

Sustainable Forest Management in West Africa A Case in Liberia

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Abstract

Sustainable Forest Management aims to ensure that the goods and services derived from the forest to meet present-day needs, while at the same time securing their continued availability and contribution to long-term development.

With Community-based forestry is seen as a promising instrument for Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) through the purposeful involvement of local communities. Globally, forest area managed by local communities is on the rise. However, transferring management responsibilities to forest users alone cannot guarantee the sustainability of forest management. A monitoring tool, that allows the local communities to track the progress of forest management towards the goal of sustainability,

In its broadest sense, forest management encompasses the administrative, legal, technical, economic, social and environmental aspects of the conservation and use of forests. This paper discusses a radical simplification of Liberia's forest management, including, Forest Economic system, Necessity of community forestry, the development of Sustainable agriculture policies and programs¹.

Keywords: Sustainable Forest Management, Forest Economic System, Necessity of Community Forestry, the Development of Sustainable Agriculture Policies and Programs

¹ This Paper should not be reported as representing the views. The views expressed in this Paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the Forest law, policy and strategy. Working Papers describe research in progress by the author(s) and are published to elicit comments and to further debate.

1. Introduction

Sustainable forest management is everyone's business. Forests are indispensable for life, therefore he who plants a tree, plants life.

The Forests of Liberia represent a significant chunk of the remaining forest cover in the Guinean Forests of West Africa Hotspot and the threats to these forests are many and growing in intensity.

But there are also many emerging opportunities for the various actors to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach, in their efforts to identify and implement durable solutions to these threats,” said Tommy Garnett, Team Leader of the Bird Life International/Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund’s (CEPF) Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Guinean Forests of West Africa.

In its broadest sense, forest management encompasses the administrative, legal, technical, economic, social and environmental aspects of the conservation and use of forests. Putting a monetary value on these public goods helps to give a clearer picture of the economic contribution that forests provide to society and also to demonstrate the net public benefit of forestry in comparison with other land uses.

This paper discusses a radical simplification of Liberia’s forest, including, Forest management Forest Economic system, Necessity of community forestry, the development of Sustainable agriculture policies and programs, Capacity building at the Forestry Training Institute.



2. Sustainable Forest Management in Liberia

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM): the SFM program focuses on empowering local populations to participate in decision making about forests, campaigning against illegal logging, and supporting community-based forest management.

Overall objective is to increase benefits from forest use. Projects are:

- Community Forestry Cluster
- Ensuring a Seat at the Table
- Making the Forest Sector Transparent

Community Forestry Cluster project aims to empower communities through organizing, information and experience sharing, and training to pursue their rights in the forest sector. The project works to strengthen local-level advocacy to address the marginalization of local populations and to promote equitable sharing of benefits from forest exploitation.

Ensuring a Seat at the Table aims to enhance communities and NGOs participation in the development of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between Liberia and the European Union (EU). The project supports direct community representation and full participation in the VPA discussions at the national level. It also works with other NGOs to broaden and enhance civil society participation in the process. The overall goal of the VPA is to reduce illegal logging in Liberia.

Making the Forest Sector Transparent contributes to improving forest governance and equity in re-distribution of revenue from logging and other commercial uses of forests. The objective is to secure government accountability through active civil society engagement. It supports initiatives and actions aimed at securing community rights and livelihoods.

According to the Liberia Social Audit Report of 2011, more than 1,084,912 hectares of forestland have been allocated by the Liberian government to logging operations as indicated by available statistics.

In addition to areas allocated to logging operations, other concessions allocated to agribusinesses will have impacts on the nation's forests as well, given the overlaps with forestlands in different conditions.

Sustainable forest management aims to ensure that the goods and services derived from the forest meet present-day needs while at the same time securing their continued availability and contribution to long-term development.

In its broadest sense, forest management encompasses the administrative, legal, technical, economic, social and environmental aspects of the conservation and use of forests.

It implies various degrees of deliberate human intervention, ranging from actions aimed at safeguarding and maintaining the forest ecosystem and its functions, to favoring specific socially or economically valuable species or groups of species for the improved production of goods and services.

