opportunities. On one hand, connecting the global regime to distinct domestic narratives – and the related worldviews, perceptions and interests – is probably the only way to make the legality verification regime effective at all. Without creating such connections to domestic policy issues and stakes, the necessary support for the national implementation of policies will likely be missing.

On the other hand, the diversity of narratives across regions does create a major challenge for a global legality verification regime. As this paper shows, support for legality verification comes from very distinct (in some cases hardly complementary) perspectives, against the background of distinct political cultures and related interests. It is an interesting question how far these strikingly different perceptions and related policy strategies can be connected to an overall effective global regime. Moreover, the diversity of interests and motivations linked to legality verification in different regions of the world (ranging from competitiveness, re-centralization and re-vitalization of the timber industry to sustainable management and social and ecological issues) raises the question: what objectives can the effectiveness of the regime be measured against and tracked with over time? In our view, the plurality of goals related to legality perception across the globe makes it questionable to assume that the impact and effectiveness of a global legality verification regime can be measured against *a priori* objectives established by one specific narrative, e.g. the narratives of the supporting ENGOs and industry in Northern ‘consumer’ countries. Rather, the mosaic of narratives in which the legality verification regime is reproduced across the globe, and which constitutes the regime politically, will translate into a mosaic of perceptions of its impacts and effectiveness. Consequently, further analyses of the legality verification regime need to integrate regionally diverse perceptions (and possibly effects) of the regime.

The strength of the regime may lie precisely in regional support and the ensuing regional effects without a globally shared problem perception, shared policy goals and shared policy solutions. For instance, supporting narratives in China and Indonesia that assume legality verification will foster national competitiveness, law enforcement or trade relations with the global market are likely to promote the implementation of the regime as do ENGOs narratives on legality verification as a basis for the protection of the world’s forests. To carefully assess and make use of these distinct perceptions in view of own pursued goals (whether they be related to the competitiveness of the industry, or to environmental sustainability of forestry worldwide) may be the essence of global forest diplomacy in upcoming years, instead of attempting to arrive at a globally shared vision (consensus) on what needs to be done. Skilful policy brokers or mediators, i.e. government officials, international organizations, or even private sector organizations who have credibility and an understanding of the debates on both the international and domestic levels, can play a crucial role to act as discourse agents

(Leipold and Winkel 2017) and to connecting narratives at different policy levels in order to (incrementally) advance the legality verification regime across the globe.

To assess distinct perceptions of objectives, impacts and effectiveness in different regions of the world remains a major task for future, possibly internationally comparative, research. This research must, on one hand, embrace and analyse the diversity of perceptions of the legality verification regime without implicitly assuming that only one perspective is right. On the other hand, it must also address the crucial question of how the legality verification regime will relate to global forest governance as a whole, i.e. including issues such as sustainability and societal participation. Finally, it would be charming for future work to take up a broader, interdisciplinary perspective and to connect the analysis of policy narratives and perceptions with complimentary analysis of developments relating to global trade or the state of the forests. This paper is meant to pave the ground for such an academic engagement with the legality verification regime as an essential new pillar of global forest governance.

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