

Comments from the World Bank team on Liberia RPP (version submitted June 8, 2011)

The following Note summarizes the feedback provided by the World Bank staff on draft versions of the Liberia's R-PP. We note the impressive work that has been carried out by the Government of Liberia and the REDD Technical Working Group in developing the RPP and to improve it as per comments provided by TAP reviewers on previous draft versions, the World Bank, and the feedback received from participants at the FCPF meeting in Vietnam in March 2011, and by Liberia Civic Society Organization in June 2011.

1. Long journey of Liberia:

The forests sector in Liberia has long been a blessing and a curse; it is a significant potential source of revenue and livelihood, but it collapsed in corruption during the civil war.

Liberia is a post-conflict country, which suffers from persistent low growth and high poverty. The democratically elected Government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, which took over in 2006, has faced daunting reconstruction challenges. More than 270,000 people died and 800,000 people were displaced (out of approximately 4 Million) because of the conflict.

Focusing on Commercial Forestry. Within this post-conflict and extremely low capacity context, Liberia in 2004 started engaging in the forests sector focusing most of the attention on the commercial use of forest. Major achievements in the commercial forests sector have been possible because of the coordinated effort of the Government of Liberia, the FDA, Civic Society and the Liberia Forestry Initiative.

From Commercial Forestry to Landscape Approach. Despite this potential, Liberia has had limited success in managing its forests to contribute in a balanced way to long-term, sustainable economic growth, to support the livelihoods of local and rural communities, or to ensure that its important national and global heritage is conserved. A shift was necessary to try to understand the best use of the forest for commercial, conservation, community forestry, carbon, agroforestry, others. If managed well, following a landscape approach that tries to give a different use to the forest according to its best social, environmental and economic value, Liberian forests have the potential to contribute to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. This RPP represents the first step of Liberia in trying to look at the different land-use options and trade-offs that exists in relation to the role of forests in Liberia for green growth and poverty alleviation.

From Government focus to a Participatory Focus. Before the war, the GoL considered itself as the custodian of Liberia Forest and as the main actor when it came to taking any decision. There was no discussion of participation, consultations, benefit sharing, community forestry. All these concepts were introduced after 2004, and Liberia has completed major steps towards opening up to a much more multi actor and multi sector approach for the management of the forest resources. This RPP is the exemplification of how far Liberia has walked to become a more participative society, with one of the most widely representative REDD working group. This RPP has been prepared jointly by the various GoL agencies and the civic society; and with broad outreach and consultative process.

2. Solid base of results and lesson learnt, but no best options for use of the resources as yet

The reform process has of course not been trouble-free. Indeed, the challenges of introducing good governance – radical reforms for a sector that has been structurally mismanaged for nearly 30 years – have been daunting and the agenda remains unfinished. The situation regarding the forests sector in Liberia is far better off today than it would have been had no action been taken. However, it is now becoming obvious that more needs to be done, and that the value of the forest in Liberia does not rely only on its commercial value, and that a landscape approach to forest resources should be considered. The RPP may wish to clarify this point.

3. REDD as a real opportunity in Liberia to rationalize land uses

It is becoming evident that the REDD process in Liberia offers an incredible opportunity to rationalize the different possible land uses in Liberia and take informed decisions for trade off in land use management, in a participatory manner, looking at social, environmental and economic sustainability of the different options. Land use plans and land use policies need to be prepared as the basis for any trade-off discussion. In the post-conflict situation of Liberia with the enormous number of people still displaced, the challenge of solving the land tenure issue is also important and should be undertaken in parallel to the REDD process. The REDD process can for now look at benefit sharing mechanism not focusing on who owns the forest but on who uses the forest. REDD should be an opportunity to improve livelihoods and address the drivers of deforestation.

4. Participation and Consultation.

Even though major participation and consultation meetings have been put in place for better preparation of the RPP, more can be done during the next phase to make sure that key actors in Government (such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Commission, Ministry of Energy etc.) and in the Civic Society fully participate in the debate and shaping of the RPP, to make sure that the solutions are owned by everybody and benefit the communities. This can be further strengthened during RPP implementation.

5. Capacity Building

Even if major policy and legal reforms have been put in place for better management of forests and for REDD readiness, Liberia's capacity to manage the process remains low and oversight weak. The presence of strong national and international partners, from NGO and CSO networks, is clearly helping in filling this gap and it should be recognized in the entire process and next steps of REDD + implementation.

6. RPP implementation

The RPP proposal is well presented and the options outlined are clear. It would be worth clarifying further that the budget estimated is only to develop the REDD+ strategy from the RPP proposal. Further financing will be necessary for the implementation of the REDD+ strategy.