More to this, sustainable forest management refers to the management of our private and public forests to ensure they continue to provide not only a sound supply of renewable timber for present and future generations, but also maintain their environmental values and social services.

It is dependent on credible science and professional commitment to improving the nature of forest management by responsible agencies and forest managers. In Liberia, governments set policies and targets to guide the application of sustainable forestry; particularly on public land but not much detailed on private land.

This new briefing from Global Witness draws on expert experience in community forestry, offering a snapshot of practical possibilities that could help to set Liberia on the path to successful community based forest management. It is intended to stimulate discussions and ideas and is offered for consideration for project designers, implementers, donors and communities to further our shared objective of successful community based forest management that provides communities with income security, facilitates rural development, promotes local economies and generates tax revenues for the state.

3. Forest Economic System

Forest economics is now assessing the value of the public goods that forestry delivers, including climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, water quality protection, recreation, and landscape value.

Putting a monetary value on these public goods helps to give a clearer picture of the economic contribution that forests provide to society and also to demonstrate the net public benefit of forestry in comparison with other land uses.

Nationally, the government of Liberia to a greater extent has adopted principles and measures that are based on international level criteria widely agreed among nations with strong, long-term forestry Industries, which include conservation of biological diversity, maintenance of productive capacity of Forest ecosystems and their health and vitality, conservation and maintenance of soil and water

Resources and enhancement of long term multiple socio-economic benefits to meet needs of societies. Social and Environmental Aspects of the Conservation:

The forest and land management agencies and corporate forestry organizations often use the term “ecologically sustainable forest management”, to describe the approach outlined above a reputable forest and environmental consultant recently proclaimed, “The language of sustainability is now being spoken from the boardroom to the bush”, suggesting that the message of Sustainable Forest Management is now widely accepted.

What this means is that ecological sustainable forest management strongly aims at achieving a continuing balance of timber supply, economic and social benefits, while retaining a range of environmental values.

4. Necessity of Community Forestry

The benefits of community forestry vary from community to community as they each identify their unique values and priorities.

For example, one rural mountain community has identified water protection as their highest priority, while a First Nation community forest sees education and long term employment of band members as their key priorities.

The numerous benefits of community forestry include: **Long-term community economic development resulting in the increased self-reliance of rural communities.**

5. Local employment in rural communities

Local-level decision making that leads to locally appropriate decisions and improves the incentives to consider the long-term benefits of sustainable management.

Increased potential to resolve conflicts over timber harvesting in watersheds and other sensitive areas; Protection of drinking watersheds, views capes, and other values that are important to communities and to local and regional economic activity.

Enhanced opportunities for education and research. Community forests can be laboratories for testing innovative forest practices.

Community participation in resource management leads to an improved awareness of forest management among members of the public.

6. Capacity Building at Forestry Training Institute in Liberia

Forestry education started in Liberia in the early 1960s with the establishment of the William R. Tolbert College of Agriculture and Forestry, one of seven colleges of the University of Liberia.

As commercial forestry began to emerge with growth in investment into forestry concessions the need for middle-level technicians became more compelling. The Union Forestry Training

Institute (UFTI) was established in 1976 as one of two Mano River Union (MRU) institutes based in Monrovia, Liberia.

The UFTI with funding through the MRU was functional until 1985 and when financial constraints became apparent, control of the institute was subsequently relinquished to the Liberian Government in 1986 and the UFTI became known as the Forestry Training Institute (FTI) under the Ministry of Education.

In 2009 at the onset of revitalization or reviving of forestry education in Liberia, following the prolonged civil crisis the government turned the institute to the Forestry Development Authority (FDA).

During this period to 2019, the Institute operated under three (3) major programs: **General Forestry, Wood Science & Technology, and Auto Mechanics.**

In furtherance to strengthening the capacity building of the Institute, the Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA) an USAID sponsor organization sponsored and supported the establishment of the Geometric Education Program to train new surveyors and GIS experts. Thus now putting the FTI to operate four (4) programs.

