



**Liberia's REDD Readiness Preparation Proposal:
The Need for a Holistic Forest Use Survey**
June 2011

Despite a stated policy of coherence between the 3Cs, currently there remains a severe paucity of economic data on the “community” and “conservation” aspects, and the data on commercial aspect is questioned. Lack of data makes it very difficult to plan future activities reliably... The implications of these findings are that, often, the economic decision making excludes the actual and potential benefits of forest management options, resulting in the undervaluation of forest resources.

- Forestry Development Authority, IUCN, ProACT Network, Sustainable Development Institute, and the World Bank, “Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Liberian Forestry Sector,” September 2010.

In order for Liberia to successfully develop a REDD program, indeed in order for Liberia to get its troubled forest sector reform back on track, it is essential that the government undertake a survey examining various possible uses of the country's forest lands. The draft Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) seen by Global Witness¹ anticipates that several encouraging surveys will be conducted, but these studies are neither sufficiently comprehensive nor adequately elaborated in the proposal. A more thorough forest land use survey, as described in this brief, should be included as a key component of Liberia's readiness activities as elaborated in the R-PP and supported by the FCPF.

After a prolonged civil war during which logging revenues were used by warlords and former-President Charles Taylor to help finance the conflict, the Liberian government and its international partners launched an expensive reform of Liberia's forest sector. However, as the authors of Liberia's forestry Strategic Environmental Assessment recognised, these reforms and the studies conducted to support them have focused on commercial logging. No study has been conducted to evaluate the different possible uses of Liberia's forest lands, and unfortunately even those studies that have been conducted have not produced data sufficient to make responsible decisions as to whether logging is economically beneficial. Without a holistic study that reviews all possible uses of Liberia's forest lands neither the government nor the people currently depending upon the forests can know their best path. Without a holistic study, no policy paths – including those that promote REDD – will enjoy ownership by the Liberian people.

A holistic study should provide a thorough, balanced review of the various possible uses of Liberia's forest lands, including logging, conservation, large-scale agriculture, mining, community use or carbon. The study should examine the forest lands' local and global environmental, social and economic values, including their potential to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The study should include an accurate survey of the current and potential contribution of forests to the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities and consider the value of local and global environmental benefits of various possible forest land uses, including timber and non-timber forest products in domestic and international markets, and the potential for job and revenue creation through community-based management of forests.

A REDD program in Liberia offers a good opportunity to conduct such a survey. Using studies designed to assess the economic costs and benefits of avoiding deforestation and forest degradation, the Liberian government has the opportunity to determine how best to benefit from its forest lands. The World Bank management has advocated for the use of studies conducted under FCPF as a means of conducting the holistic forest use study the sector requires. In an April 2011 meeting with Global Witness and Liberian NGO Sustainable Development Institute regarding the Bank's support for Liberia's forestry sector, Bank management stated that a comprehensive forest use study would be conducted under Liberia's R-PP.

¹ “Draft Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) for Country: Republic of Liberia,” 30th May 2011.

The draft R-PP seen by Global Witness does contain forest use studies. These are as follows:

- 1) A Forest Resource Assessment. This assessment appears to focus on forest stock for logging and carbon uses and contains three relevant components. First, is a study focusing on forest stock figures to determine the suitability of Liberia's forests for logging and "opportunities for carbon recovery etc." Conducted between 2011 and 2014, this study will be paid for funds other than those provided under FCPF. Second, is a 2012 study that assesses "mangroves (carbon) based on existing source materials." And third, is a 2013 study on the "biomass factors for each land use class, including degraded forest and agricultural lands."²

Outcome 1 of component 2(b) alludes to two similar reviews, covering the "economic viability of forest resources for commercial logging;" and a "socio-economic assessment of applying caps at various levels of commercial logging," respectively. No additional detail is provided as to what such these reviews would cover, although they do both also appear to focus on commercial logging.

- 2) A Land Use Assessment. This assessment appears to be broadest in focus and has two relevant components. The first, conducted in 2013, will examine the "full economic evaluation of mineral, agricultural and forestry land uses, including value chain, multiplier effects, environmental mitigation and carbon footprint." The second component, conducted in 2014, will examine the "full integrated land use suitability mapping covering all sectors."³ No additional detail is given as to how the government will weigh the value of differing resource extraction options or whether uses other than resource extraction will be examined. In order to be effective, these studies would need to consider alternatives to industrial scale logging, including community concessions, community forest management (and their value added and multiplier effects) and the socio-economic costs of logging (environmental damage and loss of forest-dependent livelihoods). It is also unclear how the comparatively small US\$ 24,000 allotted for both components will be sufficient to conduct such a sweeping assessment.

- 3) Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment. This assessment also has a broad but poorly defined mandate. Under the SESA, the government will "consider all alternatives including the 'no REDD policy alternative,'" and will "carry out cost benefit analysis of the proposed REDD+ scheme."⁴ No further detail is given as to what alternate forest uses will be examined, or how they will be examined.

These assessments do not provide the comprehensive review of differing forest uses that Liberia needs in order to make reasoned policy decisions. The assessments for which some detail is provided (Forest Resource and Agriculture) are principally concerned with determining the viability of large-scale concessions and collecting carbon stock data. No mention is made of weighing other possible forest uses, including conservation for the preservation of biodiversity, or community uses. As described in the draft R-PP, the Land Use Assessment and SESA do offer the possibility that a more comprehensive forest use review will be conducted, but the descriptions of each assessment are so short on detail that it is impossible to determine what such a survey would look like, or whether it would be sufficiently thorough.

To date, Liberia's forestry reforms have not gone well, with an emphasis on a logging industry that is not producing partly because of unrealistic estimates based on inadequate data. To succeed, Liberia's REDD program – or any policy option the country may choose – must be founded upon accurate information regarding the best use of the country's forest resources. Prior to approving Liberia's R-PP, it is essential that the FCPF Participant's Committee ensure a holistic forest use survey will be conducted.

² R-PP, p. 68.

³ R-PP, p. 68.

⁴ R-PP, p. 102.