

Jurisdictional Eligibility Criteria Assessment – Liberia

1- Choice of jurisdictional level for Liberia's deforestation efforts

The Liberian REDD+ program described below will likely be developed around two sub-national forest regions, delineated according to either ecological landscape boundaries or county jurisdiction. However, and despite a long history of local traditional leadership, Liberia has limited experience with and capacity for implementation of state administration and policymaking delegated to sub-national jurisdiction. For this reason, the Jurisdictional entity to be assessed in Liberia is the nation state.

2- National context

Liberia ended 14 years of devastating civil war and instability in 2003. Since then the country has been building political and administrative institutions and capacity, sometimes from scratch. While this period has shown remarkable improvements, many institutions are still weak. The economy has for some periods shown good signs of sustained growth, but has recently been set back by the Ebola Virus Disease and the decline in global commodity prices. Liberia is still the 7th poorest country in the world.

Use of the countries abundant natural resources has been key Liberia's economy both before, during and after the war. Redistribution of rights and wealth, including access to natural resources for rural communities, has been a political priority over the two presidential periods since the peace agreement was signed. As Liberia has demonstrated credible and sustained political commitments to fair and sustainable use of forest resources, a broad range on donors, has committed to assist the country in its efforts.

3- Detailed assessment against JEC 1 to 5

JEC 1 – Scope

The amount and quality of forest and/or peatland potential of the jurisdiction is such that it could be classified as significant and highly relevant from a global perspective on environmental conservation and climate change mitigation grounds.

Background to JEC 1

Liberia holds 43 per cent of the remaining Upper Guinea forests of West Africa (around 4,3 million Ha, close to 45% of the total land area). The forests' biological diversity encompasses the last long-term viable populations of several endemic species including the Western Chimpanzees, forest elephants and leopards. Also the rare zebra duiker and pygmy hippopotamus, in addition to over 1800 endemic plants, are to be found in the Guinean rainforest. The forest is recognized by WWF as one of earth's ecoregions that harbour exceptional biodiversity (a "Global 200 Ecoregion") <https://www.worldwildlife.org/ecoregions/at0130>, and by Conservation International/Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund as one of 35 global biodiversity hotspots, the most biologically rich and threatened areas <http://www.conservation.org/How/Pages/Hotspots.aspx>, <http://www.cepf.net/resources/hotspots/africa/Pages/Guinean-Forests-of-West-Africa.aspx>

Assessment

- The total area of forest in Liberia is small when compared to Amazon or Congo Basin. It is however large when compared to both the total area of remaining West African forest (43%) and compared to total land area (45%).

- The biological diversity and high number of endemic species makes the forest unique and significant from a conservation perspective, as is reflected in its status as biological hotspot.

Conclusion

- Liberia meets the criteria of JEC 1.

JEC 2 – Ambition and strategy

A clear quantitative target against historic rates of gross deforestation¹, which also reflects or goes further than established national targets, and a feasible strategy to reduce deforestation, and as relevant, forest and peatland degradation and restoration, within a specified timeframe, adopted and approved for the jurisdiction. Strategy development should have included an inclusive multi-stakeholder consultation process and the strategy should include quantified and time bound milestones towards reduced deforestation, and a plan for strengthening the enabling environment.

Background to JEC 2

The GoL's commitment to reduce deforestation is formally inscribed in the *Letter of Intent between the Government of the Republic of Liberia and the Government of the Kingdom of Norway on "Cooperation on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) and developing Liberia's agriculture sector"*. The Lol, signed September 2014, states as a primary purpose and focus of the partnership:

Supporting the development and implementation of Liberia's REDD+ strategy to ensure significant net reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

In addition, Liberia was the first country to sign on to the Principles and Actions of the TFA2020 initiated African Palm Oil Initiative. The National Principles that were developed in 2016 to implement this commitment seek to unite all stakeholder behind implementing 9 principles (see the Principles and Actions from Liberia APOI National Workshop of 14th August 2016, Monrovia). The principles focus on Liberia to achieve zero net deforestation in 2025; that the concession holder should work with stakeholders for responsible stewardship for their concession and adjunct conservation area and should develop FPIC compliant social agreements.

The zero net deforestation target was implicitly recognized by the Minister of Agriculture when signing the *TFA 2020 Marrakesh Declaration for the Sustainable Development of the Oil Palm Sector in Africa*, at COP22, November 2016. The formal status of this quantitative target is however not fully clear.

The Intended Nationally Determined Contributions of Sept. 2015, states that the long-term strategy of Liberia is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Liberia recognizes the significance and contribution of the forest sector in its INDC, and is preparing its National Climate Change Policy to identify sectoral measures and actions relevant to climate change agenda.

Liberia has been implementing REDD+ Readiness Activities since June 2012 with financial support from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). The REDD+ Readiness in Liberia is at an advanced stage and Liberia has recently (August 2017) submitted the participatory self-assessment of its REDD+ Readiness process (the Readiness Package/R-Package).

