

The Liberia Forest Program

Over the past decade Liberia has made notable progress in reducing poverty and transitioning from post-conflict to stabilizing and growing its economy. Challenges remain, however, as poverty and social development needs remain high, while natural resources are being depleted. This includes Liberia's forests, which comprise 43% of the remaining Upper Guinea forests of West Africa and are rich in biodiversity, including endemic animal species and over 2000 flowering plants. From 2000-2013, over half a million hectares of tree cover was lost in Liberia, or around 10% of the country's forest cover.

Forests have a potential to contribute to the reduction of extreme poverty in Liberia. Most of the country's rural population is dependent on forests, particularly vulnerable communities for whom forest products and ecosystem services serve as an economic and social safety net. However, Liberia's forests are under threat from expanding agriculture and mining both at industrial and subsistence levels, as well as uncontrolled and illegal logging.



The Government of Liberia has a long-standing commitment to reform the forest sector following a "Three C's" approach that balances and integrates community, commercial, and conservation objectives. More recently, forest carbon has become part of this approach. The **Liberia Forest Program** (financed under the \$150 million commitment of the Liberia-Norwegian partnership agreement) aims to support the Government's efforts in the forest sector, including the integration of carbon aspects. The three main components of the program are described below.

Forest Investment Project

Liberia has been developing a REDD+ strategy, with support from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility. The Forest Investment Project (\$ 37.5 M) builds on Liberia's ongoing efforts in forest sector, including grant resources from the Forest Carbon Partnership Fund (FCPF) that are helping Liberia develop its REDD+ Strategy and capacity to participate in a large-scale system of positive incentives for REDD+. This Forest Investment Project will finance investments for capacity building and on-the-ground activities for stakeholders and communities engaged directly in the implementation of priority activities in the strategy. The four main components are:

Strengthened regulatory and institutional arrangements to implement REDD+: This component will strengthen capacity in institutions at national and subnational levels (public, private, and CSOs) for improved management of forest landscapes and to complete the process of legal reform and enforcement. It also includes development of forest information systems and mapping, funding of outreach and communications, and support for benefit sharing/social agreements, gender equality and community forest management.

Strengthened management of targeted forest landscapes: This component focuses on improving the management of protected areas, strengthening community-managed forests and community governance structures, and developing public-private partnerships to increase sustainable agriculture and forest-based enterprises. It will help implement the roadmap for biodiversity offsets from mining and support the establishment of a public-private coalition with micro-small-medium enterprises committed to zero-deforestation policies and support investments for small and medium scale initiatives involving specific products such as palm oil, cocoa, paper, pulp, wood, climate-smart rice, charcoal, and wood processing.

Forest monitoring information system: This component will finance the operationalization of a measurement and reporting system for forests and emissions reductions, reference level development, and an information system for safeguards. The development of the systems is in the process of establishment under Phase I with FCPF, and this component will support their implementation and regular update.

Project monitoring and management: Finally, a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system will be developed to report on the expected results and systematizing the project's lessons learned. The project level M&E will be integrated into Liberia's M&E Framework for the national REDD+ readiness process.

Improving rubber production through a partnership with the private sector

The role of the private sector is critical and needs to be synergized alongside REDD+. At the same time, agreements between the private sector and the communities must be on an equitable and fair basis. One role that the private sector can play in Liberia is in helping to revive old plantations to keep land in production and improving productivity to remove pressure off the clearing of natural forest lands.

Since the establishment of the first Firestone plantation in 1926, rubber has been a key cornerstone of the Liberian economy. Rubber is the country's most important cash crop, providing critical employment and revenue—nearly 60% of export earnings are from rubber. Rubber plantations are the single largest source of employment in Liberia. More than 20,000 people are employed by commercial rubber farms and up to 60,000 smallholder households are involved in the growing of rubber trees.



The Liberia Forest Program is considering ways to support and improve the rubber sector in Liberia and, in particular, to provide long-term financing to smallholder rubber farmers for the replanting and renovation of aging rubber plantations. Such finance would enable farmers to renovate a portion of their trees, securing their livelihoods for the future. Technical assistance is also being considered that would focus on the adoption of agronomic best practices and environmental sustainability, and to improve adaptation to climate change.

Discussions are being held with Firestone Liberia to help identify potential eligible outgrowers, offer technical assistance, and provide an off-take agreement.

Firestone Liberia is a Liberian corporation wholly owned by Firestone Natural Rubber Company, a subsidiary of Bridgestone Americas. Firestone operates the largest contiguous rubber plantation in the world in Liberia, and is the single largest private employer in Liberia. The company manages a 48,000 ha rubber farm, producing block rubber and rubberwood. For the past seven years, Firestone Liberia has been providing, free of charge, hundreds of thousands of rubber seedlings annually to Liberian farmers to help and encourage farmers to replant their aging farms.

Payments for verified emission reductions

The Forest Sector Program intends to reward Liberia if it is successful in implementing activities and policies that lead to measured, reported and verified emission reductions. Further details on this phase of the program will be developed in consultation with the Government and stakeholders.

For more information on Liberia, see: <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/liberia>

