



Liberia: the good, the bad, the ugly

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Forestry sector

- Reform of the law and regulations marked a major break with the past
- More than 1 million hectare given allocated to logging companies, current areas > U\$13 million
- Government planning to waive annual Land Rental Fees, could total more than US\$150 million in the next 23 years (that is left of the contracts)
- The VPA signed with the EU holds some potential; but will depend on political will within the Liberian government

Forestry reform

Has delivered only
promises of change



Agriculture

Poses multiple threats to communities and forests

Firestone, LAC, Cavalla Salala, Sinoe, Guthrie, Cocopa concessions cover 438,679 ha but <18% cultivated



Agriculture

- Sime Darby (220,000 ha) and Golden Veroleum (350,000 ha) are new additions to Butaw, LIBINCO, and other existing oil palm concessions
- Total land under agriculture concessions and privately owned rubber and oil palm plantations could be around 2million hectares
- Although the forestry sector has not delivered or changed much, “the changes on paper” represent significant progress over the agriculture sector

What does this mean?

- More than 30% of the total land area is already under long-term leases for monoculture plantations, protected areas, and logging concessions
- Communities face uncertain futures – ownership, continued occupancy and use under question - in the old concessions as well as in the new concessions
- Displacement and resettlement provided for in the major agriculture concessions

What does this mean?

- Companies may request approval from government to resettle communities; no response within 90 days means YES!
- Request only need to show that the continued existence of the community may interfere with the operation of the company – movement of people into and out of the area will unarguably “interfere” with operations
- According to Sime Darby, more than 10,000 people will be affected by when they develop the first 15,000 ha of its 220,000 ha – these people will “interfere” when planting is complete

What does this mean?

- Communities have lost their lands unless the concessions are revoked or terms renegotiated
- If GV plantation develops according to plan, the government is required to extend their contract for another 33 years – without negotiation (Section 3.2a)
- Farmers affected by GV development need permission from GV to farm and GV can withhold that permission – if permission is granted, they cannot sell their produce commercially (Section 8.11)

What's in it for communities

- The combined obligatory social contributions for community development from logging and mining companies total approximately US\$15m per year
- This could total more than US\$375m in the 25years lifespan of these contracts
- (But) the first US\$16m (5 ½ years) contributed by ArcelorMittal have been mismanaged and hardly anything to show for it
- For agriculture, the benefits are less clear and negligible

Opportunities

- Community Forestry Development Committees (CFDCs) have legitimacy that NGOs do not have; they can use the law – if need be
- CFDCs are finding their voice and challenging companies to do better and more
- There are multiple platforms to engage stakeholder – VPA dialogue, social agreement re-negotiations coming up

Challenges

- Coordination and collaboration amongst NGOs is far below what is needed to create the critical mass that could drive progress (unhealthy competition)
- Uneven understanding of the issues means forming a common position and set of demands is challenging – reactive rather than proactive
- Government and communities pre-occupied with short-term benefits over long-term implications
- Monitoring and working with CFDCs have increased the work load

Potential strategic interventions

- Civil society to debate and agree their own vision for REDD and use that as a lobbying and advocacy tool targeting government and donors
- Proactively take the lead to develop a legislative proposal for the establishment of a single benefit sharing trust for ALL social contributions
- Prepare all CFDCs before negotiations – provide full legal support during negotiations
- Civil society formulate vision for land reform and engage with the process

Potential strategic intervention

- Facilitate debates at the community and national levels to identify areas of common concern regarding plantation development and use this as a basis for further engagement
- Experience sharing amongst Liberian communities – those affected by Firestone and LAC may have experiences to share with the new ones on the block
- Where communities allow plantation development to proceed – should we invest money tomorrow to channel their complaints after the fact? (CFDC experience)

The key?

- Politicize the issues in ways that we have not done in the past – BUT use technical arguments and positions backed by research
- **Political debates:** upcoming presidential debates on natural resource and development
- **Organized dialogue:** bi-annual stakeholder dialogues on natural resource and development
- **Broaden the debate:** bring in other NGOs working outside the forestry sector