¹ Initially based on national forest definitions for native forests (excluding harvesting from tree plantations). When jurisdictions are able to apply measurement and monitoring methods for High Carbon Stock (HCS) at scale, using eg. proxies of canopy cover and forest type, the targets, measurement and monitoring could be specified to deforestation related to forest as defined by the HCS approach.

As one of the activities under this program, a National REDD+ Strategy has been produced, which has benefitted from wide consultation and input. It was formally approved by the National Climate Change Steering Committee (a high-level cross-ministerial committee, chaired by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning), in June 2017. The process identified and reviewed strategy options using cost-benefit analysis and feasibility analysis, reviewed barriers to addressing deforestation drivers as well as identified appropriate policies and measures needed. A subsequent study also supported the identification of landscapes to be targeted for action leading to reduced deforestation based on vulnerability to deforestation, and degradation and potential for conservation.

The Readiness assessment includes self-assessment in key areas of focus and progress against criteria and needs for further actions towards implementation of a comprehensive REDD+ program. A summary is copied below [P. 6]. Notably, several steps are required before GoL is able to make a fully informed decision on quantitative deforestation targets and a detailed strategy at jurisdictional level. Hence, it is expected that GoL will await further development of the NFMS before making a formal political decision on deforestation targets and strategic priorities.

It should also be noted that Liberia under the National Forest Reform Law has committed to placing 30% of forest area under protection and steady progress is being made on this front. Liberia’s active participation in Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 is evidence of its commitment and efforts to address the agriculture related drivers of deforestation.

Component	Sub Component	Summary of scores
Readiness organization and consultation	1a. National REDD+ Management Arrangements	Yellow
	1b. Consultation, participation and outreach	Green
REDD+ Strategy preparation	2a. Assessment of Land Use, Land-Use Change Drivers, Forest Law, Policy and Governance	Green
	2b. REDD+ Strategy Options	Green
	2c. Implementation Framework	Orange
	2d. Social and Environmental Impacts	Green
Reference Emission Level/Reference Level	3a. Reference Emissions Level/Reference Levels	Yellow
Monitoring system for forests and safeguards	4a. National Forest Monitoring	Red
	4b. Information System for Multiple Benefits, other Impacts, Governance, and Safeguards	Orange

[Extract from the Liberia FCPF "R-package", submitted Aug 2017: <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/liberia>]

Assessment

- Liberia has an official commitment to significant net reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, signed at government level.
- This ambition has in the context of the TFA 2020 African Palm Oil Initiative, been quantified as a commitment to zero net deforestation by 2025. The formal status of this quantitative target is not confirmed.
- It should be noted, as discussed under JEC 4 below, that Liberia's forest monitoring system is still under development. As such, the Liberian government do not have detailed information on deforestation rates by deferent drivers sufficient to set a quantitative deforestation target with fully know policy implications.
- Liberia has recently approved REDD+ strategy, which lays out clear pathways and actions required to substantially reduce deforestation. It follows from points above that the strategy is not yet tied to a specific deforestation targets nor milestones.
- The REDD+ strategy was developed through an inclusive multi-stakeholder process.

- It should be noted that Liberia do not have a fully developed National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS), that would allow for a detailed strategy with quantitative targets and milestones.

Conclusion

- Liberia has committed to substantially reduce deforestation, and has an approved strategy to achieve this. Target and strategy does however not fully meet the criteria of JEC 2 with regards to quantifying targets and milestones.

JEC 3 – Progress

Timely progress towards milestones of the strategy, including implementation of key policies, and measurably on a trajectory towards the targets for reduced deforestation. This criterion builds on criterion 2, and asks for documentation on progress pertaining to ambition and strategy as per targets set for the jurisdiction.

Liberia has substantial progress in developing a legal framework for land rights and land use related to forest resources, including for Community Forests. USAID is supporting various programs to develop laws and regulations clarifying tenure issues including the rights of rural communities to manage and benefit from customary held forests, and strengthen the capacity of rural communities to benefit from this.

Liberia has gone through multiple regulatory reviews and developed advanced laws and regulations for more sustainable forest harvesting. Much of this has happened under overview and support related to the implementation of Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) that will ensure certified legal forest harvesting in Liberia [VPA 2012].

Liberia has also developed and put into force new laws and regulations on management of wildlife and protected areas.

No REDD+ specific laws or policies have been adopted by the Government of Liberia, although a legal review has shown that some laws could potentially be used within the context of REDD+. Specific legal guidance will be needed on issues such as carbon rights, REDD+ benefit sharing and financing modalities. Recent experiences in Liberia with regard to the sharing of forest revenues offer transparent mechanisms for revenue sharing.

The FCPF readiness fund, the Liberia Forest Sector Project and the VPA Support Unit, is offering substantial support to develop capacity, structures and institutions for improved land use management and forest management. Liberia Forest Sector Program, EU and the UNDP GEF Deforestation Commodities program will be providing additional resources in the coming years.