Forestry Development Authority Collaborating with International partners for sustainable forest management in Liberia.

The Forestry Development Authority (FDA) has been collaborating with other partners in Liberia since 1959 and most recently, since the end of the civil war, on various sustainable forest management activities often with the support of the US Agency for International Development (USAID).



The Forestry Development Authority (FDA) through the Liberia Forest Sector Project (LFSP) along with the Strategy Planning Unit (SPU) have identified a capacity gap within the FDA to be trained by (FTI) in the areas of short courses that will be conducted for three months per circle in the areas of forest management for the sustainability of the forest in Liberia, the largest forest blocks remaining in West Africa, Liberia hosts tremendous tropical forestry and biodiversity resources.

7. The Development of Sustainable Agriculture Policies and Programs

The Government of Liberia has developed several agriculture, food security and nutrition policies but lacks the political will and resources and capacity (institution and human) to ensure implementation of sustainable agriculture policies and programs.

There is no communications strategy for the sector and other related issues such as policy assistance, advocacy and dialogue.

Currently FAO is supporting the development of the Country's National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP).

With technical assistance from FAO, the Government will develop a communication strategy for the sector that will assist to propagate policies that have been reviewed/formulated and validated to benchmarks for good practices for an effective and sustainable agriculture sector. Support for institutions too

To strengthen CARI, Africa Rice and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture recruited four international experts to mentor young researchers to work in plant breeding and soil and water management.

8. A ten-year plan was formulated to give this research direction



The World Bank Liberia Country Manager, Larisa Leshchenko, is optimistic about the results so far: rice and cassava were the focus of the research, with over 1000 metric tons of rice seeds and ten new varieties of cassava made available as a result for distribution across the country.

Liberians eat rice as a staple food, and the new rice variety has a three-month growing period, plus the prospect of increased yields from 2 tons/hectare to about 4–5 tons/hectare in the lowlands, which many farmers consider a new era for rice production in Liberia.

The new varieties of cassava yield up to ten tubers per stick.

For farmers to benefit from these, 21 launching areas were set up in Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Bong, Sinoe, Margibi, Bomi, and Gbarpolu counties.

These have served as a one-stop-shop for distribution and learning. Liberia can now boast of abundant high quality rice seeds and cassava varieties. Seeds are no longer an issue.

Kemoh Sheriff has been working closely with farming groups in Bomi County, and he expresses satisfaction for the work done.

We have multiplied planting material of the improved varieties of cassava,” he said, “and other farmers do have access to them. What is now left is the value addition, where farmers can see finished products on the markets.

The World Bank mobilized US\$1.6 million for the Ebola emergency recovery program, financing the need to avert hunger and revive agriculture.

In all, over 7,000 metric tons of high yielding rice varieties, 300 metric tons of certified rice seeds, 100 metric tons of maize seeds, and 79 tons of cowpeas were distributed to over 20,000 farmers.

The main concern of forestry administrations must be to find ways of transferring enough power and security to local communities to make it worth their while to devise and sustain effective management and in ways which make them fully accountable to those objectives themselves.

9. Conclusion

As someone fascinated by the natural environment, and conscious of the many threats of destruction that it faces today, I aspire to continue working in the environmental and Forestry sector, and help to preserve that which I consider priceless.

Liberia is the country with the largest remaining block of the Upper Guinea Forest Ecosystem (42%, my current work with the Forestry Training Institute has exposed me to the many threats that this unique ecosystem, which is a global biodiversity hotspot faces.

Though laudable efforts have been made toward improving the management of the forest sector; there are also instances where good intentioned projects are poorly implemented due to lack of professional knowledge or technical capacity, to upraise Sustainable forest in Liberia.

From my participation in the 3rd International Conference on Research in Management and Economics in Brussels, Belgium, I anticipate gaining the following benefits: Exposure to international best practices and emerging trends in the environmental sector, and a way to uphold the sustainable Forest Management in Liberia.

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