



USAID PROGRAM BRIEF

LAND TENURE & PROPERTY RIGHTS

LIBERIA

OVERVIEW

Liberia's post civil war rehabilitation effort shows encouraging signs but also faces large impediments in attaining the political stability and poverty reduction goals needed for sustainable development. In a country with approximately 40% tropical forest cover, revenues from "conflict timber" extraction fueled the civil war (as well as that in neighboring Sierra Leone) providing no benefits and causing significant harm to many forest dependent communities.

USAID/Liberia's Land Rights and Community Forestry Program (LRCFP) works with government, pilot communities, and other stakeholders to establish and demonstrate a framework for community land and forest resource rights that will provide equitable local benefits while safeguarding national and international forest conservation obligations. Key government partners comprise the Forestry Development Authority, the recently formed Land Commission, and local government including traditional authorities. LRCFP's engagement with pilot rural communities seeks to inform emerging land and community forestry policies and build capacity in practice regarding issues and workable solutions to sustainable management of forest lands.



Wild palm oil is a vital subsistence and income-generating forest product needing clear definition of land rights.

STATUS

Starting in 2008, the LRCFP has worked with the Forestry Development Authority, the Governance Commission, the Land Commission (since its formation in late 2009), and with four pilot communities in two contrasting counties. Technical and financial support have built capacity in international "best practice" related to community rights and management responsibilities in forest lands including:

- Building the institutional framework for community forestry—a new focus in Liberia;
- Using simple geospatial technology applications (community mapping on satellite imagery and Global Positioning System) to identify land and resource conflicts and contribute to management of those conflicts;
- Improved community management of forest lands combining conservation and enhanced livelihoods mediated by democratic community management bodies; and
- Pilot-community analysis of customary land and resource tenure and country-wide public consultations on land tenure issues.

SUCCESSSES

USAID's support through LRCFP has highlighted the importance of communities in forest land rights and governance, and the potential to provide equitable economic benefits. Among accomplishments are:

- Support to development of legislation to establish the Land Commission and Community Rights Law. Assisting implementation of the latter through regulations and practical experience to test the law in pilot communities is underway;
- Understanding customary institutional arrangements in pilot communities containing 30,000 inhabitants leading to establishment of functional democratic forest management committees;
- Community mapping of more than 50,000 hectares of customary areas using simple geospatial technology and subsequent identification and management of inter-community and community-government conflicts through development of co-management agreements;
- Enhancement of livelihoods and incomes of numerous community members through five improved value-chains of forest products and forest-based agricultural systems while improving forest and biodiversity conservation through community-based threat and opportunity analyses; and
- Capacity-building at Forestry Development Authority, Land Commission and community pilot sites of more than 300 individuals, adapting international best practice to local circumstances.

CHALLENGES

Liberia's unique origin and history among African nations, decades of poor governance, and civil war have left challenging legacies including:

- A plethora of sometimes violent land and natural resource conflicts resulting from a history of incoherent legislation, demarcation and documentation, complex and competing land claims, and lack of regard for customary rights.
- Poor physical, social, educational, and financial infrastructure making national cohesion and regionally competitive economic development prospects demanding and uneven;
- Weak educational background and experiential capacity among government, civil society, and private-sector personnel, along with high illiteracy in rural communities; and
- Decades of relief donations but little development leading to a “dependency” culture.

FUTURE

With a planned 15 months remaining in LRCFP, emphasis will be on completion of ongoing activities and consolidation of accomplishments including accentuation of improved economic benefits from community forest management; development of community forest management plans and a government/community co-management plan for a conservation protected area; capacity-building for the new Land Commission and for the Forestry Development Authority in supporting community forestry through application of the new Community Rights Law; and support for community benefits from logging concessions.

LTPR PROGRAMMING NEEDS IN LIBERIA

- Support and capacity building for the nascent Land Commission
- Improved understanding of customary land and natural resource governance and tenure to provide input to new decentralized policies and practices
- Increased support to rural community-level institutional and technical capacity for sustainable land management leading to improved livelihoods
- Assistance in land/resource co-management and conflict management
- Informing and empowering the public on land/natural resource issues
- Coordination of donor support for land tenure and property rights programs

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