Assessment

- Liberia has progressed substantially in developing a legal framework for tackling deforestation, including on land rights and land use, and commercial forestry. Further developments will be required on these topics as well as for agricultural and REDD+ specific topics.
- Liberia is receiving and will continue to receive substantial support to strengthen institutions and build capacity among both government and civil society, in the same areas.
- It should be noted that Liberia, 14 years beyond the devastating civil war, is in many areas still developing institutions, individual capacities, and laws and regulations, from a very low level.

Conclusion

- Liberia is progressing well in the developing of laws and regulations, institutions and individual capacities, in line with the REDD+ strategy.

JEC 4 – Monitoring, reporting and verification (“MRV”)

A transparent system is operational at relevant jurisdictional level for monitoring, measuring, reporting and verifying reductions in deforestation and, where relevant, forest and peat degradation and restoration, against an established baseline. The system is linked to an annual reporting schedule with full transparency and openness to undergo independent verification.

The Lol detailing the mutual commitments of the forest partnership between Liberia and Norway stipulates obligations to develop a National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS) that goes beyond the requirements of this JEC 4. Liberia has also signed the Paris agreement and REDD+ related decisions and it is part of the commitment to submit FRL to the UNFCCC, which is also a deliverable under the FCPF support.

As a post-conflict country, the national forest inventory and monitoring has not been systematic and data constraints have posed a challenge. However, an MRV road map has been developed, and some elements of a NFMS has been implemented under the FCPF readiness workflow, including an interim Forest Reference Emissions Level based on secondary data.

As of Sept 2017, the FDA and FAO is reviewing a final draft of a comprehensive contract for the "Design and implementation of a MRV framework and development of FREL/FRL for REDD+ in Liberia". The contract stipulates that a fully operational NFMS is implemented by June 2019.

Assessment

- Liberia has developed a "MRV road map" and is finalizing contracts that will support the development of a National Forest Monitoring System, that will go well beyond requirements stipulated under JEC 4. First reporting is expected mid-2019.

Conclusion

- Liberia is progressing towards the requirements of JEC 4, and is signing a contract with FAO that will allow Liberia to fully comply with JEC 4, estimated mid-2019.

JEC 5 – Social and environmental safeguards

In accordance with the Cancun Agreement, at the national level, the appropriate policies and legal and regulatory frameworks (including relevant safeguards) are in place to mitigate the social and environmental risks associated with implementing the strategy.

The Lol detailing the mutual commitments of the forest partnership between Liberia and Norway stipulates obligations to implement safeguards in line with the requirements of this JEC #5.

In support of the GoL's commitment under the Lol with Norway, GoL is implementing the Liberia Forest Sector Project with support from the World Bank. The comprehensive LFSP consists of multiple components and cover areas such as community forestry and protected area management. In the implementation of the LFSP, Liberia is committed to follow all relevant World Bank safeguards. Procedures to ensure compliance are laid out in the detailed "Process Framework" for the project. [LFSP Project Appraisal Document (PAD) and Process Framework]

A thorough Social and Environmental Strategic Assessment (SESA) process was conducted under the FCPF Readiness workflow. This involved consultations and case studies as well as validation exercises

at sub-national and national levels. Synchronization of the REDD+ Strategy process and SESA process meant that the two processes were mutually reinforcing. The SESA process was used to influence the development and prioritization of the strategy options, in identification of safeguard issues and in the selection of appropriate mitigation actions. The Environment and Social Management Framework (ESMF) has been produced, but is yet to be operationalized. [FCPF Readiness assessment]

The APOI National Principles also reinforce the commitment to sound social and environmental safeguards in oil palm sector development, including a reconfirmation of

- 1) all palm oil companies in Liberia, both local and international, having to conduct a thorough FPIC compliant process, as defined by RSPO, before any agreement with the local community is signed as per the new land policy;
- 2) Food security for communities having to be directly taken into account in oil palm development. This includes access to current and future farmland for growing healthy food, appropriate land use planning and associated community development plans, supported by training and extension resources; and
- 3) all entities commercially producing palm oil in Liberia to be RSPO members aiming to produce RSPO certified palm oil, and only produce on lands not designated as High Carbon Stock (HCS) or which have not been deliberately cleared of HCS/HCV to free the land up for oil palm development.

As of September 2017, GoL is just initiating a process for setting up a safeguard information system (SIS), to operationalize the ESMF and to comply with Cancun and Warsaw agreements under UNFCCC [FCPF Readiness assessment]. The safeguard information system is expected to be operational by end of 2018. A grievance redress mechanism tied to the application of REDD strategic options is also work in progress.

Assessment

- Liberia is already following World Bank safeguards when implementing REDD+ activities, and has broad commitment from both government and industry to follow high standards (including FPIC, RSPO, HCV and HCS) in development of its palm oil concession.

Conclusion

- Liberia is progressing towards the requirements of JEC 5, and has a clear plan towards full compliance.